

# Poverty As An Obstacle to Sustainable Rural Socio – Economic Development: *Exploring New Path Ways* Towards Poverty Reduction In Nigeria

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## **Abstract**

*Poverty in Nigeria today has become a common household phenomenon as Nigerians are enmeshed in circles of poverty that seem to defy any meaningful solution in recent times. The intensity of poverty even became more glaring as it was considered an important causative factor in the #endbadgovernance protests in Nigeria recently. It is indeed a cause for concern considering the fact that Nigeria is naturally endowed with abundant wealth but her citizens wallow in poverty. The recent poverty estimates by the World Bank where the poverty rate in Nigeria is estimated to have reached 38.9% in 2023, with an estimated 87 million Nigerians living below the poverty line – the world's second largest poor population after India even becomes more worrisome. The United Nations Development Programme, UNDP (2023) has reported that majority of the poor in Nigeria reside in the rural areas where access to programmes of poverty reduction are difficult to come by. This means that most of the targeted poor for poverty alleviation hardly come to benefit from these programmes. Consequently, the rural dwellers in Nigeria continue to wallow in poverty as a result of neglect. This paper therefore examines the phenomenon of poverty as an obstacle to sustainable rural socio – Economic development that is required to reduce poverty amongst rural dwellers and create wealth. Adopting a qualitative methodology, the paper critically examines the phenomenon of Poverty as an obstacle to Sustainable Rural Socio – Economic Development in Nigeria. It assessed most especially previous government efforts towards poverty reduction in Nigeria and concludes that these programmes have not succeeded in reducing rural poverty due mainly to the lack of commitment by the government during implementation process thereby hampering rural development. The paper then provides a recipe and new pathways for the eradication of poverty in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Poverty, Rural, Sustainability, Socio-Economic, Development, Poverty reduction

## Introduction

Although the last century saw great progress in reducing poverty and improving well-being, poverty remains a substantive global problem of huge proportion. Of the world's 6 billion people, 2.8 billion live on less than US \$ 2 per day and 1.2 billion spend less than US \$ 1 per day (Addison, 2004). As a share of the population, global US \$ 1 - a - day poverty fell from 40% in 1981 to 18 percent in 2004, and US \$ 2 - a - day poverty fell from 67 percent in 1981 to 48% in 2004 (Chen & Ravallion, 2007). The extent and depth of poverty in the developing world is a disgrace (Pinstrop-Andersen and Pandya-Lorch, 2001). In absolute terms, the number of people in the developing world living on less than US \$ 1 a day fell from slightly less than 1.5 billion in 1981 to 970 million in 2004, which marks the first time the poverty count has gone below 1 billion (Chen and Ravallion, 2007). Poverty has increased in sub-Saharan Africa over the past two decades both in absolute terms and as a share of the world's total poor (World Bank, 2004; Kraybill and Bashaasha, 2006). The situation in sub-Saharan Africa is especially desperate as nearly half of the population is poor and poverty has increased over the last decade (World Bank, 2003). Poverty reduction and economic reforms are the major challenges facing Nigeria today (Etim *et al.*, 2010): 54.7% of its population are poor (FOS, 2004). This has consequently impeded rural development as many remain without the basic requirements of human living. This paper therefore examines the nexus between poverty and rural socio economic development in Nigeria

## Conceptual clarification

Under this section, some of the key concepts used in this study will be clarified. This is for the purposes of clarity and enhancing the understanding of readers.

## The Concept of Poverty

One of the oldest and unresolved social problems of human society is poverty (Yakubu & Abbas, 2013). In every society, there are groups of people who are well to do considered to be rich and those who lack considered as poor. Poverty as a concept does not lend itself to an easy and precise definition. The analytical exploration of the concept and definition is fraught with a number of difficulties. This is because; it affects many aspects of the human conditions including physical, moral and psychological, that a concise and universally accepted definition is elusive (Blackwood and Lynch, 1994). Poverty is more easily recognized than defined. Hence, a universally acceptable definition of the term has always been difficult. (Okunmadewa, 2001). Poverty is an unacceptable deprivation in human well-being that can comprise both physiological and social deprivation (World Bank, 2000). Poverty, no matter how it is perceived or defined, is a state of life that is not desirable (Omonona *et al.*, 2000).

According to United Nations Development Programme UNDP (2006) poverty has been conceptualized within four different clusters. These clusters are seen from the perspectives of income and consumption, tying poverty with inability to meet the basic needs of consumption, poor shelter or poorly equipped shelter without the needed furniture together with lack of some audio-visual materials that can help in making people well informed about the opportunities available in the society. Deprivation in terms of capability and lack which affects even the personal respect individuals can enjoy and lastly multi-dimensional deprivation which depend on the society one belongs to.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development OECD (2013) argues that in most societies the notion of what constitutes poverty varies greatly as such, it is hard to arrive at one definition that encompasses the full meaning of poverty. However, some perspectives of the concept have emerged. Ebong (2013) defined poverty in terms of income/consumption perspective, the basic needs perspective and capability perspective as well as incapacitation in terms of human resource formation. There also exists a minimum level of income and consumption below which an individual is considered poor in the society. In this regard, poverty can be absolute or relative meaning poverty in one place may not be poverty elsewhere.

