

An Assessment of National Poverty Eradication Programme on Wealth Creation in Benue State

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Abstract

Poverty is pervasive and widespread among underdeveloped countries. For several decades, global discussions on underdeveloped countries revolve around poverty related problems. Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are currently with the highest level of poverty. This study examines the current strategies adopted by the Federal Government of Nigeria through National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) and the impact it has on the beneficiaries in Benue State. The explanatory- survey method was utilized for the collection of data through questionnaire administered on one hundred and nine (109) respondents selected from beneficiaries and key officials of NAPEP in six (6) local government areas of Benue State. Our findings suggest that the strategies employed by NAPEP have not made significant impact in improving the lives of beneficiaries in Benue State. We observed structural defects in implementation strategies adopted by NAPEP. More so, corruption, poor funding and untimely release of funds, weak monitoring and impact assessment plans, bad governance are major problems constraining the successful implementation of poverty reduction programmes in Nigeria. We therefore recommend that poverty reduction strategies should be constructively structured to effectively target the poor who are the actual beneficiaries; the anti-corruption crusade stand of the Federal Government reinvigorated especially with related cases of poverty reduction programmes; a sound educational curriculum are required at all levels of our educational system on entrepreneurial education and values reorientation; adopting of global approach to infrastructural development and improve access of the poor to micro-credit facilities.

Keywords: Benue state, poverty, poor funding, weak monitoring, bad governance.

1. Introduction

The level of poverty in Nigeria today is quite disturbing as it has assumed an alarming proportion. According to Abdullahi (2009), both the quantitative and qualitative measurements attest to the growing incidence and depth of poverty in the country. The federal government in line with global contentions has been responding to ameliorate the worsening condition of the poor by shifting public expenditure towards poverty alleviation programmes to cushion the effects of poverty.

It has been known in Nigeria that every government embarks on one form of poverty reduction strategy or the other. However what has remained an issue is the weak impact it has on the poor who are the target beneficiaries. The perceptions of the poor about poverty reduction programmes have been that of ineffectiveness and irrelevance in their lives as government poverty reduction efforts contributes little to their struggle to survive.

Poverty is one of the most serious problems in Nigeria today. Despite the various efforts of government from independence to date, poverty has been on the increase. Nigeria's proportion of the poor has doubled over the last two decades, during which time the country received \$3000billion in oil and gas revenue (Oyemorni, 2003). Indeed it is a paradox of poor people in rich country, in other words "poverty in the midst of plenty". Statistical data available indicates that by 1960 the poverty level in Nigeria covers about 15% of the population and by 1980 it rose to 28%. In 1985, the poverty level was 46% and it dropped to 43% by 1992. By 1996, the Federal Office of Statistics estimated poverty level in Nigeria at about 66%.

The poverty levels by zones as at 2008 shows that South -South has 35.1%; South East 26.7%; South West 43.0%; North Central 67.0%; North East 72.2% and North West has 71.2% as well (Soludo,2008). One out of two Nigerians is in poverty and it is becoming dynastical, that is, children of the poor likely to become poor due to widening gap in access to quality education. Nigeria is one of the most unequal societies in the world.

Despite the plethora of poverty reduction programmes put in place by the federal government to fight poverty over the years, one begins to wonder why poverty is still on the increase. Are the poor who are the actual targets of these programmes really benefitting from them; and if not what is responsible for the inefficiency of these programmes?

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Concept of poverty

In recent years the subject of poverty has been a subject of interest to governments, development finance institutions, professional bodies and academics. Despite the immense attention that the subject has received, there is still no universal treatment as to its definition (Ajakaiye, 1998). Poverty is a state where an individual is



not able to cater adequately for his or her basic needs of food, clothing and shelter. He is unable to meet social and economic obligations, lack gainful employment, skills, assets and self-esteem, and has limited access to social and economic infrastructure such as education, health, portable water and sanitation and consequently has limited chance of advancing his or her welfare to the limit of his or her capabilities.

By basic need definition, poverty is deprivation of material requirements for minimally acceptable fulfillment of human needs, including food. This concept of deprivation goes well beyond the lack of private income. It includes the need for basic health, education and essential services that have to be provided by the community to prevent her members from falling into poverty. It recognizes the need for employment and participation in economic and social affairs.

