A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA BEFORE 1999

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Abstract

Presently, poverty has become one of the greatest challenges facing mankind all over the world. Nigeria is not an exception as more and more citizens of this country continue to swim in the ocean of poverty. Efforts by successive governments to resolve the problem through the introduction of poverty alleviation programmes have not been quite successful. Thus, this paper attempts a critical appraisal of poverty alleviation measures in the country before 1999.

Introduction

It is not longer news that all over the world today, poverty has become a major plague afflicting millions of people and it is one of the greatest challenges facing mankind. Indeed, the global poverty situation is nothing to cheer about. For instance, in a report by the United Nations Development Programme (1997:30), about one billion people are poor out of a world population of five billion. Because of the severity of the situation, the United Nations Organization declared 1996 as the International year for Eradication of poverty and designated October 17th of every year as the International day for the eradication of poverty, worldwide. Similarly, the United Nations declared 1997 - 2006 as the Decade for the Eradication of Poverty.

As a full member of the United Nations Organization, Nigeria is obliged to attain the global target that has been set for the total eradication of poverty. Successive governments in the country introduced policies and programmes aimed at poverty alleviation. However, these have not been quite successful. Therefore, this paper attempts a critical appraisal of the poverty alleviation measures introduced in Nigeria before the inception of the Obasanjo civilian administration in 1999.

In an attempt to carry out the task set for ourselves above, this paper is divided into five parts. The first part clarifies the concept of poverty. Secondly, we examine the nature of poverty in Nigeria. Thirdly, we discuss the efforts made by successive governments to alleviate poverty before 1999. Next, the factors responsible for the failure of past of measures at poverty alleviation are examine, followed by the way out of the problem. Finally, the paper would conclude.

The Concept of Poverty

Generally, there is no agreed universal definition of poverty. “Poverty is complex and multi-dimensional and has various perceptions” (World Bank, 2000/2001: 10; Ogwunike, nd: 2). Poverty does not only differ according to social group, political or economic context, geographical area but, also experienced differently by women and men.

Poverty can either be absolute or relative. In absolute term, poverty refers to the lack of physical minimum requirements for person of household for existence. Among others, it means the inability to meet basic needs such as food, clothing shelter, portable water, health services , basic education public transportation and so on.

On the other hand, relative poverty refers to a situation where the provision of goods and services to an individual or household is lower than what others have. In other words, the position of various groups in a scale of income is taken into consideration. The position of an individual in this scale is compared with the rest in order to conclude whether or not he belongs to the poverty group. Therefore, according to the approach, an individual is said to be poor, if he has far less income and material wealth than the average person in his community.

Whether, absolute or relative, Onibokun and Kumuyi (1996), have given a good definition of poverty thus:

Poverty is a way of life characterized by low calorie intake, inaccessibility to adequate health facilities, low quality education, low-life expectancy, high infant mortality, low income, unemployment and under employment , and inaccessibility to various housing and societal facilities (quoted in Pyke and Ali-Akpajiak, 2003: 5).

Clearly, individuals who are poverty-stricken do not have access to the basic needs of live for survival such as food, clothing, shelter and so on. Poverty does not only manifest itself in economic deprivation, but also in the context of inability of an individual to have access to basic social amenities (Grass and Adetunmbi, 2000 and CBN/WB, p.x).
The Nature of Poverty in Nigeria

Publications by the Federal Office of Statistics, National Planning Commission and the United Nations Development Programme have always thrown light on the nature of poverty in Nigeria. These reports have continued to reveal that poverty continues to escalate and the intervention measures have failed to make appreciable impact.

The severity of poverty in the country is revealed by social indicators such as literacy level, health, nutritional status, housing, water, sanitations, access to credit. These are compressed into what is known as the Human Development Index (HDI).

The statistic of poverty in Nigeria is alarming. For instance, table 1 reveals that poverty increased from 28.1% to 54.4% in 2004. This means that 18.26 million Nigerians lived in poverty in 1980 and 68.70% million in 2004.