It is generally agreed that poverty means lack of basic needs and services such as food,

clothing, bedding, shelter, basic healthcare and education. This can be referred to as lack of minimum standard of living and powerlessness, indicating lack of ability to express one's view locally and nationally. Other conceptions of poverty include moral poverty, which is measured by the normative way of life defined by society.

Lastly, in the context of this study poverty is conceptualized in terms of income/consumption perspective as it is generally believed and observed as well that low level of income is the major and most visible symptom of poverty. It is also based on level of income that poverty line is constructed to determine a minimum level of income below which a person is considered to be absolutely poor. Also, the paper further lays more emphasis on the Nigeria's context as relative poverty relate more to developed countries as absolute level of poverty in those countries has been wiped out (Brian, 2009). Poverty is also multidimensional relating to income, deprivation, culture and even the psychology of the people

### **The Concept of Rural Area**

A rural area is an open swath of land that has few homes or other buildings, and not very many people. A rural area population density is very low. Many people live in a city, or urban area. Their homes and businesses are located very close to one another. In a rural area, there are fewer people, and their homes and businesses are located far away from one another. Agriculture is the primary industry in most rural areas. Most people live or work on farms or ranches. Hamlets, villages, towns, and other small settlements are in or surrounded by rural areas. Wildlife is more frequently found in rural areas than in cities because of the absence of people and buildings. In fact, rural areas are often called the country because residents can see and interact with the country's native wildlife. Throughout the world, more people live in rural areas than in urban areas. This has been changing rapidly, however. Urbanization is happening all over the world. In the United States, the Census Bureau classifies a rural area as a town with fewer than 1,000 people per 2.6 square kilometers (square mile), and surrounding areas with fewer than 500 people per 2.6 square kilometers (square mile).

In the United States, rural areas take up about 98 percent of the country but are home to only 25 percent of the population. In Ethiopia, a less-developed country where agricultural jobs are much more common, 87 percent of the people live in rural areas. In general, a rural area is a geographic area that is located outside towns and cities. For this paper, a rural area is defined as an area with fewer than 1,000 people per 2.6 square miles, whose members' primary occupation is farming and is usually located outside the city.

### **The Concept of Development**

Due to the generic nature of the concept of development, it has not been possible to arrive at precise and universally acceptable definition. This has been due principally to the ideological disposition of most scholars who look at development from preferred positions. According to Rodney (1972), development is the ability of a society to tap its natural resources in order to cater for the material and social lives of the generality of the people. To Oladipo and Olorunyome (1999), development is a term borrowed from biology. It describes a process through which the potentials of an object or organism are released, until it reaches its natural, complete, full-fledged form. Development also means the desire and ability to use what is available to continuously improve the quality of life, liberate people from the hazardous power and influence of natural geography and world historical environment. It can also be seen as a change or a transformation into a better state. Dos Santos (1978) described development as advancement towards certain well defined general objectives which correspond to the most advanced societies of the modern world.

From the above, one may be right to say that development is a socio-economic process in order to overcome economic and institutional backwardness. A key component of development is the improvement of the material condition of the populace and equitable distribution of resources. At the core of development challenges in Africa is essentially how to replace persistent human neglect by putting the people first in development initiatives. It is people that make

development possible (Audu 2009). In fact, central to the issue of development is the observation made by UNICEF, particularly in the context of Africa that the day will come when the progress of nations will be judged not by their ability or economic strength, or by the splendour of their capital cities and public buildings, but by the wellbeing of their people and by their level of health, nutrition and education. For this paper the concept of development shall be used to mean change or transformation into a better state.

### **The Concept of Sustainable Rural Socio - Economic Development**

According to OECD (2001), Sustainable rural socio - economic development is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable development entails balancing the economic, social and environmental objectives of society which are the three dimensions of sustainable development and integrating them wherever possible, through mutually supportive policies and practices, and making trade-offs where it is not possible. This includes, in particular, taking into account the impact of present decisions on the options of future generations. The pursuit of sustainable development thus requires policy changes in many sectors and ensuring coherence between them. However, sustainable development has often been interpreted narrowly as an environmental issue without implications for more than a small group of society. Sustainable development has important political, institutional and capacity implications. At the national and local level, it requires cross-sectoral and participatory institutions and integrating mechanisms which can engage governments, civil society and the private sector in developing shared visions, planning and decision-making (OECD, 2001). For this paper, Sustainable rural socio - economic development involves the economic, political, social, environmental, technological and human improvement of a society and its citizens.

