

## POLITICS OF POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMS IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

Umar Farouk Musa<sup>1</sup>

School of international studies,  
College of law, government and international studies,  
Universiti Utara Malaysia.  
E-mail: faroukmusa2013@gmail.com

Mohamad Ainuddin Iskandar Lee Bin Abdullah<sup>2</sup>

School of international studies,  
College of law, government and international studies,  
Universiti Utara Malaysia.

Ratnaria Wahid<sup>3</sup>

School of international studies,  
College of law, government and international studies,  
Universiti Utara Malaysia.

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### ABSTRACT

Poverty is a social evil that affects the economic growth and development of different countries. This paper uses literature and power theory to examine the politics of poverty alleviation before, during and after the implementation of the structural adjustment program in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Findings from the study reveals that over fifteen poverty alleviation programs were implemented like National Poverty Eradication Program but poverty remains at an alarming rate in the country. However, many reasons were attributed to the perpetual economic, social, psychological and political denial in the country. The high rate of absolute and relative poverty is as a result of political instability, inadequate policy continuity, especially during the military era. Similarly, corruption, mismanagement of resources allocated for these programs, the social evils in the aspects of violence, terrorism, insurgencies, communal and inter-religious conflicts crippled the poverty reduction strategies. Economically, other factors include a fall in the prices of petroleum products which is the country's main sources of revenue, the budget deficits to finance the poverty reduction. Consequently, the inadequate harmonization and collaborations between the all tiers of governments, private sector, civil society organisations had again contributed to the failures of economic intervention measures. The paper recommended for, Agricultural policies and agribusiness initiatives, provision of social amenities, revival of War Against corruption, institutionalization of vocational education and training centers and entrepreneurship innovation to serve as a noble solution heartrending paucity diminution in Nigeria.

Key words: Politics, Poverty Alleviation programs, Structural Adjustment, Nigeria.

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### 1.0 Introduction

Poverty is a global problem that affects socio-economic and political aspects of lives of about 2 billion people across the globe. Poverty is most peculiar in developing countries of Latin America, Asia, Africa and Nigeria specifically (Oshewolo, 2010). Studies revealed that Nigeria is the richest and most populated country in Sub-Saharan Africa with an estimated 170 million people, but the alarming magnitude of Poverty in the country has reached a worrisome dimension as ignorance, unemployment, malnutrition, malady and inadequate access to credit scheme are apparent among the citizens (Bakare & Edozie, 2015). Since the attainment of political independence, the government has implemented poverty alleviation programs and policies such as Operation Feed the Nation, Green Revolution, National Directorate of Employment, National poverty Reduction programs among others. Nevertheless, previous studies revealed that the programs yielded little impact, as the basic indicators of basic health, qualitative education, assistance programs, standard of living and the right to social security revealed that 46 percent of Nigerians are living below the national poverty line of \$2.5 per day and nearly 70 percent of the rural population are living in abject poverty.

Many factors were identified in the literature as responsible for the failures of the poverty reduction programs in the country, these include inadequate political will to provide holistic approach to the policy on poverty reduction, inconsistency in the macroeconomic policies, political instability, especially during the military era, corruption, inadequate effective coordination and harmonization among the three tiers of government, politicization of poverty alleviation programs and lack of targeted settings at the ministries, agencies responsible for the implementation of the programs and exclusion of the targeted poor during agenda setting (Jacob & Onwughalu, 2015). All efforts to tackle poverty through various strategies yielded insignificant results. All indicators attested that in spite of the huge resources invested in combating the phenomenon were unsuccessful. Recent report indicated that 110 million Nigerians are poor despite the copious policies and programs executed (Nwabughio, 2015). Based on this background, this study is motivated to proffer useful strategies to reduce poverty in the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

The paper is structured into introduction, overview and synopsis of poverty reduction programs, categorization of poverty, conceptual clarification on politics and poverty. The Power theory, predicaments to poverty alleviation, recommendation and prospects for poverty reduction in the country.

