

POVERTY IN NIGERIA AND GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TOWARDS ITS ALLEVIATION

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Abstract

Nigeria, the most populous country not only in Sub-Saharan Africa but the continent as a whole, is highly endowed with natural resources, and being the 6th largest crude oil exporter in the world, its people are paradoxically wallowing in excruciating poverty. Historically, the trend of poverty in Nigeria is that of the upsurge. In 1980, for instance, the number of people living in poverty increased from 27% to 46% in 1985 and from 55% in 2004 to 61% in 2010 and 64% in 2013 (World Bank, 2013). Consequently, the need arises for concerted effort to be made to tackle the menace of poverty in the country. Thus, several poverty alleviation programmes were undertaken by the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) as an indication of its commitment to alleviate poverty in the country. Reviewing relevant literature, we evaluate poverty alleviation programmes in this paper. We conclude that despite enormous resources allocated to poverty elevation programmes, poverty levels did not decline but has increased over time. This failure is explained by corruption, overlapping functions and rivalry among executing agencies, as well as political interference. Recommendations for improving poverty alleviation programmes and making them more effective are provided in this paper.

Keywords: Poverty, poverty alleviation measures.

JEL Codes: I32, I38

Introduction

Poverty is a global problem. Globally, there are over 700 million poor people. The African continent is one of the most poverty-stricken with its Sub-Saharan part (SSA) being characterised by acute deprivations, illiteracy, poor healthcare, high maternal mortality, and low life expectancy. Nigeria, the most populous country not only in Sub-Saharan Africa but the continent as a whole, is highly endowed with natural resources and is the 6th largest crude oil exporter in the world (OPEC, 2016), its people are paradoxically wallowing in excruciating poverty. Historically, the trend of poverty in Nigeria has been increasing. The number of people living in poverty increased from 27% in 1980 to 46% in 1985 and from 55% in 2004 to 61% in 2010 and 64% in 2013 (World Bank, 2016). Consequently, the need arises for concerted efforts to tackle the menace of poverty in the country.

Concept of Poverty

The term poverty enjoys no universally accepted definition ¹as different people view it from different perspectives, conditions and environments (Casimir, Nwaoga, & Ogbozor, 2014).

¹ Scholars give different definitions to the term poverty but none of such definitions enjoys general global acceptability.

Poverty is a global phenomenon that dates back centuries of human existence and connotes a state of deprivation where individuals or families cannot afford the basic necessities of life such as food, decent shelter and clothing, education, and healthcare (Appah, Sophia, & John, 2012). From whichever angle² one views poverty—the absence of basic needs, loss of human dignity or unimaginable human suffering—the fact remains that chronically³ poor people live in a world that is not only conscious of their predicaments but is highly resource-endowed to alleviate their suffering (Chronic Poverty Report, 2008-2009).

The poverty situation in Nigeria is worrisome: over 70% of Nigerians are tagged as poor but what is much more disturbing is the fact that half of those classified as poor live in absolute poverty (IFAD, 2007). Notwithstanding the country is one of the largest⁴ world oil producers (Babalola et al., 2009; Ewhrudjakpor, 2008) with a population of over 180 million (National Population Commission, 2016), two-thirds of which are poor, Nigeria is the third⁵ country with the highest number of poor people in the world. This is perhaps because poverty is endemic in Africa, and Nigeria is the most populous country in the continent (Kibirige, 1997; Obadan, 1996). The poverty problem in Nigeria is further compounded by poor and dilapidated infrastructures and mass illiteracy in addition to low access to formal financial services. It is not surprising, therefore, that Nigeria has paradoxically been among the 25 poorest countries of the world since 2006 (Ehinomen & Adeleke, 2012). Consequently, the need arises to embark on measures to address the problem.

Poverty Alleviation

Bamiduro and Gbadeyan (2011) view that any measure(s) taken by individuals and governments at various levels as well as nongovernmental organisations (local or international) for eradication or reducing the menace of poverty in a society or country is known as poverty alleviation (PA). It is an effort from any source that aims at positive change in the conditions of the poor (Imhanlahimi & Idolor, 2010). Alleviation of poverty is characterised by empowerment. Also, like Innocent, Eikojonwa and Enojo (2014) note, that just like poverty itself, empowerment is also multi-dimensional as it results in complete overhauling (economic, social, political, and psychological) of the miserable status of the powerless poor. PA takes centre stage as a global development challenge. With this objective in mind, the international development community is not interested in reducing poverty only but aims to eradicate poverty as one of its main focus (Chandy & Gertz, 2011). To achieve this, the strategies of (i) Basic Needs; (ii) Targeting; (iii) Economic Growth; and (iv) Rural Development are employed.

