

AN APPRAISAL OF POVERTY ALLEVIATION AMONG THE RURAL POPULATION IN NIGERIA, 1978 – 2010

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ABSTRACT

Poverty is a virulent challenge to humanity because of its multi-faceted dimensions and impact on people. Among the developing nations especially, it stands defiantly tall, denying people several necessities of human life and development such as access to medical care, food, shelter, clean environment, a decent standard of living and significant contributions to human development. In Nigeria, the devastating impact of poverty is palpable everywhere and most endemic among the rural dwellers, the food producers of the nation. The scourge is a perpetual reminder that the ruling class has failed to execute its social contract with the governed. As a result of the vexing and soaring tide of poverty, successive governments over the years have adopted some measures to reduce poverty among the citizenry. This paper reviews Nigeria's poverty alleviation approaches from the inauguration of "Operation Feed the Nation" (OFN) in 1978 and up to 2010. It examines the causes of the deepening poverty among the rural dwellers in spite of governments' efforts at poverty reduction; it identifies, among other causes, lack of political will and sincerity on the part of government, poor governance, misplaced priorities, and the inability of policy makers to include the beneficiaries in the planning, as some of the reasons for the failure of the programmes. The paper suggested, among others, that there should be a concerted, well-focused, sincere, and transparent approach by all the stakeholders in their efforts to eradicate poverty in Nigeria.

Key Words: Poverty, alleviation, rural dwellers, programmes, urban centers.

INTRODUCTION

Themes like poverty alleviation and rural development are familiar concepts in Nigeria because of the prevalence of poverty among the people generally, with rural dwellers as the most vulnerable. This malady has continued to defy all government anti-poverty efforts over the years. As a result, Nigeria numbers among the poorest nations of the world, as revealed by the UN poverty index in 2010 (Obadan 1).

Most Nigerians generally, but particularly the rural dwellers, are beset by their inability to live a decent life; high infant mortality rate, low life expectancy, little or no access to educational opportunities, lack of employment opportunities, poor and inadequate health care, poor drinking

water, inability to feed well, poor housing, lack of means of self-actualization which have all combined to produce low self-esteem. In order to curb this ill, successive Nigerian leaders, military and civilian, have grappled with this albatross. Governments, national and international organisations, as well as the people themselves have struggled to tame this ugly monster, but to no avail. The incidence seems intractable, with the poor obviously growing poorer with each passing day.

This paper examines the major poverty alleviation programs of government from 1978 to 2010. This is done in two phases: phase one (1978 – 1999), and phase two (1999 – 2010). The paper argues, *inter alia*, that corruption, poor governance, insincerity on the part of government, and lack of political will are the main reasons for the strangle-hold of poverty on Nigerians generally and particularly, the rural dwellers.

CONCEPT OF POVERTY

Since poverty is a universal malady, however the approach to and its appreciation by individuals and countries differ and with different viewpoint. Some consider it as a comprehensive socio-economic virus that constitutes one of the greatest afflictions of humanity (Egbe 2002). Poverty can be considered as, according to the opinion of Ekot (2002), a living condition in which an entity is faced with economic, social, political, cultural, and environmental deprivations laced with vulnerability and powerlessness (Ekot 2002).

Traditionally, poverty was viewed in terms of insufficient income for securing and meeting demands of life, such as food, potable drinking water, clothing and shelter. However, that view has been expanded with an index to measure poverty in an international perspective. The United Nations therefore introduced the Human Development Index (HDI) which gives indication of poverty or prosperity level within a given society or globally. Thus, the HDI is often based on the human development in terms of whether people are able to feed well, sheltered, healthy, work, educated, participate in community life and exercise the freedom to choose what to do in the context of a free society (Wikipedia).

Palmer (2007) posits that poverty can be absolute or relative. According to him, absolute poverty exists when the lives of those concerned fall below what society accepts as minimum standard of living. Most developing countries of the world such as Nigeria, fall within this category, where rural dwellers live below \$1 per day, the prescribed UN minimum needed for mere survival. Relative poverty on the other hand refers to a situation where a person or household's provision of goods is lower than that of the others within the same society. This is however not the best parameter for measuring poverty at the individual level. The human index of people or household in this category may be high but are considered poor in relation to others in that society. In other words, a person may be adjudged as poor in a particular society even when compared to another in a different society whose standard of living could be millions of miles away in terms of provision of the necessities of life.