### **1.1 Overview Of Poverty Alleviation Programs In Nigeria.**

Nigerian government had implemented different poverty alleviation programs since independence for accelerated socioeconomic development in the facet of capacity building employment generation to the less privileged and tertiary institution graduates and ensuring skills acquisition, generation of income to boost agricultural output or moderate the severe effects of poverty in the rural, urban areas in the Country (Aminu & Onimisi, 2014).

Poverty alleviation programs are categorised into two periods; Structural Adjustment Program: pre-SAP and post SAP era: The Pre-SAP era, include Operation Feed the Nation (OFN); Free, and compulsory primary education (FCPE); Green revolution, Federal Low-cost Housing Scheme, National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA); River Basin Development Authorities (RBDA); Rural electrification scheme (RES); Agricultural Development Program, Rural Banking Program (RBP); Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme and Strategic Grains Reserve Program (Hussaini, 2014a).

The serious economic crisis experienced in Nigeria in the 1980s has affected the quality of life of most citizens (Sulaiman, Migiroy, & Aluko, 2014). In this regard, determined efforts were adopted by the government through (SAP) cushion these effects. Consequently, the implementation of structural adjustment program has worsened the economic condition of Nigerians, particularly the poor who are most vulnerable, as per capita income, budget deficit, increased in retrenchment of workers, inflation, poor educational system, industrial strike action, and above all the nation's economy became sorrowful (Boboye & Ojo, 2012). Other consequences include many Nigerians especially the poor could not afford the basic necessities of life, high level of unemployment due to withdrawal of subsidies, demonstration, inept political leadership, corruption and strong opposition by interest groups was also experienced (Nwagbara, 2011).

The post-SAP; poverty alleviation programs were put in place to cushion the outcomes for instance, National Directorate of Employment (NDE); People's Bank of Nigeria (PBN); Community Banks program (CBN); Better Life Program (BLP); National Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI); Family Support Program (FSP), and Family Economic Advancement Program (FEAP) were implemented. However, most of these programs failed to meet up with their objectives, due to political and policy instability, poor mechanisms of sustainability, lack of transparency and accountability, inadequate coordination, inefficient budgetary management and failure of policy mechanism targets (Arogundade, Adebisi, & Ogunro, 2011; Hussaini, 2014a). On the return to democracy in the year 1999, the government realises that about 70 percent of the population are living in abject poverty, this led to the launching of the Poverty Alleviation program (PAP). The program provided jobs to 200,000 people. Despite these efforts poverty remained higher in the country (Ogwumike, 2002). The vanity of this program, led to the establishment National Poverty Eradication Program (NAPEP), with the aim of coordinating all poverty alleviation programs from the national level to all the local governments in Nigeria. NAPEP has been structured into four schemes and these include: I. Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES); II. Social Welfare Service Scheme (SOWESS); III. Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS) and IV. Natural Resources Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS). On the whole, these programs were designed to achieve the government's motive to eradicate absolute poverty, a sum of six billion Naira was approved in the year 2001. The major difference between NAPEP and previous poverty reduction projects was that it coordinates the activities of other relevant ministries, parastatals and agencies nationwide. Even though, NAPEP appears to be capacious program but poverty level remained unchanged.

Subsequently, the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS); were launched, with four major stages and these are: Transforming government institutions to fight corruption, ensure transparency, promoting the rule of law and enforcement of contracts. Promoting private sector as an engine for wealth creation and employment generation. NEEDS also gives emphasis to social welfare on health, employment, education, poverty reduction, security, youth empowerment, participation and strategic value orientation. The program was established with a national outlook in the 36 states and 774 local governments. The State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (SEEDS), and the Local Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (LEEDS) respectively. The implementation of the policy calls for collaboration and coordination among Federal and States governments, private sector, donor agencies, civil society organizations, Non-governmental organizations NGOs and host of other stakeholders. It is often described as the Nigerian version of the MDGs. However, poor implementation crippled the activities of (NEEDS) the implementation strategy was described as a medium term (Ojo, 2014).