The Basic Needs Strategy focuses on how the basic necessities of life are made easily available to the poor. These needs include food, decent shelter and clothing, healthcare, water, education, and security or safety from physical harm. Targeting as a poverty reducing strategy implies that a particular identified group with unique characteristics becomes the centre stage in the process. Thus, groups such as people with disability (deaf, blind or cripple), women, youths or particular artisan may be the focus. Similarly, where the emphasis is on factors such as health, nutrition, education or training that result in human capital formation and development, the strategy becomes that of economic growth. The Rural Development Strategy, on the other hand, pays attention to empowering rural dwellers by creating opportunities for income generating, needs attainment, and improvement in wellbeing

² Rather than absence or lacking in material needs, some scholars and development practitioners prefer to view poverty from deprivation in non-material well-being such as social and political exclusion.

³ Chronically poor are also called extremely poor or hard-core poor.

⁴ Nigeria is the 13th largest producer of crude oil in the world.

⁵ India tops the list followed by China then Nigeria.

Government Poverty Alleviation Strategies in Nigeria

In an attempt to slay the dragon of poverty in Nigeria, the Federal Government (FG) for over four decades introduced various programmes at different time intervals. These programmes were designed in such a way that all sectors of the Nigerian economy would feel their impact. However, several poverty alleviation agencies (PAAs) and institutions existed before 1999 when a Presidential Panel was established and charged with the responsibility of streamlining and rationalising them (Ojo et al., 2012). Since 1999, Nigeria has had various military and civilian administrations since the attainment of independence in 1960. Consequently, each regime did not continue with a poverty reduction programme initiated by its predecessor (Bamiduro & Gbadeyan, 2011). The following poverty alleviation programmes were undertaken by the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) as an indication of its commitment to alleviate poverty in the country (Ojo et al. 2012).

i. Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB) of 1973

According to the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD, 2007), poverty in Nigeria is more noticeable and dominant in rural than urban areas with almost all rural dwellers living on subsistence agricultural practices. Waheed et al. (2013) stated that agriculture and rural development which is a vital factor in poverty reduction became the focus of poverty alleviation programmes (PAPs). The first set of PAPs was the National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) conceived by General Gowon's led military administration in 1972 followed by NACB in 1973 (Innocent, Otaida, & Eikojonwa, 2014). The establishment of agriculture-devoted-funding NACB thirteen years after the attainment of Nigeria's nationhood was meant to boost agricultural production through sectorial credit allocation to individuals and group of farmers, cooperative societies, registered firms as well as various levels of government. Under this initiative, 318,000 small-scale farmers benefitted from an interest-free loan of about N5.8 billion; then, an equivalent of over USD7 billion (Ojo et al., 2012). The NAFPP failed woefully as it recorded barely any achievement (Innocent, Eikojonwa, & Enojo, 2014). NACB, on the other hand, faced series of challenges in that its loan disbursements through selected commercial banks generated no return (as the loan was interest free) coupled with the fact that even the principal amount became trapped in the selected commercial banks which turned out to be distressed and liquidated (Justine, Ighodalo, & Okpo, 2012).

ii. Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) of 1976

The coming of General Obasanjo on stage after the brutal assassination of Ramat Mohammed saw the introduction of the over publicised and poorly initiated OFN. As the programme's name implies, it was the result of the failure of the agricultural sector to meet the nation's food demand that called for its introduction. Under this programme, graduates from tertiary institutions (mainly universities and polytechnics) regardless of their area of specialisation were drafted and mobilised to rural areas to educate subsistence farmers on modern farming practices (Innocent, Otaida, & Eikojonwa, 2014). The programme was, of course, deemed to fail as those graduates were ill-prepared.⁶ Also, poor outreach of the targeted programme participants aided by administrative bottleneck immensely contributed to the failure of this initiative. Thus, two years later, despite huge public resources that were committed to the programme, no success was recorded. This led to the establishment of the Green Revolution.