2.2 Poverty Reduction

All formal activities geared towards lowering the prevalence and rate of poverty in the country. Poverty reduction programmes are aimed at raising people's incomes and increasing the power of low-power group so that it nearly equates that of the high-power group.

2.3 Poverty Reduction and Wealth Creation

Mbaegbu (2008) argued that one of the goals of economic development strategy pursued by successive Nigeria governments has been the reduction of poverty through dolling out of money, distribution of machinery and equipments amongst others to the poor. A good number of these poverty reduction policies over the years have failed to adopt sound strategy of developing local entrepreneurs through entrepreneurial skills and wealth creation processes which increases purchasing power and demand for goods and services. When employment increased, it creates resources and the market is flood with goods and services that reduced inflation; create wealth and eradicate poverty.

Other countries that have used the entrepreneurship strategy for employment generation, poverty reduction and economic growth include: the United State of America (USA) in the 1980s; Chile through the "Chicago boys". In South East Asia, we have Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea rising from poverty to riches, a development that has stunned the world.

The used of entrepreneurial development strategy to generate employment, economically empower the people, reduce poverty and propel economic growth was postulated by Friedman (1953) based on an earlier General Theory of Empowerment by Keynes in 1936. Suffice to state here that National Poverty Eradication Programme(NAPEP) has wealth creation as its focal point. Thus, programmes of NAPEP are aimed at equipping Nigerian poor with skills to create jobs for themselves and other people instead of hunting for white-collar jobs in the public sector.

2.4 Constraints of Poverty Reduction Strategies in Nigeria

Despite the numerous poverty alleviation strategies introduced in Nigeria over the years, poverty alleviation still remains an issue. There is widespread agreement that the previous strategies have failed to achieve their objectives. Several studies have been carried out to analyze the poverty reduction strategies in Nigeria and they largely collaborates some reasons for the failure of the numerous poverty intervention measures put up over the years. In general, most of the schemes have failed for reasons that include: public policy inconsistency, inadequate stake-holding by beneficiaries and operators, corruption, lack of adequate infrastructure, poor education, and bad governance amongst others.

Aliyu (2002) has specifically identified the problems of NAPEP as weak response and commitment of the federal ministries on the role of members of the state coordinating committee and contributions to this committee. Weak capacities of the states and local government offices of the ministries in generating and processing required data in their field operations, weak facilities and logical support for NAPEP to effectively monitor all poverty related operations in local government areas and also lack of compendium of information in all operations and non-governmental organizations sorted out by states and local government areas.

One major problem observed which affect all poverty reductions a strategy in Nigeria is that of implementation. Their laudable objectives are usually overwhelmed by corruption which has become so pervasive and deeprooted that it is now self-perpetuating and therefore would require multifaceted approaches in eliminating the causal factors.

3. Methodology

Explanatory survey design was employed. Questionnaire and interviews were used as instruments of data collection. These methods were used because they are more appropriate methods of eliciting the desire information/responses needed for the purpose of this research. Focused Group discussions were conducted with a few selected individuals (beneficiaries of NAPEP); this was done because most of them are not literate and may not be able to fill the questionnaire. A question guide made of fifteen (15) questions was used, each respondent was interviewed at length and data gathered were used to add the desired depth to the research. The questionnaire was also used to obtain data from selected key officials of NAPEP. The questionnaire made up of



fifteen (15) questions only which was structured in order to get accurate data on the subject. The researcher also made use of secondary sources of data, which include Official records/statistics and related literature on NAPEP from the time of her inception to date.

3.1 Sampling Procedure

This study is aimed at assessing the strategies used by NAPEP in Benue State. The study has been designed in such a way that, the target population includes: selected staff of NAPEP and beneficiaries of the various NAPEP programmes in Benue State.

The study area covered the entire Benue State, which consists of twenty-three (23) local government areas. In this study six (6) local government areas were selected along the three (3) geo-political zones of the state. Two (2) local government areas were selected from each zone based on a simple random technique of balloting.

From zone A, Kwande and Vandeikya were selected. Zone B, Makurdi and Gwer-west local government areas were selected, while Zone C, Oju and Otukpo were selected. From each of the six (6) local government areas two districts were selected by a random sampling technique, in all 12 districts were covered. Thirty (30) respondents were covered in each of the local government area. Questionnaires were administered on thirty (30) NAPEP officials across the entire state. In administering the questionnaire and interviews, the researcher covered most of the schemes/programmes of NAPEP.