Alternatively, the seven Points Agenda, was launched in order to address challenges related to food security, wealth creation, provision of energy and power, transportation, security in the Niger Delta, land reforms and education. However, despite the huge resources committed to the implementation of the program, it was politicized by the power holders and failed to achieve the desired goal. The policy was characterised by inconsistency, poor funding and was unable to address poverty and hardship Nigerians encountered (Aliyu & Chukwudi, 2015). Similarly, the politicization of the policies and programs, corruption, political instability and duplication of the agencies are the major challenges to poverty reduction in Nigeria (Jacob & Onwughalu, 2015). For comparative purposes, poverty reduction programs have also been implemented in Mongolia. Consequently, Mongolia manage to achieve satisfactory level of macroeconomic development and financial prudence via single treasury account. This led to positive changes in income, health, education and human development indicators thus, recorded success due the elaborate political will on Economic Growth, Support and poverty Reduction Strategy. Primarily, the strategy focuses on employment generation, especially the rural household received capacity building in areas of carpentry, electric welding, hairdressing and sewing (Morris & Bruun, 2005). Concurrently, an increased in Budgetary allocation which focuses on effective service delivery of the public sector, result oriented operation to issues concerning the vulnerable and poor. For instance, in 2004 alone the sum

of sixty billion (tugrugs) was invested into the economy. Similarly, debt management, foreign direct investment was also accorded priority, the government obtained one hundred and fifty three million of external loans from international financial institutions and donor states. Fifty nine percent of the total external borrowing was spent on basic facilities such as education, social welfare and health. Stabilization of the exchange rate was also achieved to accelerate sustainable environment for commercial activities. In the same vein the banking sub-sector was concurrently transformed and performance improved between 2004-2005. Priorities were also given to Micro-financial institutions to generate employment and boost small scale enterprises. The Mongolian experience also shows the participation of the non-governmental organization in poverty reduction. NGOs such as World Vision were further piloted to facilitate business opportunities and empower the poor. The Mongolian poverty reduction programs were further supported by strategic ministries of education and finance (Gochoosuren, 2013). Vast aspect of national development was identified and actualized through a participatory approach to state and social development policy. Equally, the USAID initiatives have assisted the country on areas of regional stability, economic growth and development, especially, on transparency, accountability, establishment of twenty small scale business, competitiveness, employment generation and economic diversification. These development has enable the country to recorded remarkable advancement from 86<sup>th</sup> position to 72<sup>nd</sup> among 189 economies in developing countries (Osborne, Cane, Cousins, & Chuluunbaatar, 2015; Plan & Ulaanbaatar, 2003). Capacity building packages Vocational education and training center was inaugurated with over hundred professions. Additionally, a program similar to the Nigerian Green Revolution had significantly influenced agricultural productivity in which modern farm inputs such as thirty portal tracts, thirty irrigation equipments and other farming initiatives had eradicated poverty in Mongolia (Fan, Chen, & John, 2016; Plan & Ulaanbaatar, 2003).

Considering the efforts of Mongolian government in a viable policy implementation on poverty reduction, Nigeria government could emulate some of the approaches, hence both countries received the intervention of international donations, loans and technical partnership on the aspect of national development. Mongolia has agricultural potentials and had succeeded in harnessing mineral resources, therefore these are possible avenues where Nigeria can explore to alleviate poverty.

### **1.3 Methodology**

The study utilized secondary sources of literature from published journals, articles, textbooks, reports, executive summary and internet resources.

### **1.4 Conceptual Clarification Of Politics**

Scholars have defined politics based on the views, for instance, Aristotle, 4<sup>th</sup> century, said that politics is the utilization of the public arena to achieve private interest. Less well (1936), so politics as “who gets what, when and how”. Politics is seen in a complex society, as competition among groups, ideology and material, either for leadership or to influence those in the power corridor (Hague & Harrop, 2013). Therefore, politics is perceived as congruous struggle for power, authority to plan policies and execute decisions. The Nigerian politicians uses their power to create different policies and programs to suit their interest.