⁶ The scenario was that of 'teach what you do not know' as a history or accounting graduate was asked to teach best agricultural practices to peasant farmers.

iii. National Directorate of Employment (NDE) of 1986

The British colonial masters instituted an educational system that satisfied their need for a middle cadre workforce mainly for clerical and administrative functions (Okonkwo & Ezeh, 2008). Accordingly, after independence, Adebisi and Oni (2012) observed that the same educational system which neglected vocational skills acquisition continued to prevail, which, in turn, produced a stream of unemployed graduates without employable skills.

The promulgation of Decree number 24 in October 1986 saw the establishment of the NDE by General Babangida's led military junta that was famous for designing attractive paper policies and very unpopular in having the political will to implement such policies. As argued by Anger (2010), the mere paper policy cannot solve the problem of poverty in Nigeria. Ojo et al. (2012) submitted that NDE was established for skills acquisition to reduce over-reliance on government white collar jobs that were not available and provide easily accessible records of both unemployment and scarce vacancies in the country. Thus, the programme was deeply rooted in the philosophy of self-reliance through viable venture ownership which provides self-employment rather than wage-earning employment (Adebisi & Oni, 2012).

According to Oyeranti and Olayiwola (2005), the NDE focuses its attention on four main programmes which include Rural Empowerment Promotion Programme (REPP), Special Public Works (SPW), Small Scale Enterprises (SSE), and Vocational Skills Development Programme (VSDP) which comprise 80 different trades that are imparted through the National Open Apprenticeship Scheme (NOAS), Re-settlement Scheme, Waste-to-Wealth Scheme, and School on Wheel Scheme.

It was on record that the NDE scheme provided employment opportunities to more than two million unemployed job seekers through training in various skills and a sizable number of trades aided the establishment of many small-scale ventures for self-reliance and business training to many Nigerians (Innocent, Otaida, & Eikojonwa, 2014). Ojo et al. (2012) argued that even though NDE is one of the longstanding⁷ intervention strategies in Nigeria, with widespread presence, it suffers from poor funding, loans recovery difficulty, and poor records management. Besides, the scheme had a lot to chew at a time: it was into skills acquisition, business training, credit disbursement, as well as procuring and disposing of agricultural inputs like pesticides and fertilisers (Innocent, Eikojonwa, & Enojo, 2014). These shortcomings, notwithstanding, the Directorate, with its so many years of experience in the field of battling unemployment, is a good avenue for creating employment opportunities for poverty reduction in the country (Justine, Ighodalo, & Okpo, 2012).

iv. Peoples Bank of Nigeria (PBN) of 1990

Many Nigerians living in rural areas have no access to formal financial services. Not until in the recent past, many local government councils had only a single branch of a commercial bank. Not only that, access to credit was further restricted by a collateral requirement from the commercial bank which views the rural poor as risky borrowers and unworthy customers (Aigbokhan & Asemota, 2011).

In an attempt to allow under-privileged low-income Nigerians to have access to credit facilities, Decree No. 22 of 1990 which established the PBN was promulgated (Ojo et al., 2012). Being an alternative to the conventional commercial banks, PBN was mandated to meet the credit needs of unbanked poor and equally accept savings from such under-privileged customers as

⁷ The Directorate still exists though, barely non-operational.

the need arises in their ordinary legitimate venture operations (Oyeranti & Olayiwola, 2005). Oyeranti and Olayiwola added that the PBN posited itself as an important microfinance provider to inculcate banking habit in the rural areas thereby reducing the level of financial exclusion, creating opportunities for self-employment and poverty reduction.

Justine, Ighodalo, and Okpo, (2012) reported unabated corruption in PBN due to a get-rich-quick syndrome of its officials. For instance, more than one-third of the total amount meant to have been disbursed by October 1990 to the targeted beneficiaries was stolen. Moreover, only slightly more than one-quarter of the remaining two-thirds that was claimed to have been disbursed was accounted for. They equally added that rather than giving loans to poor Nigerians, the zonal coordinators of the bank were concerned with payments of overhead expenditures some of which were never incurred.⁸ Consequently, as at the time the bank was wound up more than 80% of its loan portfolio was corruptly written off as bad debt (Ugoh & Ukpere, 2009) before being merged with the Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB) to create the Nigerian Agricultural, Cooperative and Rural Development Bank (Oyeranti & Olayiwola, 2005).

v. Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) of 1997

This programme was introduced by General Abacha's led military government amidst serious controversy: the programme was intended to improve the economic status of households, but at the time of its introduction the regime was busy retrenching already miserable-living-civil servants (Innocent, Eikojonwa, & Enojo, 2014). That singular act of reducing the country's workforce increased the number of households without jobs, and therefore worsened, rather than advancing their economic status. Nwachukwu (2007) opined that in addition to credit provision for agricultural undertakings, FEAP also had the objective of utilising cooperative societies to deliver credit for the cottage and small-scale industries for the creation and development of plants, machinery, and equipment to create jobs and cut down unemployment and poverty.