### **Methodology**

The data for this study were assembled from various publicly available sources, such as the National Human Development Report of the United Nations (2018) and the National Bureau of Statistics Report (2018). Further data was gathered from related literature on poverty and rural socio economic development. Poverty was measured based on the multi - dimensional poverty index (MPI) because poverty is not limited to low income but also includes poor health, nutrition, inadequate livelihoods, lack of jobs, poor housing standards and low education and skills (United Nations Development Program Report, 2018). The MPI shows the number of people who are multi - dimensionally poor and the deprivations such people face. Analysis involved the use of triangulation as the data was organized in themes and subthemes related to the study. The presentation was mainly in prose form.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **The Structural Theory of Poverty**

According to Abdulai and Shamsiriy (2014), the structural theory of poverty has its roots in the Marxist doctrine in which the argument that the existence of low-income class is the creation of the capitalist economic system, or the bourgeoisie, as a strategy for dominance.

To the structural theorists, poverty is due to the structure of the larger socioeconomic order Abdulai and Shirmshiry, (2014). Proponents of this theory attribute the source of poverty to economic, political, and social system which cause people to have limited opportunities and resources with which to achieve income and well-being (Bradshaw, 2006). The same view is expressed by Samati et, al. (2012) who believe that larger economic and social structures is a cause of poverty. They argue that capitalism creates conditions that promote poverty, and that irrespective of individuals' effort; (hard work, skills and competencies); the structure of some economies, for instance the economy of most developing nations ensures that millions of people are poor. In other words, a greater number of literature suggest that the economic system is structured in such a way that the poor fall behind regardless of how competent they may be (Bradshaw, 2006). The theory also asserts that within a market-based competitive economic

system, unequal initial endowments of talents, skills and capital which determine productivity of an individual cause poverty Davis and Sanchez-Martinez (2014).

According to Davis and Moore (1945) as cited by Sameti, et, al (2012) asserts that certain positions in society require special and at times unique talents, skills and knowledge. They further argue that conversion of one's talent into such special skills and knowledge requires a training period during which the individuals undergoing such training must sacrifice their time, money and other resources. Such positions are usually the exclusive reserve of the rich since the poor cannot afford the cost of such rigorous, and lengthy and often expensive trainings. This consequently perpetuates a circle of poverty for generations of the poor in society.

With particular reference to rural poverty, Richardson and London (2007) posited that the relationship between poverty and structural inequalities is not accidental or incidental but structural and causal. To solve the problem, Richardson and London (2007) strongly suggested that the first thing to be done is to break these barriers to be followed by building rural economies. However, Abdulai and Shamsiriy (2014) have made it clear that fighting structural poverty seeks to only strengthen the capacity of the poor to cater for their livelihoods, but not to turn people into passive and permanent beneficiaries of assistance programmes.

### **Poverty in Nigeria**

Nigeria is one of the most resource endowed nations in the world. But socio economically, Nigerians are also among the poorest in the world (Etim and Edet, 2007). However, despite Nigeria's physical and human resources endowment, there has been progressively worsening welfare conditions of its nationals (Okunmadewa 2001; Etim *et al.*, 2009; Etim and Edet, 2009). The human development report by United Nations Development Programme, UNDP (2005) reveals that Nigeria is one of the poorest among the poor countries of the world. With Human Poverty index HP1-1 value of 38.8%, Nigeria is ranked 75th among 103 developing countries.

The poverty situation in Nigeria is particularly worrisome given the fact that the country is rich and the people are poor and this paradoxical situation was tagged "poverty in the midst of plenty" by (World Bank, 1996). A study by Federal Office of statistics FOS (1999) shows that the incidence of poverty in Nigeria was raised from 26.7% o to 46.3% between 1980 and 1985, and 42.7% to 65.6% between 1992-1996. The percentage of poor people however dropped to 54.4% in 2004 (FOS, 2004). Majority of the poor live in rural areas where they take to farming as their major occupation (Etim, 2007). Most of the population of sub-Saharan Africa is rural, and agriculture is the mainstay of people's livelihood (Breth, 2004).

Like in many developing countries, poverty in Nigeria is essentially a rural phenomenon as most of the impoverished people live in the rural areas where they derive their livelihood from farming. In Nigeria, the poverty Assessment (PA) study showed that 87% and 67% of the core poor in 1985 and 1992 respectively were in agriculture and all reside in the rural areas. (Canagarajah *et al.*, 1995). Though, urban poverty exists and is also becoming an increasing concern as reflected in the worsening trend in urban welfare indicators (World Bank, 1997), rural poverty is a much wider issue than the former. The poverty figures in Nigeria shows that majority of the poor are located in rural areas. The proportion of the poor in rural area was 63.27% whereas the proportion of urban residents in poverty is 43.19%. Poverty gap and squared poverty gap was 25.82% and 14.06% for rural areas and 16.70% and 9.18% for urban areas respectively (FOS, 2004).