### **1.5 Conceptual Clarification Of Poverty**

Poverty has no specific definition, it's seen as either political, social, economic and psychologically in manifestation. Therefore, poverty is the incapability to gain access to the essential needs of life such as foods, cloth, shelter and the inability to meet up with other social and economic responsibilities (Ijaiya, 2015).

The World Bank (1999), define poverty as shortage of food, lack of shelter, being ill, and not being able to go to school, not being able to read, fear for the future, not having a job, not being able to speak correctly, losing a child due to illness brought about by dirty water, lack of representation, powerlessness, not being able to speak correctly and inadequate freedom (Ijaiya, 2015). Similarly, the World Bank (2011), defined poverty as distinct deprivation in the living condition which comprises of multiple dimensions, these include inability to have access to basic needs, low income necessary for human existence. Poverty also entails poor health and sanitation, education, clean water, insufficient physical protection, denial of expression and inadequate ability and opportunity to live a better life (Adebayo & Moshood, 2010). Poverty is also, seen as situation of inadequate infrastructures, nutrition, health, self-esteem, intellectual development and inability to articulate, political and economic, social, environment and low per head income (Aliyu & Chukwudi, 2015).

### **1.6 Categorization Of Poverty**

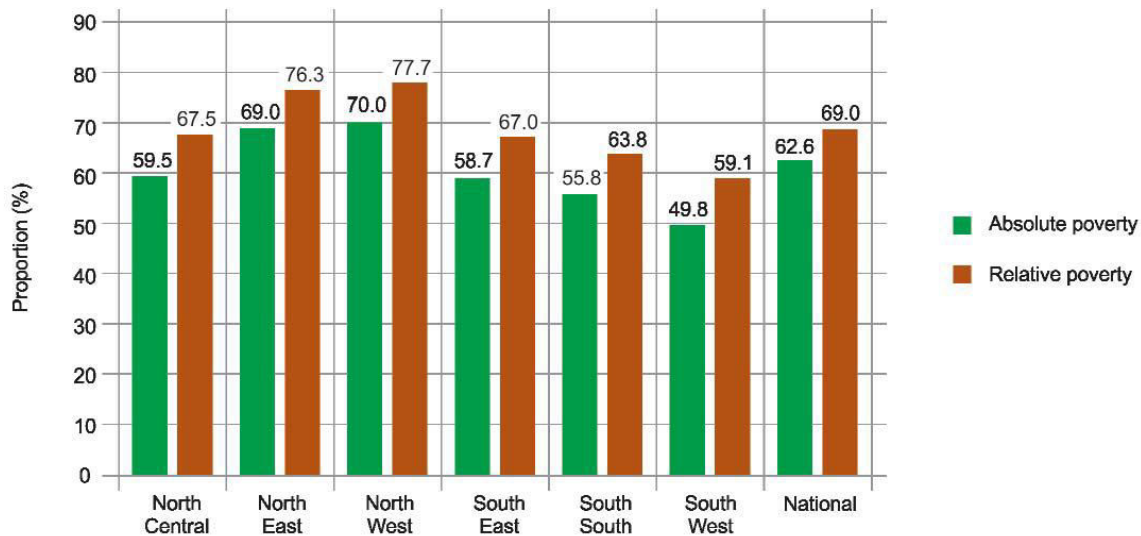
Poverty, according to Lame and Yusoff (2015), can be categorized into five types. The first category is absolute or severe poverty which occurs in a situation where human beings exist in a state of denial or absences of basic needs or insubstantial sources of income to secure food, health, safe drinking water, shelter, sanitation, education and information. Relative poverty entails the position of household or individual comparably to the standard of living in a particular country. This can be measured by three dimensions, namely the income, disposable income and low income of family. Thirdly, structural/chronic poverty, which means poverty might be constantly on long time. The causes of chronic poverty are permanent and occurring for a long period of time due perpetual factors such as inadequate skills for gainful job, poor productive resources, vocational weaknesses, widespread cultural and socio-political circumstances. Fourthly, speculative transition, meaning poverty is temporary or provisional for a short period of term and occurs due to man-made or natural calamities such as war, drought or other environmental dilapidation or harsh policies that resulted in loss of jobs and value of income, etc. Lastly, poverty is caused as a result of location, region or geographical areas; hence the affected regions are prone to environmental degradation, insufficient welfare services, low per head income and social denial (Lame & Yusoff, 2015).