According to Ugoh and Ukpere (2009), FEAP was established concurrently with the Family Support Programme (FSP) which aimed at improving rural families' wellbeing through nutritional condition and effective health care delivery. These programmes were another set of failures for the Nigerian poor: after expending over N10 billion (then, an equivalent of about USD84 million) virtually nothing existed to prove their presence (Innocent, Eikojonwa, & Enojo, 2014). Furthermore, part of the failure story of these programmes is the unpatriotic attitude of the beneficiaries who connived with equipment fabricators to provide substandard equipment at an inflated cost (Ugoh & Ukpere, 2009). Other problems that pulled these programmes down include near absence or ineffective supervision and monitoring of projects, resulting in poor loan recovery. The FGN, therefore, responded to these problems with the establishment of the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) (Ojo et al., 2012).

vi. National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) of 2001

In 1999, a general election was held, and the government headed by retired General Obasanjo saw the need to address the much glaring youths growing restlessness across the country due to a high level of unemployment. The government responded by establishing the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) in the year 2000 thereby engaging up to 200,000 unemployed youths into various tasks for a monthly upkeep allowance of N3,500 each (Ojo et al., 2012).

⁸ Payments of four months' salaries to ghost workers and telephone bill when there was no telephone at all are few examples (see, Justine et al. 2012).

The beneficiaries of this programme were, for instance, assigned to work in government direct labour projects, such as maintenance of roads, environmental sanitation, and highways vegetation control. Ugoh and Ukpere (2009) submitted that over politicisation and corruption associated with PAP generated public outcry which led the government to set up a committee with a mandate to review the programme, and at the end, the committee proposed the establishment of NAPEP.

According to Justine, Ighodalo, and Okpo (2012), NAPEP has the mandate to coordinate all activities relating to poverty reduction undertaken by government agencies, ministries, and parastatals and ensure harmony among them so that activities of one agency will not contradict the other but rather compliment it so that each programme can sustainably contribute towards the attainment of the overall goal. In this regard, Justine et al. (2012) submitted that 14 and 37 core ministries and agencies and institutions were identified, and all the poverty-reducing programmes to be undertaken were broadly grouped into four. These are the Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES), Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS), Social Welfare Service Scheme (SOWESS), and Natural Resource Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS).

However, Dakyes and Mundi (2013), who investigated the impact of NAPEP on rural population in Mangu Local Government of Plateau State by using a sample of 500 households, revealed that NAPEP was firstly billed to create 200,000 jobs across the country, and for this target to be achieved, the government released a huge amount of money. More than 43% of the sample population in the study had never heard of NAPEP, and less than 3% (very insignificant) confessed to having received a small loan that was not adequate for any meaningful venture to warrant poverty reduction. Similarly, more than 97% of the sample population stated that they had never enjoyed any of the programme's packages. Furthermore, Anger (2010) reported that NAPEP was set up to address poverty issues in the country through empowerment, but rather than working towards the realisation of its goals it became entangled in series of controversies that necessitated the upper house of the National Assembly to call for probe of the agency's activities from inception. Anger (2010) further stated that by 2009, NAPEP had gulped the sum of N11.8 billion (about USD98 million) with little or no evidence to justify this huge expenditure. We now look at theories of poverty and their link to the failure of the various efforts made towards poverty alleviation in Nigeria.