Despite the involvement of the inhabitants of the rural communities in various farming activities, coupled with the use of backward technology, the incomes of the generality of the farmers have remained low. This has however worsened their living conditions through a reduction in purchasing power. The poor living conditions manifest in poverty. Consequently, for rural people in Nigeria to improve their poverty situation which will stimulate economic growth and increase their incomes, their poverty situation has to be curbed. But to formulate policies and develop programmes aimed at combating the ravaging woes of poverty, an understanding of the effects of poverty on socio economic development of the rural poor is therefore imperative. This however requires identifying the factors which influence poverty in

Nigeria; examining the previous government policies that have not attracted any significant changes with a view to providing new pathways to sustainable socio economic development of rural areas.

### Causes of Poverty

There is no one cause or determinant of poverty. On the contrary, combination of several complex factors contribute to poverty. These include the under-listed, among other factors: Corruption, Bad governance, Debt burden, Unemployment, Unfocused government policies, Low productivity, Burgeoning population growth, Globalisation, Lack of effective skills/training. Others include, low or negative economic growth, deficiencies in the labour market resulting in limited job growth. Yet others include, increase in crime and violence, environmental degradation, retrenchment of workers, a fall in the real value of safety nets, and changes in family structures (Ajakaiye and Adeyeye, 1999; Ogwumike, 2002). For want of space we shall proceed to examine some select few factors below:

**Corruption:** Since its independence from Britain in 1960, Nigeria has grappled with the challenge of corruption. Many regimes have been toppled from power after being accused of tolerating corruption, or even engaging in it. Yet the scale and complexity of corruption have continued to grow. From rare in the early post - independence period (1960-1966), and widespread in the 70s and 80s, the vice gradually became systemic and institutionalized during the 90s, when successive authoritarian and unaccountable military regimes tolerated or even promoted it. Some of the most common forms of corruption seen in today's Nigeria are acceptance of gratification and other forms of inducements, influence peddling; embezzlement of public funds and conflict of interests, e.g. in the award of contracts by public office holders to cronies, family members and personally held companies. Others are bribery; extortion, fraud; nepotism, e.g. in recruitment/appointment and promotion of public servants; rigging of elections; misappropriation and conversion of public funds or properties for personal use; procurement scam; leaking tender information to friends and relations; diversion and misappropriation of funds through manipulation or falsification of financial records; payment for favourable judicial decisions, electoral and examination malpractices, etc. In recent times also, no institution or sector of Nigeria has been spared of corruption including, religious bodies, educational institutions, judiciary, military, MDAs, the private sector, and all the rest. Instances of corrupt practices have been extensively reported in the local media. Others can be found in reports of dozens of official inquiries established by governments at all levels. Many academic studies have also been done. Further, over the last 10-15 years Nigeria's anti-corruption agencies have also investigated and successfully prosecuted several corruption cases shedding further light on the nature of corruption in contemporary Nigeria.

One example is the diversion of funds meant for poverty alleviation programs such as foreign aid, which reduces the amount of resources available for poverty eradication programmes. Corrupt practices of this type will then discourage donors from giving further aid. Government own funds or procured items for poverty alleviation can be misappropriated. The commonest example being fertilizers usually procured for small scale farmers but end up being diverted by government officials. This leaves the poor rural farmers poor even where their conditions could have been improved (Liverpool-Tasie *et al*, 2010: 12).

Also grand corruption or the embezzlement or diversion of huge public funds leaves the population with poor infrastructure or none at all, further deepening their poverty. Examples of such infrastructure include health and educational facilities, and of course roads. In Nigeria, contracts are usually awarded for many of such projects, but in some cases, the projects will be abandoned after the contractors have collected huge amount of money, sometimes up to 100 per cent of contract sum. All these deny the rural people the much needed infrastructure for socio economic development.

**Bad Governance:** The persistence and pervasiveness of poverty in several countries has been linked to the lack of popular participation in governance and decision -making as well as weak institutional base emanating from bad governance. This has led among other things to

poor accountability, transparency in resource allocation, weak programme implementation and monitoring. Ultimately, development programmes are rendered ineffective as poverty reduction initiatives are rendered ineffective and resources wasted.

**Debt burden:** In several developing countries of the world, debt burden is assuming increasing importance as a cause of poverty. In such countries servicing of the debt has encroached on the volume of resources needed for socio-economic development. The productive sector such as agriculture, manufacturing etc. are equally constrained leading to low productivity, low capacity utilization, under employment and low purchasing power thereby subjecting the masses of the people to abject poverty. In Nigeria, at the end of December 2000 external debt stood at US\$28.5 (about 80% of GDP), Though, a debt pardon deal was brokered between Nigeria and her creditors (Paris Club) during the Obasanjo's regime, by 2011 debt portfolio was projected to represent 12% of GDP. Amount required to service this debt annually is enough to hamper government expenditure for the provision of social and physical infrastructure for the rural poor.