Similarly, Akpomuve (2014), classified poverty into five major of denials and these include:

**Political denial:** illiteracy is the main constraint to the eradication of poverty due the fact that it compliments certain situation of domination, exploitation and deficit. People who are politically deprived only occupy lower positions and are confined to pressures, physically and economically and the poor are denied of political voice. **Physical and personal denial:** these forms of deprivations are noticeable in the aspect of health, literacy, nutrition, inadequate self confidence and educational incapability.

**Economic denial:** These comprise of insufficiency of access to properties, assets, income, money and factors of production. One of the most important and concrete manifestation of poverty is inadequate access to essential necessities of human survival. **Social denial:** Encompass the hindrance for full participation in economic, social and political life.

**Cultural denial:** These are deprivations relating to values, attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, orientation and information. The poor are subsequently at the disadvantage of political and economic opportunities (Akpomuvie, 2010). Consequently, poverty has direct effects on the Nigerian economy, especially, the inability of the poor to partake in decision making, being productive, employed, attain school and access qualitative medical services. These factors contributed to child mortality, increased crimes rate, low life expectancy and homelessness (Ucha, 2010). Based on the aforementioned forms of denial, the phenomenon of poverty deserved crucial policies that will tackle the multifaceted consequences on the masses in the country. The figure below illustrated the percentage of Poverty across the six geopolitical zones and overall National absolute and relative poverty rate.



Source: National Bureau of statistics 2013.

The histogram shows that North-Central zone have 59.5 percent of absolute poverty and 67.5 percent of relative poverty. The North-East has 69.0 percent of absolute and 76.3 percent of relative poverty and the North-West have 70.0 percent, 77.7 percent of absolute and relative poverty. The South -East have 58.7 percent and 67.0 percent of absolute and relative poverty, South-South have 55.8 percent and 63.8 percent of absolute and relative poverty, while South-West have 49.8 percent and 59.1 percent of absolute and relative poverty respectively.

Based on this report, the National absolute and relative poverty stand at 62.6 percent and 69.0 percent respectively. This shows that 62.2 percent and 69.0 percent of Nigerians are poor. Relative poverty seems to be higher as compared to absolute poverty and if concerted efforts are made, as recommended by this paper, it would effect positive changes on the poverty indices of Nigeria.

### 1.6 Theoretical Framework.

Scholars have articulated different theoretical prepositions in an attempt to proffer a workable solution to the phenomenon of poverty, these include, Participatory theory, Power, Natural- circumstantial, Underdevelopment theory, individual deficiency and Basic needs theory (Akpomuvie, 2010; Hussaini, 2014a, 2014b).