Table 2, reveals the relative incidence of poverty in urban and rural areas of the country. It shows that incidence of poverty is higher in the rural areas than in the urban areas. For instance, in 1980, the incidence of poverty in the urban area was 17.2% in 1980 and by 2004 it climbed to 43.2%. In the rural areas, it was 28.3% in 1980 and climbed to 63.3% in 2004.

Similarly, table 3 shows the poverty levels by geo-political zone in the country. It reveals that poverty continued to worsen for all the zones. Although, the rate of poverty in the Southern states fell between 1997 and 2004, it actually increase in the Northern states during the same period. Thus, by 2004 the Northern geopolitical zones have more poor people than the Southern geopolitical zones.

In addition to the above revelation, statistical data by 1999 also reveal the following:

- Life expectancy is a mere 54 years.
- Infant mortality was 77 per 1000 and maternal mortality was 704 per 10,000 live births.
- Total population earning less than $1.0 per day was 70.2 percent.
- Only about 10 percent of the population had access to essential drugs.
- Among children under five years of age, only 30 percent were underweight.
- Total population without access to portable water was 61 percent.
- Rural population without access to healthcare was 870 percent.
- Rural population without access to electricity was 70 percent.

Indeed, the rate of impoverishment was highest in the history of Nigeria between 1993 and 1997. The country’s population of the poorest among the poor trebled within the period reaching to a very high figure of 37 million in 1997. Therefore, it is not surprising that Nigeria is ranked among the 25 poorest countries in the world and the poorest OPEC country.

### Table 1: Trends in Poverty Levels: 1980 - 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Poverty Incidence %</th>
<th>Estimated Population</th>
<th>Population in Poverty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>65m</td>
<td>18.26m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>46.3</td>
<td>75m</td>
<td>34.73m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>91.5m</td>
<td>39.73m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>65.6</td>
<td>102.3m</td>
<td>67.11m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>126.3m</td>
<td>68.70m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Poverty Alleviation Programmes before 1999

Before 1999, elaborate poverty alleviation programmes were initiated by successive government in Nigeria. These focused mainly on food and agricultural production, mobilization, participation, employment, skills improvement and so on. The major one are:

i. **National Directorate of Employment (NDE)**
   This was set up 1986 to design and implement programmes with the aim of combating mass unemployment in the country. The focus was on secondary school leavers and graduates of higher institutions. The NDE intervened in the following areas:
   - training and promotion of entrepreneurship
   - training of rural employment vocational skills acquisition training
   - training of labour-based methods of maintenance and construction of infrastructure.

ii. **Directorate for Foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI)**
   It was established in 1986 to coordinate and streamline all rural development efforts. Also, it had the function of accelerating the pace of integrated rural development in the country. The activities of DFRRI covered areas such as provision of feeder roads, portable water supply and so on.

iii. **Peoples Bank of Nigeria (PBN)**
    The peoples bank of Nigeria was established in 1989 to provide micro credits to the informal sector operators. Similarly, it also provided specialized services to the poor who find it difficult to access from the banks. Thus, PBN granted facilities to the poor without collateral security.

iv. **National Bank for Community Bank (NBCB)**
    This was established in 1989. It’s main mandate was to set up community banks, supervised their functions and provide capacity development to them. The idea was that of a financial institution that is self-sustaining, owned and managed by a community or group of communities to provide credit, deposit and other banking and financial services to its members and other rural dwellers while mobilizing saving. As of December, 1999, a total of 1014 community banks were established.

v. **Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB)**
    The Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB) was established in 1972. The mandate was to provide credits for agricultural production, processing and marketing to small holders, large-scale farmers and cooperative bodies.
Family Economic and Advancement Programme (FEAP)

Family Economic and Advancement Programme (FEAP) was established in 1987. Its mandate was to provide access to credit for micro entrepreneurs at grassroots level, encourage job creation, local raw material utilization and development of indigenous technology. During the period of its existence, FEAP approved a total of N3.33 billion for disbursement and support of 20,382 projects across the country.

National Agricultural Land Development Agency (NALDA)

National Agricultural Land Development Agency (NALDA) had the mandate of developing large tracts of land in each state and to facilitate and supervise agricultural credit to participants. The establishment of NALDA also enhanced the setting up of economic size farm holdings in the country. It also, contributed to increasing food production especially in the rural areas through the establishment of enclave crop farms and the outreach farm development projects.