**Unemployment and Underemployment:** Employment is a key determinant of poverty. Gainful employment is important for individual to earn income and escape from "income" poverty. While generally in countries of the world the non - poor suffer from transitional or involuntary unemployment, the poor are faced with problems of structural unemployment due to lack of skills or extremely low educational levels, medical problems, geographical isolation (which affects the rural poor) and in some countries, discrimination based on race or other attributes. Further, underemployment occurs largely in the informal sectors and results in low incomes for an important segment of the labour force, particularly in rural areas. In poorer, rural areas, this mainly takes the form of seasonal unemployment and in urban areas those who have given up searching for work. High unemployment particularly affects youths, women, rural dwellers, and those "queuing" for good jobs in the formal sector.

**Macroeconomic shocks and unfocused government policies/policy failure:** This has been a major cause of poverty in several countries of the world. As many economies in the world faced macroeconomic disequilibrium, mostly in the balance of payments due to expansive aggregate demand policies, terms-of-trade shocks, and natural disasters, it becomes necessary to undertake major policy reforms. In the process such economies become vulnerable to poverty. Macro-economic shocks and policy failure account for poverty largely because they constrain the poor from using their greatest asset "labour". Also, monetary policies that adversely affect cost and access to credit by the poor, fiscal policy which results in retrenchment, lay-off and factor Substitution; exchange rate policy which raises the domestic cost of production in an import dependent production system will affect the poor negatively. However, an exchange rate policy which boosts exports particularly those in which the poor are predominantly engaged (for example agriculture) will help reduce poverty.

**Human Resource Development:** This is germane to human capital development and capability to escape from poverty. Continued investment in human capital with improvements in efficiency is necessary to sustain reduction in poverty changes in the labour market. Investment in people can boost the living standards of households by expanding opportunities, raising productivity, attracting capital investment, and increasing earning power: In addition, providing additional educational opportunities for adolescents may prevent some youths from becoming involved with gangs, drugs and violence, given the evidence linking the perpetrators of crime with school dropouts.

**Low economic growth performance:** Growth of the economy is a must for poverty reduction. In developing countries such as Nigeria growth that is employment generating and with export base is desirable in order to achieve growth that is poverty reducing with equity. Although the economic performance of countries in the World has generally been highly volatile since the early 1980s, on the whole, growth rates have been low or negative, with overall declines in several countries. This is due in part to external shocks such as adverse changes in several countries' terms of trade, changes in global demand for exports and changes in global interest rates on developing countries external debt. All these are probably responsible for the increase

in poverty level in various countries of the world.

**Labour markets deficiencies:** The poor's most abundant resource is their labour, a virile labour market is important to reducing poverty and income inequality. In most countries of the world the majority of poor households participate in the labour market in one way or the other, and thus poverty is a problem of low wages (in the informal sector), low labour returns to rural self-employment activities, underemployment, and in some cases, protracted unemployment. These problems are affected in different ways by deficiencies in labour market. The majority of the labour force work as paid employees in the private informal sector, followed by employees in the public sector. When there are deficiencies in labour market, the poor are affected by limited job growth and absorption capacity in the formal sector. Also, relatively high labour costs in the formal sector that lead to over expansion of a low-productivity informal sector, thus putting downward pressure on wages in the informal sector (where many of the poor work), and limited opportunities for unskilled youth to acquire job training and skills can perpetuate a cycle of poverty.

**Ill-Health and Diseases:** Good health is basic to human welfare and a fundamental objective of social and economic development. Poor health shackles human capital, reduces returns to learning, impedes entrepreneurial activities and holds back growth and economic development. Diseases cause poverty and vice versa. In most countries of the World major diseases causing poverty are Malaria, HIV/AIDS and other infections/diseases. In Nigeria for instance, AIDS prevalence is about 5.4% with an infected adult population of 2.6 million (Ajakaiye and Adeyeye, 1999). This will constrain availability and participation of this segment of the population in the labour market to earn income.

**Increasing Violence and Crime Wave:** A steady rise in crime and violence has devalued the quality of life of Nigerians to some extent. Although individuals of all socioeconomic groups are affected, the rural poor are particularly vulnerable to these social problems. There are instances of shootings, gang killings; etc. Crime and Violence have serious economic costs. For instance, an increasing proportion of public resources, which are already limited, is required to strengthen police enforcement, support the growing prison population, finance the demands place on the judicial system, and provide health care for persons injured by violence. Other costs include the expensive security systems and guards now required by businesses and homes, the loss in potential revenues from foreign investor and tourists who have sought other destination as a result of the threat of crime, and the migration of the urban middle class. Because of the heterogeneous nature of the poor, it is difficult to link poverty, crime and violence directly. However, the adverse social consequences of crime have been closely associated with poverty for example, loss of lives at productive age and quantum loss of properties.