Theories of Poverty Alleviation

i. The Individualistic Theory of Poverty

This theory postulates that an individual is the cause of his poverty because of his negative attitude towards work and his negative generic qualities that are not easily changed. That is to say, an individual's defect in his ability and aspiration causes poverty. Equally, with hard work and rational choices, the poor would have evaded their predicaments, and with same informed choices and desire for success, the poor can remedy or improve their social status (Abdulai & Shamshiry, 2014). This is basically 'blaming the victim' which supports the 'survival of the fittest' ideology that can be linked to the Darwinian poverty theory that found its root in Charles Darwin's evolutionary exposition in which he pictured a 'jungle-like' human evolution process where the weak would give way to the strongest (Lewens, 2012). However, evidence from the literature shows the apparent weakness of the assertion that those who cannot withstand the unhealthy competitive world conditions die off. This is because rather than leaving the stage for the strongest, the poor (the weak) have been increasing (World Bank, 2013). Furthermore, the victims of the blame in this theory of poverty (the poor) are socially excluded from the

needed means that can create, oil or motivate their zeal to attain their goals thus entrapping them in a culture of poverty (Abdulai & Shamshiry, 2014).

ii. The Culture of Poverty Theory

This theory is a brain-child of Lewis Oscar who studied the urban poor in Puerto Rico and Mexico in 1959. According to this theory, poverty is caused by cultural belief systems that support the sub-cultures of poverty. The culture of poverty holds that transmission of a set of norms, beliefs, and skills that are products of social interactions of individual and his community from one generation to another. The aftermath of the transmission of such norms rests with the individual. Thus, rather than blaming the poor for his miserable status as is the case with the Individualistic Poverty Theory, the Culture of Poverty links the individual with his community in explaining the causes of poverty. Cultures are transmitted through a learning process which attracts reward for an exhibition of the needed outcome. The theory, therefore, shows how poverty alleviation programmes such as direct aid or other forms of welfare packages serve as an incentive for the poor to hang on government welfare which in turn perpetuate poverty through a cycle of poverty that is passed from parents unto their children (Bradshaw, 2007).

iii. The Cyclical Theory of Poverty

The theory of interlocking, circular, interdependence within a process of cumulative causation developed by Myrdal (1957) provides the root for the cyclical poverty theory (Bradshaw, 2007). The assumption that circular causation among all factors in the social system causes a cumulative process is the main hypothesis of Myrdal's model which he used to explain the ever increasing wide gap between rich and poor nations. By employing Myrdal's theory, one can explain how a country experiences regional economic inequalities.

The cyclical theory of poverty encompasses the conservative individualistic as well as the dysfunctional structural school of thought as it views poverty as a product of the fusion of individual attributes and economic, political, and social systems which deprive the individual of opportunities that will generate income and raise well-being.

This cycle of poverty at the individual level may be shown as joblessness, for instance, that results into little or absence of income which hampers both consumption spending and savings for investment. Thus, there will be lower economic activities which will further compress community opportunities. Equally, deprivation in the form of healthcare, decent accommodation, and children's education compound the miserable status of the poor. Thus, the circle catches up with the children who as a result of poor educational background further fall behind in terms of availing themselves to job vacancies (Bradshaw, 2007). This theory suggests that poverty is multifaceted; its causes are many, but most efforts geared toward its alleviation pay attention to only part of these causes for a solution. The interdependence of the factors that result in poverty requires a multifaceted effort to fight the scourge. Breaking the cycle of poverty provides a better solution to poverty than most other efforts that reduce poverty but left the cycle to continue. With the chain broken, the poor would be made to attain self-sufficiency which is vital to poverty alleviation.

In sum, the Cyclical Poverty Theory takes into account not only the individuals' limitations but also the economic, political, and social system which put them at a disadvantage due to limited opportunities and resources with which to achieve income and wellbeing. It shows how economic, political, and social exclusion negatively affects the psychological abilities of the individual. These various deprivations reinforce one another as they are linked with each other

creating a chain that becomes difficult to break. This theory, therefore, depicts how not only individual deficiencies but an array of economic and social factors intertwined to produce cumulative effects that result in a chain of events (hence, the cycle) that makes persistence poverty to be passed from one generation to another.

Government Anti-Poverty Programmes from Theories Perspectives

The Individualistic Theory provides a basis upon which most welfare and social policy programmes rest. The consensus opinion is that these programmes are targeted at enhancing the productive capacities of the poor and pushing them into work with a greater emphasis on self-reliance strategies for the poor to break away from the bondage of poverty. However, focusing on individual deficiencies of the poor to address the poverty issue is not without problem. First, anti-poverty initiatives do not concur with the ‘blaming the victim’ concept of the individualistic theory, and therefore, fail to support strategies that punish or try to change the individual as a solution to poverty. This is perhaps the basis upon which targeted beneficiaries of several Nigerian poverty reduction programmes such as NDE, PEAP, and NAPEP failed to conform to the programmes’ guidelines which in turn resulted in the colossal failure of these programmes (Ayadi, 2012). Secondly, it is equally important that although the individual deficiencies approach is simple, they are not always carefully explored as they get implemented, and it is unlikely that policymakers will pursue a community development approach to solving poverty (Bradshaw, 2007).