National Primary Healthcare (PHC)

The National Primary Healthcare was established in 1992 with the mandate of promoting and designing primary healthcare at the grass root level. It was active in the integration of HIV/AIDS control programme into primary healthcare and has actively collaborated with international agencies in realizing the goals of the PHC.

In addition to the poverty alleviation programmes discussed above, others that were introduced during the same period were the Better Life Programme (BLP) and the Family Support Programme (FSP).

Why Poverty Alleviation Programmes before 1999 Failed

Many factors accounted for the failure of the poverty alleviation programmes before 1999. These were:

i. Majority of those benefited from the programmes were not the poor. They were the powerful and rich people in the society. This situation led to frustration, disillusionment, discontent and resentment on the part of the people (UNDP, 1998: 63).

ii. A major shortcoming in the implementation of the poverty alleviation strategies was their top-down approach. Thus, according to the United Nations Development Programme (1998: 64).

- These initiatives resulted in the creation of a multiplicity of institutions with overlapping roles and responsibilities, and very little was achieved...
- State and Local Governments were reduced to mere implementing authorities... The various programmes were not synchronized with community need.

iii. There was the absence of a national framework for poverty alleviation and undue political interference.

iv. Proliferation of poverty alleviation agencies with functions that were duplicative and overlapping.

v. There was the mismanagement of available resources as a result of sharp corrupt practices.

vi. Even when some of the programmes were well conceived, lack of continuity as a result of incessant changes of policies and/or Government became a problem.

vii. There was the problem of lack of commitment and political will to ensure the success of the programmes by the poor including inadequate and inconsistent funding.

viii. The planning and implementation of the programmes were not based on the needs of target beneficiaries due to lack of baseline data and the exclusion of beneficiaries from the planning process.

ix. Networking among agencies responsible for poverty alleviation was absent. Indeed, there was poor co-ordination, monitoring and evaluation at inter-ministerial and inter-Agency levels.

x. The micro-economic situation in Nigeria during the period exposed the poor to socioeconomic harsh conditions. The forces procreating poverty were more active than those eradicating it. These rendered the contributions of poverty alleviation agencies to appear insignificant.

xi. There was the absence of sustainability mechanism in programmes.

Recommendations

In order to alleviate poverty in the country, the following measures are suggested:

i. The implementation of poverty alleviation programmes based on top-down approach should be jettisoned. Beneficiaries of the programmes should occupy central position in the planning and implementation process.

ii. There is the need to avoid the proliferation of poverty alleviation programmes in the country.
There is the need to harmonise them in terms of numbers and functions for optimal results.

iii. Mismanagement of available resources and corruption must be curtailed. Indeed, there is the need for Government to strengthen the anti-corruption agencies to be able to stamp out the menace of corruption in the society.

iv. Networking among poverty alleviation agencies should be strengthened.

v. The micro-economic conditions must be addressed squarely. Therefore, in devising policies and programmes, efforts should be made to give due consideration to and protect the interest of the poor.

vi. A lot of money is required considering the severity of poverty and number of people affected in the country. Therefore, poverty alleviation programmes should be adequately funded and timely.

vii. There must be continuity of poverty alleviation programmes in the country. Frequent changes of policies and Government are bound to affect the implementation of the programmes.

viii. Efforts should be made to utilize fully, the industrial and agricultural capacities of the country.

ix. The United Nations Millennium Goals should be fully implemented especially the goal of reducing poverty by 50%.

Conclusion

The paper examined critically the poverty alleviation programmes of Nigeria before 1999. Before this date, efforts were made by successive government in the country to introduce measures to reduce poverty such as NALDA, NDE, DFFRI, FEAP, NACB and so on. However, these were not quite successful and poverty continued unabatedly. In order to reduce poverty in the country, networking among poverty alleviation agencies should be strengthened, there is the need to harmonize poverty alleviation programmes in the country in terms of numbers of functions, mismanagement and corruption should be eliminated and so on.

References