### **Previous Efforts at Poverty Reduction in Nigeria**

The poverty issue in Nigeria has over the years attracted series of efforts both by the government and NGOs towards its reduction. This section of the study is therefore dedicated to examining



these programmes and policies with a view to assessing their success or otherwise.

**Table 1: Selected government programmes of poverty reduction in Nigeria**

Programme	Year Introduced	Head of Government	Target Group	Nature of intervention
Directorate for foods, roads and rural infrastructure (DFFRI)	1986	General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida	Rural dwellers	Feeder roads rehabilitation, rural water supply and rural electrification
National directorate of employment (NDE)	1986	General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida	Unemployed Youths	Training, financing and guidance
National health insurance scheme	2004	Chief Olusegun Obasanjo	The poor in the society	To provide easy access to health services
Operation Feed the Nation (OFN)	1979	General Olusegun Obasanjo	Rural dwellers	Increase food production
National accelerated food production programme (NAFPP)	1972	General Yakubu Gowon	Peasant farmers	To educate farmers
Nigeria Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB)	1972	General Yakubu Gowon	Peasant farmers	Agricultural Financing
War against indiscipline/operation go back to land	1983	General Muhammadu Buhari	The entire society	War against indiscipline and corruption
Better life programme (BLP)	1987	General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida	Rural and Urban women	Self-help Rural Development programme, skill acquisition and health care
Peoples Bank of Nigeria (PBN)	1989	General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida	Underprivileged in rural and urban areas	Securing loans and credit facilities
Community Bank (CB)	1990	General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida	Rural residents and micro enterprises in urban centres	Securing loans and credit facilities
Family support programme (FSP)	1994	General Sani Abacha	Families in rural areas	Health care and childhood development
Family economic advancement program (FEAP)	1998	General Sani Abacha	Rural dwellers	Credit facilities to support support the establishment of cottage industries
National economic empowerment development strategy (NEEDS)	2004	Chief Olusegun Obasanjo	The poor in society	Government reformation, growing private sector, access to health, education, welfare, employment, empowerment, security and participatory governance
<i>National Social Investment Programme</i>	2016	General Muhammadu Buhari	The youth in society	welfare, employment, and empowerment,

*Source: Oladeji and Abiola (1998) Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Nigeria: A Call for Policy Harmonisation for development*

For want of space, we shall proceed to discuss only a few of these programmes bringing out their strength and weaknesses as well as assess their success or otherwise.

### **Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFERRI)**

The Directorate was initiated in Nigeria in January 1986 under General Ibrahim Babangida's administration. It was a kind of home grown Social Dimension of Adjustment (SDA) that was embarked upon in most sub Saharan African countries by the World Bank, African Development Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The programme was designed to improve the quality of life (improvement in nutrition, housing, health, employment, road, water, industrialization etc.) and standard of living of the rural dwellers through the use of many resources that exist in the rural areas and encourage mass participation of the rural people.

On establishment, DFRRRI attempted to open the rural areas through the construction of access roads, and provision of basic amenities of modern living. The potentials of rural areas were seen to be both immediate and long term and the idea of opening up of rural areas with feeder roads and integrating it with other parts of the country provided basis for food that could be evacuated to enhance the quantity of food and raw materials consumption. Consequently, the agency was to ensure more food at cheaper rate and improve rural condition to stem the rate of rural-urban migration; improve quality of rural life and by implication, its productive capacity that would ensure a greater exploitation of the potentials of rural areas and hence development.

Though a laudable programme, the problem of DFRRRI was hardly one of lack of enthusiasm and relevance but of variation between enormity of rural under development and the quantum of resources available to subdue the problem. The poor quality of infrastructure provided by the directorate probably due to mismanagement of funds made the impact of the programme almost insignificant. Also, the directorate has been criticized for lack of proper focus and programme accountability. There were issues of ineffective supervision of its projects that were scattered all over Nigeria. The lack of supervision led to poor quality of projects executed. Most of the projects could not stand the test of time.

### **The National Directorate of Employment (NDE)**

The National Directorate of Employment (NDE) was established in November 1986. It began operations fully in January 1987. The birth of the Directorate was predicated on the effects of the economic recession of the 80s which led to a drastic reduction in capacity utilization and consequent outright closure of industries in Nigeria. Equally, other macro-economic policies of the government of the day such as structural adjustment programme (SAP), devaluation of the Naira, privatization and commercialization of the economy, etc, resulted to massive job losses in both the public and private sectors of the economy. According to the Annual Report of the NDE (2013), unemployment rate had risen from 4.3% in 1985 to 7.0% at the beginning of 1987 because of the situation earlier stated.