However, this study adopted the Power theory in order to explore the attitude of the ruling class, specifically in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The theory proposes that the composition of leaders regulates the level of resources and subjected the poor hardship. The dominant ruling class that organizes programs has reasonably mismanaged the public resource and created unnecessary programs without due consultation of the people whom these policies affects. They decided on the allocation of wealth, chance, opportunity, revenue and jobs. This attitude led to the misuse of state resources by the few and the masses or citizens have insignificant access to basic needs. Therefore, people are subjected to poverty on the basis of weak economic, political and social programs imposed on them by the power holders. Therefore, the theory may be used to suggest that the situation of poverty in Nigeria can be attributed to the attitude of the leaders. The country has a lot of resources such as petroleum, agricultural potentials, solid minerals, liquefied natural gas and abundance of human resources. Literature has deduced that most of the poverty alleviation strategies implemented in the country were politicized especially, at the implementation process in the areas of corruption, misplacement of the aims and objectives, unnecessary duplication, declarative



statements without a rigorous political will, a favor to cronies, families, contractors and waste of resources (Jacob & Onwughalu, 2015). Poverty alleviation in Nigeria became a regime political proclamation for instance the military regime that ruled the country from 1985-1993 alone has launched different programs. Similarly, First ladies sphere headed many poverty mitigation packages in order to influenced and achieved political interest (Jacob & Onwughalu, 2015; Sodeinde, Ajaegbu, & Ajaegbu, 2015). These scenarios became an illusion, maneuver and politicization of empowerment schemes.

### 1.7 Challenges Of Poverty Alleviation Programs In Nigeria.

Poverty is persistently one among the greatest economic and social predicaments confronting most developing countries Nigeria inclusive. Worldwide, more than one billion people live in abject poverty and about 70 percent of Nigerians are poor, it is based on this development that the Federal, States, local Governments, and Non-governmental organisations in Nigeria, especially after the Structural Adjustment Program had devised various policies to eradicate poverty, but certain political, social, religious, economic and cultural barriers had crippled these efforts and therefore, poverty remains a serious social evil in the Country. Therefore the menace of poverty in Nigeria is a known fact, these resulted to malnutrition, ignorance, inadequate access to credit services, unemployment, youth gang and low life expectancy (Bakare & Edozie, 2015). These programs had in turn yielded fruitless results due, several reasons:-

**Politics of poverty alleviation:** One of the main reasons for the failure of poverty alleviation programs is the policy instability and frequent launching of new programs. Studies have indicated that policies in Nigeria are either imported or superimposed from international donor agencies, namely, the World Bank, international Monetary Fund which made the execution of the policies mere lip service, adhoc arrangements and colorful celebrations (Dauda, 2016). The paradox is that those saddled with the duty of implementation are non-poor and holders of political power. Therefore, other reasons for the malfunctions of these programs are political instability, inadequate policy continuity, especially during the military era each regime come with different poverty alleviation measures contributed to more failures than success, specifically, to advance popularity among their political gladiators (Aliyu & Chukwudi, 2015). For instance, in 2007, the government launched a program called the Seven Point Agenda purposely to address food security, wealth creation, provision of energy and power, transportation, security, land reforms and education. The country experienced a change of leadership due the demise of the then president. The new government equally launched the Transformation Agenda in the year 2011, which reverses all the implementation strategies of the seven point agenda and did not achieve any remarkable success (Abioro & Adefeso, 2016).

**Corruption, mismanagement of resources** allocated for these programs, wasteful public investment and patiable policy initiatives on poverty reduction and inequality. Corruption has been observed to be a significant factor leading to increased crime rate and unemployment in Nigeria. Social evils in the aspects of violence, terrorism, insurgencies, communal and inter-religious conflicts. Others, reason for unsuccessful poverty alleviation strategies in Nigeria includes the presents of unrest in the Niger Delta and youth uprising. Economic factors also contributed to this problem due to fall in the prices of petroleum products which is the country's main sources of revenue, the country experiences budget deficits to finance the fight against poverty. In addition the high population growth experienced in the country with about 173 million people, inadequate skills and vocational education policies also contributed to failures of these policies (Olotu, Salami, & Akeremale, 2015). These condition are further aggravated by the poor condition of public infrastructure which hampers the implementation of poverty alleviation programs in the country. Moreover, this has also led non diversification of the economy and a neglect of Agriculture which provides employment for over 70 percent of rural dwellers in Nigeria (Sola, 2006).