The second poverty theory rests on the notion that generational transmission of beliefs and value systems which are reinforced by dysfunctional sub-culture of the weak and disadvantaged people perpetuate poverty. The apparent solution here is viable anti-poverty measures that result in the cultural overhaul or change through socialisation that inculcates positive work habit as well as avoidance of reforming-seeking behaviours that are attributed to ‘ghetto’ life such as alcoholism and prostitution. This change will replace the unwanted negative attitude with a more pragmatic culture that will encourage productivity, savings, investment, and integration of the poor who in turn assimilate better value systems and become socially responsible. The Nigerian Rural Housing Project of the late 70s was an example of this perspective that involved the experimental relocation of the poor from their ghetto dwellings to suburbs; the motive is that the new culture from the new environment will emancipate them from poor living conditions that can, and too often do, foster despair, laziness, hopelessness, and anti-social behaviours. Similarly, targeting of youth as in “Youth Empowerment Scheme” where the focus is on youths can go a long way in putting a stop to the recreation of the unneeded culture by keeping them away from detrimental interactions and behaviours (Bradshaw, 2007).

The third theory postulates that in addition to individuals’ shortcomings, economic, social and political systems which constrain people from having resources and opportunities that enhance well-being is the cause of poverty. In this regard, poverty alleviation measures must centre on structural reforms that will take care of barriers that obscure families from better jobs and non-performance of sectors that support micro ventures. This theory suggests that poverty is multifaceted, but most poverty alleviation efforts focus on only part of the solution: that of income or monetary poverty. Thus, poverty alleviation strategies should be comprehensive enough to encompass a chain of services that address individual and community needs; collaborative – where various agencies can contribute to attaining the overall goals; and community organizing where stakeholders are carried along and the relevance of the programme to both the individual and the community emphasised because personal and community well-being are intertwined (Bradshaw, 2007).

Conclusion

The adoption of a series of poverty alleviation programmes by the Nigerian government with the motive of eradicating or at least reducing poverty has been met with little or no success. The failure of these poverty alleviation programmes to address the poverty problem in the country has been attributed to poor macroeconomic management, political instability, weak administration, and bad governance. Similarly, unabated and institutionalised corruption that cut across all tiers of planning, execution, and implementation of the various programmes, as well as mission drift in which non-poor get the benefit and overlapping functions that result in unhealthy rivalry among executing agencies, hinder the ability of these poverty alleviation strategies to create significant sustainable positive effects. Other problems associated with poverty reduction programmes in Nigeria include the absence of well-defined policy framework and guidelines, a lack of continuity in addition to political interference. Equally, these poverty reduction programmes failed largely because they were built on faulty philosophy. It is pertinent to note that different poverty alleviation measures have been tried in Nigeria, but the government paid little attention to their comparative outcome and implications.

In sum, government failure appears to be the main driver behind the inability to reduce poverty, and the theories of poverty only provide a backdrop for understanding poverty. More government accountability, public consciousness or awareness, and greater government transparency are needed to overcome poverty. The government expenditure in Nigeria is substantial with an aggregate expenditure of USD28 billion and GDP per capita exceeding USD5900, yet poverty is on the increase in the country. A fresh approach to poverty reduction is needed that should concentrate on government reforms that will result in desired government investments which will revamp the private sector which in turn generates employment opportunities and greater and fairer access by people to government services.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the government should be more accountable by operating transparent systems while reducing bureaucratic obstacles and having the political will in formulating poverty-reducing programmes. Additionally, poverty alleviation programmes' objectives should be clearly defined. The chain of poverty-reducing programmes should be streamlined by merging programmes that are compatible with one another to cut down overlapping functions, unhealthy and highly detrimental rivalry, and a waste of resources. Equally, there should be a mass awareness campaign on poverty alleviation programme to be implemented in a given community so that the targeted beneficiaries could be made to believe in it and appreciate its worth. Similarly, control measures in the form of effective programme monitoring and evaluation should be put in place to ensure that allocated funds are prudently utilised and avoid their diversion and other corrupt practices to achieve the targeted objective.

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