4. Results and Discussion

Data was obtained from a total of one hundred and nine (109) respondents made up of nineteen (19) officials of NAPEP and ninety (90) beneficiaries. The shortfall in sample size which initially was 180 beneficiaries and 30 NAPEP officials is as a result of problems encountered in the process of data collection.

Data obtained from respondents have been presented in form of tables made up of absolute frequencies and interpreted clearly in percentages.

4.1 Participation of Beneficiaries in NAPEP Programmes

Table 1: Respondents that participated in NAPEP Activities

NAPEP Programme	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Capacity Acquisition programme (CAP)	53	58.8%
Mandatory attachment programme (MAP)	24	26.7%
KEKE NAPEP	7	7.8%
Micro-credit scheme	6	6.7%
Total	90	100%

Source: Field survey 2012

From Table1, more than half of the respondents, that is, the beneficiaries constitute 53(58.8%) that benefited from the capacity acquisition programme. 24(26.7%) of the respondents benefited from the mandatory attachment programme; while 7(7.8%) respondents benefited from KEKE-NAPEP and 6(6.7%) benefited from micro-credit scheme. The capacity building activity is meant to train beneficiaries in the various skills and trades after which beneficiaries will be assisted with start-up capital in form of loans or credits to start micro-businesses of their own. It is expected that after the training beneficiaries are given some micro-credits or loans to start-up. However Table1 have shown that just 6(6.7%) of the respondents have actually benefitted from the micro-credit strategy of NAPEP. It therefore suggests that a weakness exists in this strategy as beneficiaries are not properly empowered to start entrepreneurial activities that will create income streams and wealth.

It is argued that this model of poverty reduction through job creation is plausible in the sense that when you develop entrepreneurship and create jobs; you increase purchasing power and demand for other goods and services in the market place. Then, you create employment of resources and flood the market with goods and services to reduce inflation, create wealth and eradicate poverty (Abdullahi, 2009). The used of entrepreneurship strategy for employment generation, poverty reduction and economic growth is the strategy used among countries like USA, Chile, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea.

Previous studies of Friedman (1953) based on an earlier General Theory of Employment by Keynes in 1936 support this model. Also, Kpelai (2009), Iguisi (2008), Konings (1995) and Hughes (1993) provide evidence in their empirical works which suggest that equipping the poor with skills to create jobs for themselves and other people is the best strategy of rising from poverty to riches.

Europe and USA have propelled the growth of their economies through promoting vibrant SME sub-sector. This situation creates demand on policy makers to aggressively support entrepreneurship education and development in Nigeria in order to reduce the level of poverty in the country; the case of Nigeria appears to be worrisome when compared with other African countries. Table 2 portray an alarming situation exist in Nigeria.



Table 2: Share of micro entrepreneurship in employment creation in some African countries.

Country	% share of micro entrepreneurship in total wage employment
Sierra Leone	95
Ghana	85
Zambia	84
Uganda	62
Kenya	59
Tanzania	57
Zimbabwe	53
Nigeria	48

Sources: Nigeria Academy of Management Journal as cited by Abdullahi (2009:57)

4.2 Impact of NAPEP on Beneficiaries in Benue State

Table3: Impact of NAPEP on Beneficiaries

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Positive impact	13	14.4%
Little impact	3	3.3%
No impact	74	82.2%
Total	90	100%

Source: Field survey, 2012

From Table3, 74(82.2%) of the respondents said the nature of assistance given to them has not really helped in reducing poverty, they have not actually felt the impact of the prorammes they participated in terms of alleviating their present status of poverty. The beneficiaries who participated in the training programmes said they have only acquire the knowledge and skills but lack the where withal to turn these skills into productive ventures. They lamented that even the stipends promised them was not paid at all.

The performance of most of poverty alleviation schemes has in general been abysmal. This is partly because most of the beneficiaries and custodians of these schemes usually do not have adequate stake in the success of it. This weakness is perhaps very evident in some of the poverty alleviation schemes established since pre-independence in Nigeria.