Further reasons that contributed to the failure of poverty alleviation strategies in Nigeria is the inadequate coordination and collaborations between the government, private sector and civil society organisations. The preceding policies on poverty reduction approaches in Nigeria were weakened due to predominance initiated, designed and implemented by the government as inputs from other non-public sectors are neglected (Oshewolo, 2010). These are the major challenges confronting poverty reduction and implementation strategies in Nigeria.

### 1.8 Recommendation And Prospects For Poverty Alleviation.

Based on the above mentioned barriers to poverty reduction strategies, this study recommended the following mechanisms to mitigate poverty in Nigeria.

**Agricultural policies and agribusiness initiatives:** Nigeria is rich in agricultural potentials, as of 1970, studies indicated that it contributed to more than 30 percent of yearly Gross Domestic Products which accounted for over 70 percent of non-oil exports and supply over 80 percent of the country's food. The National Bureau of statistics 2008, asserted that Agriculture contributed 42 percent of the national's (GDP). The country was once among the leading producer and exports cocoa, groundnut, rubber, cotton, palm kernel, tomatoes, pearl millet, cassava, rubber and sugar cane. Agriculture employs more than 60 percent of the population and vast fertile land are still underutilized. However, the discovery of oil in commercial quantity has led to the desertion of agriculture (Ayinde, Ilori, Babatunde, & Ayinde, 2015; Ibrahim & Onoriode, 2015).

Therefore, proper utilization of this opportunity shall have a positive impact on the lives of the citizens, these include the establishment of farm centers across the 109 senatorial zones in the country in different aspects prominent include poultry, cattle rearing, fish farm, mixed cropping and plantation agriculture. Similarly, agro-allied industries should be established to process the farm produce for internal consumption and export.

**Provision of social amenities:** As poverty has a direct bearing with inadequate basic needs, government at all levels, namely the federal, state and local government should ensure the supply and provision of essential needs like the regular supply of

electricity, road network, availability of housing, establishment and expansion of schools. These would influence the lives of the common man and reduces the hardship encountered by the people especially the rural dwellers.

**Revival of war against corruption:** Literature has indicated that mismanagement, dishonesty, favoritism, poor accountability and public distrust are some of the factors that contributed to the ineffectiveness of most of the previous policies on poverty alleviation. Consequently, this study suggested for the reinforcement of the war against indiscipline and corruption. Prudence would be achieved if public office holders faced the wrath of the law.

**Institutionalization of vocational education and training centers:** Poverty reduction strategies deserves concerted efforts through the designing of capacity building, skills acquisition programs, redesigning of the school curriculum so that priority should be given to learning of some basic vocations such as computer installations, welding and fabrication, carpentry, electric wearing, driving, mechanical work so as to ensure the youth are employed. Therefore, vocational education should be given emphasized in high schools, secondary and tertiary institutions alike.

**Creation of entrepreneurship opportunities:** The country had already established structure for loan schemes. To this effect, soft loans should be made available and accessible to the underprivileged people in all the thirty six states and the seven hundred and seventy-four local governments. The provision of capital would accelerate businesses, since there are ready made market due to the population of the country. Equally, the government should encourage small scale business and industries in order to increase job opportunities.

## 1.9 Conclusion

This study x-ray the challenges of poverty alleviation programs implemented by the previous government in Nigeria. Our findings reveal that enormous resources have been invested to combat poverty but yielded minimal results. Conclusively, it is therefore imperative to devise coherent and workable strategies to mitigate the effects of this phenomenon. We have suggested premeditated approaches which include investment on agricultural and agribusiness programs, provisions of social amenities, revival of war against indiscipline, institutionalization of vocational education and training. Other noble strategies such as the creation of entrepreneurial opportunities respectively. However, this study is limited to the Nigerian context, therefore, the generalization of these strategies shall be within our scope. Future studies should apply a qualitative research design to explore the views of beneficiaries of poverty reduction programs.

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