The Directorate was empowered to operate as an employment creation agency statutorily charged with the responsibility to design and implement programmes to combat mass unemployment with the following mandate:

- ◆ To design and implement programmes to combat mass unemployment;
- ◆ To articulate policies aimed at developing work programmes with labour intensive potentials;
- ◆ To obtain and maintain a data bank on employment and vacancies in the country with a view to acting as a clearing house to link job seekers with vacancies in collaboration with other government agencies and
- ◆ To implement other policies as may be laid down from time to time by the board established under section 3 of its enabling law.

The Directorate commenced operations in January 1987 with visible presence in all the states of the federation. In order to fulfil its statutory mandate, the NDE introduced four major areas of intervention towards mass job creation for the unemployed in Nigeria as follows:

- (a). Vocational Skills Development
- (b). Entrepreneurship Development
- (c). Agricultural Skills Training and
- (d). Public Works Programme

The NDE, through the machinery of skills acquisition in vocational, agricultural, entrepreneurial and activities in the public works sector as well as collaborations with both local and international organizations and private individuals, has impacted a total of 3,625,930 unemployed Nigerians. This figure is little compared to the enormity of poverty in Nigeria.

### **National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP)**

The National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) was an agricultural extension programme initiated in 1972 by the Federal Department of Agriculture during General Yakubu Gowon's regime. The programme focused on bringing about a significant increase in the production of maize, cassava, rice and wheat in the northern states through subsistence production within a short period of time. The programme was designed to spread to other states in the country after the pilot stage that was established in Anambra, Imo, Ondo, Oyo, Ogun, Benue, Plateau and Kano states. Mini-kit, production-kit and mass adoption phases were the three phases of the programme. The policy goal of NAFPP was to make Nigeria self-sufficient in food production. Consequently, land reform and mass literacy policies were recommended for farmers. It was the opinion of the initiators of this programme that target crops for accelerated production are major staple foods of Nigerians and if produced in abundance, hunger and related food crisis will be put to check. This was achieved through the introduction of high yielding varieties, use of appropriate fertilizers, agrochemicals, good storage and processing facilities, provision of credit as well as marketing outlets. In addition, several research institutes were mandated to develop improved crop varieties and were made popular through extension agents and the use of mass media. The policy instruments included subsidy, credit, adaptive research and demonstration plots.

Williams (1999) conducted a study assessing the performance of the National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) in Nigeria. Using FGD which targeted senior officers of the federal ministry of agriculture in Abuja, Kano and Kaduna states Williams found that the programme could not make any meaningful impact due to a number of reasons which included inability of some farmers to form co-operatives which made them left out in the programme as the programme relied on disbursement of credits and farm inputs through co-operative societies. Abrupt/premature withdrawal of funding by the Federal Government due to the introduction of another programme termed Operation Feed the Nation. Also demonstration trials done on some selected farmers' plots by the research and extension personnel did not give a true representation of the outcome of the technology or programme. In other words, it lacked farmers' participation.

### ***National Social Investment Programme***

The Federal Government of Nigeria established the National Social Investments Programmes (NSIP) in 2016, to tackle poverty and hunger across the country. The suite of programmes under the NSIP focuses on ensuring a more equitable distribution of resources to vulnerable populations, including children, youth and women. Since 2016, these programmes combined have supported more than 4 million beneficiaries' country-wide through a fair and transparent process supported by the Ministry of Budget and National Planning (MBNP) and other notable MDAs with aligned goals. The programme was established in 2016

#### ***The programmes are as follows:***

- (1). The N-power programme is designed to assist young Nigerians between the ages of 18 to 35 to acquire and develop life-long skills for becoming change makers in their communities and players in the domestic and global markets and given a stipend of N30,000 monthly. The Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programme directly supports those within the lowest poverty bracket by improving nutrition, increasing household consumption and supporting the development of human capital through cash benefits to various categories of the poor and vulnerable. The support is conditioned on fulfilling soft and hard co-responsibilities that enable recipients improve their standard of living.
- (2). Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP) is a micro-lending intervention that targets traders, artisans, enterprising youth, farmers and women in particular, by providing loans between 10,000 and 100,000 at no monthly cost to beneficiaries.

- (3). The Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSF) aims to deliver school feeding to young children with a specific focus on increasing school enrolment, reducing the incidence of malnutrition (especially among the poor and those ordinarily unable to eat a meal-a-day), empowering community women as cooks and by supporting small farmers that help stimulate economic growth.

### **Exploring New Path Ways Towards Poverty Reduction in Nigeria**

As a multi-faceted and deeply rooted phenomenon, an effective poverty reduction strategy in Nigeria must reflect its multidimensional nature, incorporating economic, social, cultural and political dimensions. One take away from the policies of poverty reduction that impinges sustainable rural socioeconomic development is corruption. The phenomenon of corruption has perverted all sectors of the life of Nigerians. From public corruption to petty corruption, the phenomenon has defied all meaning efforts at its eradication.