From the responses gathered, it is appropriate to state here that the various NAPEP programmes embarked on have not actually helped in the reduction of poverty of the beneficiaries in Benue State as there has been no positive change in the direction of their standard of living.

4.3 Stake-holding in Policy Decision Making

Table4: Stake-holding by beneficiaries in policy formulation

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Consulted in policy making	11	12.2
Not consulted in policy making	73	81.1
Neutral	6	6.7
Total	90	100%

Source: Field survey, 2012

The respondents were asked if they have ever been consulted or involved in any policy decision making process as regards NAPEP programmes. Their responses show that, the poor who are the actual beneficiaries of the poverty reduction programmes are not involved or consulted in decision making and policy formulation processes that concern them. As over 81.1% of the respondents indicate there was no form of consultation whatsoever. From our causal observation, some respondents believed that, right from the stage of conception of these programmes, they are not intended to benefit the poor who are the real target. They are rather drawn and implemented in line with selfish interests of government officials. This goes a long way to answer the question of who benefits from these programmes.

Nigeria's legacy of mismanagement and corrupt governance has encouraged many government officials to seek ways of sharing the national cake instead of helping bake it. By 1999 corruption was practically institutionalized and poverty alleviation programmes were not left out too.

NAPEP Officials



4.4 Effectiveness of NAPEP in Reducing Poverty

Table5: Poverty reduction by NAPEP

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Very effective	2	10.5%
Effective	2	10.5%
Very ineffective	6	31.6%
Ineffective	9	47.4%
Total	19	100%

Source: Field survey, 2012

From Table 5, 2(10.5%) of respondents said the programme was very effective similarly 2(10.5%) said it was effective on the other hand, 6(31.6%) believes the programme is very ineffective and 9(47.4%) are of the view that the programme is ineffective. In effect this means that the NAPEP programme has actually been ineffective in the reduction of poverty of the people of Benue State. This tallies with views earlier expressed by beneficiaries of NAPEP. Moreso, NAPEP will actually fail in meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of reducing poverty incidence by half in the year 2015.

Olaitan et'al (2000) and Nwachukwu (2000) argues that poverty reduction programmes are mere policy pronouncements as well as been veritable means for money laundering, it becomes a scramble for all to get the "National cake". The poverty reduction programmes just like many other federal government programmes that have been initiated in the past, are always brilliant in conception but their implementation are not anything but ineffective thereby vitiating the objectives. While some of the poverty reduction programmes are vague in scope as a result of weak and ad-hoc nature of their conception, design and identification, some are conceived ab-initio to fail as they were only designed for the benefit of a very few privileged instead of the target poor (Oyemomi, 2003; Olaitan, 2000 and Nwachukwu 2000).

4.5 Participative Approach in Designing Poverty Reduction Programmes in Benue State

Table 6: Participation in Poverty Reduction Policy Design

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	4	21.1%
No	15	78.9
Total	19	100%

Source: Field survey 2012

The data from Table 6 shows that 4(21.1%) of the respondents affirmed that poverty reduction strategies are drawn in participatory manner while 15(78.9%) are of a contrary opinion. If these kinds of responses are from the NAPEP officials themselves, there are no doubt that there exist strong weaknesses in public policy structure in poverty reduction programmes across Nigeria. This suggests that there is lack of proper targeting mechanisms with which to genuinely identify the poor people in Nigeria. It has been shown clearly that the implementation of NAPEP programmes is not directed at the poor.

4.6 Corruption and Poverty Reduction

It is observed that in implementation of poverty reduction programmes, corruption has been identified in many quarters as one of the major problem confronting most poverty reduction strategies and have been responsible for failure of most poverty reduction programmes in Nigeria. The responses we got revealed this fact.

Table7: Corruption as Major Factor Militating against Poverty Reduction

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	12	63.2%
No	7	36.85
Total	19	100%

Source: Field survey 2012

Table 7 shows that 12(63.2%) officials of NAPEP agreed to the fact that corruption is one major factor responsible for failure of majority of poverty reduction programmes in Nigeria.

It is no exaggeration to say that the level of corruption is indescribable. Our economic dilemma is compounded by corruption and other aspect of social indiscipline, which are widespread in both the public and private sectors of our society, unfortunately, there seems to be little awareness of the dangers posed to our future by these problems even amongst the elites. A recent news magazine, the economist, has also appropriately described the cost of corruption to Nigeria thus:

Nigeria has received some \$280billion in oil revenues since the early 1970s. Through foolish investments, grafts and simple theft, this vast fortune has been wholly squandered. In fact because, successive Nigerian Governments borrowed billions against future oil revenues and wasted that money too, it is fair to say that Nigeria blew more its entire oil windfall. Nigerians are averagely, poorer today than they were in 1974. Despite



the recent surge in the oil price, the country is saddled with high poverty incidences

Human Development index released by the United Nations for 2006 indicates that 90.8% of Nigerians cannot spend \$1.00 a day and are therefore below the poverty line (Sadiq, 2008).

Respondents identify other problems faced by poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria to also include: political bias and policy instability; absence of effective collaboration and complementation among the three tiers of governments which hinder government efforts at fighting poverty. Furthermore, severe budgetary, management and administrative problems results in uncompleted projects and facilities which eventually breakdown and are abandoned. Absence of agreed poverty reduction agenda that can be used by all concerned; Federal government, State Government, Local government, NGOs and the international Donor Community and most of the poverty alleviation programmes lacked mechanisms for their sustainability.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The problem of poverty in Nigeria is complex, multidimensional and multifaceted requiring the need for renewed reflection and rethinking of the strategies that have been formulated to tackle poverty in the past. The new strategy should therefore be anchored on entrepreneurially driven policies that will economically empower the people, reduce poverty and propel economic growth. The poor have not actually felt the impact of NAPEP in Benue State as there have been no significant changes in the standard of living of those who have benefited from the NAPEP programmes. It has registered little or no success in achieving its goals of eradicating poverty.

The implementations of NAPEP have not effectively targeted the poor. Lack of participation and involvement of the poor who are the true beneficiaries in policy formulation, budgetary and budget deficiencies; poor implementation strategy, bad governance, lack of access to micro-credits or loans and above all corruption by government officials.

5.2 Recommendations

- Alleviating poverty in Nigeria requires real revolution and government must make deliberate efforts for paradigm shift from the status quo of dolling out money to the poor to adoption of wealth creation strategies. The poor should be made creative and productive as this will move them out of the vicious circle. The poor lack the capacity and power to transform their situations. They need empowerment after they have been trained and acquired skills to start micro enterprises.
- 2. There is also the need to inculcate an entrepreneurial mindset in our youths most especially our students in the tertiary institutions. This can be done through curriculum review and values re-orientation that inculcate entrepreneurship education in line with the global realities. Through this strategy our fresh graduates will create jobs opportunities for themselves instead of seeking for jobs after graduation.
- 3. Participation of poor in poverty related policy decisions is a key to the success of any policy directed at poverty reduction. Without the involvement of the poor, poverty reduction strategy is not likely to take in sustained manner.
- 4. Government in conjunction with other regulatory agencies promote good governance transparency and accountability. This will support the development and maintenance of transparent and stable economic and regulatory environment conducive to efficient private sector activities
- 5. Anti-corruption agencies in the country need to be strengthened to treat cases of mismanagement and misappropriation of funds meant for poverty reduction programmes with dispatch. The fight against corruption must be heightened as it is considered a debilitating factor in the fight against poverty and its reduction. There is need to demonstrate in more concrete terms the political will to eliminate corruption beyond rhetoric.
- 6. Government should create special centres specifically entrusted with responsibilities of assisting individuals develops skills, knowledge and new venture management competencies in starting and owing a venture that will create wealth for them.
- 7. A key strategy for attacking poverty is by helping the poor develop their micro enterprises in the rural areas. This will also create the needed intersectoral linkages in which large proportion of peasant farmers in Benue State can benefit.
- 8. It has been observed that credit inaccessibility is a major constraint for many of the poor. A sustained microcredit scheme where the federal government guarantees the risk be put in place to assist the poor access credit facilities for start-ups and create wealth in the community. A good example of sustained micro-credit model can be seen in Bangladesh where the Gramen Bank has taken an initiative in launching the first mutual fund of the poor.
- 9. Government needs to provide basic infrastructures such as good roads, portable water, and electricity amongst others. The availability of basic infrastructures could among other things improve the quality of lives in the rural and urban areas help reduce the costs of production and curb rural urban migration.



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