Consequently, poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria are always hijacked by corrupt people and use to their advantage. Because of corruption popular poverty alleviation programmes such as cash transfers, distribution of palliative, fertilizer never get to the rural poor. Contracts awarded for rural infrastructure are never done after collecting contract sum. For rural development to take place this has to be addressed. Due to the enormity of the vice, it will not be out of place to advocate for the death penalty for offenders proven guilty. Legislations should be enacted at the federal, state and local government levels to that effect. When this is done, violators will think twice before engaging in the vice.

High poverty undermines rural dweller's productivity and lowers their purchasing power thereby denying them access to quality education, health care, and basic needs. The few schools, health facilities, and roads in the rural areas are in poor state. Schools apart from insecurity that has converted them into refugee camps, many are without qualified teaching staff. For poverty to be eradicated then these facilities must be provided and made to function efficiently so as to provide the necessary training that will emancipate them from poverty. When this is done then our rural areas will witness significant transformation.

Another pathway poverty eradication and entrenchment of sustainable rural socio economic development is the provision of credit facilities, access to extension services, birth control measures, and intensification of education as a means of alleviating poverty among the rural people. The existing poverty programs exhibit limited efficacy in generating employment opportunities and fostering sustainable economic growth and development Although direct assistance programs like food subsidies and cash transfers have a beneficial effect in the near term, they are less effective in tackling the underlying structural causes of poverty (Sameti et al., 2012; Tyer-Viola & Cesario, 2010). This highlights the pressing requirement for policy approaches prioritizing capacity development, community empowerment, and measures promoting sustainable economic growth and development within low-income communities (Christie, 2002, Santika et al., 2019)

Opportunities highlighted at SENCE Agriculture Fair of March 2012 showed that Nigeria faces a large and growing global agricultural market which still remain that way in 2019. In spite of all these opportunities majority of farmers (more than 65%) still use the crude method of farming; Storage facilities have not improved much and thus losses incurred from postharvest handling are still very high; Infrastructure development has not progressed to meet the current challenges, resulting in stagnation of processes and logistical nightmare; Access to markets has remained a recurring headache making the idea of Farming very unattractive to most people. Beyond all of these, the fact remains that, Nigeria's Agricultural Sector has enormous potential, with an opportunity to grow output by 160% from USD 99 billion at present to USD 256 billion by 2030. The rising commodity prices, growing demand for food all present significant opportunities for Nigeria. The rural people that constitute the impoverished engage in Agriculture and government could encourage them by providing aid to them to engage in profitable Agriculture. one way this can be done is to establish Agro processing industries that will turn their products into processed and packaged goods for export. Government could also provide

an enabling environment for export of these items in their unprocessed form. By encouraging rural production, wealth will be created and hence poverty alleviation. The future is great and the right people need to be involved to move it away from rhetoric to a life giving, money making venture for the good of the country's poor.

There is a dire need for continuity and perpetual implementation of poverty alleviation programmes by the current and future administration for the impact of the policies to be felt in Nigeria's rural economies. The inconsistencies of regional poverty alleviation programmes with the national policies should be adjusted to align with each other. The good relationship and peaceful atmosphere will always ensure the success of poverty alleviation programmes, policies, and consequent development of rural communities. Policies should be monitored and evaluated purposely to determine achievements of rural poverty reduction programmes vis-à-vis development.

Again, Nigeria's poverty alleviation reforms need to be backed up or initiated through policies coupled with increased and better co-ordinate technical and financial backing. It should also be programmes selected based on a rational, national and institutional structure that come from a national consensus on how best to achieve sustainable and equitable redistribution of wealth that will guarantee rural development.

### Conclusion

Despite the renewed commitment over the past 15 years and more to poverty reduction as the core objective of international development discourses and policies, progress to this end remains disappointing (UNDP, 2003). This is particularly evident in the extent to which the world is off track to achieve most of the Sustainable Development Goals, globally and in most regions and countries (UNDP, 2003). This inadequate progress raises important questions about the policies and strategies that have been adopted to achieve poverty reduction, as well as about key international issues including aid, debt and trade. Nigeria has the richest natural resources in Africa and yet it is poor and stagnant in growth and development. In other words, in spite of all the wealthy resources including human and material in its possession, Nigeria remains one of world's poorest countries. The Nigeria's poor lacks information, knowledge about market prices for the goods they deal in, issues related to health, availability of public services, and their rights. They constitute a political majority which lacks the visibility and voice as regards the institutions that shape their lives. Poor people in Nigeria are also said to lack access to relevant skills and knowledge, education and personal development that could improve their livelihoods. As such alleviating poverty for them will ensure the eradication of a critical sector of the economy and hence development

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