Some scholars are of the opinion that poverty can be self-inflicted. Those of this persuasion point to a situation in which a country could have high economic growth rates and yet retain a high level of poverty among its citizens. Applying this to the Nigerian situation, Ajakaiye and Olomola (1998) have argued that Nigeria's battered economy was self-inflicted, and that if the country's resources had been well managed since independence, poverty would have been at a very low ebb. The explanation of poverty, according to this reasoning, may be attributable to several factors, but the human factor being a major one.

The problem of poverty in Nigeria is a paradox because Nigeria has a huge resource base for growth, especially in the agricultural sector. Agriculture, not the oil sector, is the mainstay of Nigeria's economy. From a World Bank report, agriculture contributed 45 per cent of GDP between 2003 and 2007. The agricultural sector provides employment for about two-thirds of the country's labour force. Eighty per cent of Nigeria's population live in the rural areas, constituting our grassroots. It not only provides livelihood for the rural population, but makes Nigeria the world's largest producer of cassava, yam, and cowpea, all staple food in sub-Saharan Africa. Yet Nigeria imports grain, livestock and fish on a large scale yearly. The World Bank report says that 90 per cent of Nigeria's food is produced by the grassroots, who depend on rainfall rather than irrigation. This is in spite of the huge efforts made previously to stem the tide of poverty. Given the worsening poverty situation, the attainment of the Millennium Development Goal by 2015 can only be a farce.

TABLE A: Table Showing Nigeria's Progress on the Millennium Development Goals, 2003-2007.

GNI per capita	Total Population	Rural Population	No. of Rural Poor (million approximate).
1,180.0	154,423,182.0	70,528,437.4	

Source: World Bank statistics 2010

From the report shown above, over 70 percent of Nigerians are classified as poor, and 35 percent of them live in absolute poverty. Poverty is severer in the rural areas than the urban areas where, according to the report, up to 80 percent of the population live below the poverty line, no social services, and infrastructure are limited.

With the explanation above, the concept of poverty and poverty alleviation efforts in Nigeria should therefore be a deliberate, well-articulated and focused process by which the socio-economic and political status of the poor, especially the rural dwellers is improved. This can be achieved when there is an equitable distribution of social services, the development of infrastructures, and socio-economic security to enable all citizens perform. To achieve this goal, the rich, the poor, private organizations and more importantly, a deliberate employment of the political will and sincerity by government with its power as, "the authoritative allocation of values" must be fully employed and adequately directed. In this context, poverty alleviation should be seen as well-articulated process which cuts across all strata of society and not merely as the implementation of projects. Governments and concerned organisations have made efforts over the years in curbing this monster. How have the various Nigerian governments fared in this task over the years?

GOVERNMENT EFFORTS AT POVERTY ALLEVIATION

Poverty alleviation efforts in Nigeria has been a long struggle, taking different shapes and focus according to the visions of the leaders at the time. This paper focused at the evaluation of such efforts from 1978 to 2010. The time-frame is a recognition of the first attempt by government in appreciating the scourge of poverty among Nigerians. As stated earlier, our discussion shall be done in two phases: 1978 to 1998; and 1999 to 2010.

(a) Phase One of Poverty Alleviation Efforts (1978 – 1998)

This period witnessed nine different approaches to the problem of poverty. It began in 1978 during the leadership of Olusegun Obasanjo as Military Head of State. In that year 1978,

Obasanjo inaugurated what he termed Operation Feed the Nation (OFN). The focus of the programme was to increase food production in order to make it cheap and affordable to all Nigerians. At the time, the prices of food was soaring higher and higher beyond the reach of majority of the citizens. This programme, it was hoped, would contribute to national development through the provision of food. However, the whole exercise was a reverie and a noble dream. The government did not seem to have adequately appreciated the magnitude of what it was attempting to do but began by making promises without first weighing the implications. It was governments' response to the situation of the moment.

The philosophy of the programme was that everybody, including students on holidays, could be mobilised to increase food production. For instance, secondary school students who were on vacation were expected to congregate at their various local government areas for the purpose of farming. The logistics for the success of the programme was poor. Land for the programme was not acquired and crops were not made available. In some local government areas at the time like Ogoja, for instance, students were made to cultivate cassava farms during vacations. Small cassava farms cultivated on confiscated primary school gardens by students were not cared for; how to mobilise students, their transportation to such centres, procurement of farm tools, their feeding, considering that some the students were self-supporting who had to use the holiday period to work out their school fees, among other considerations, belied the preparedness of the initiators of Operation Feed the Nation.

In 1979, Nigeria returned to democratic governance under the leadership of Shehu Shagari who also, following in the same tract, began his own programme, The Green Revolution, which also laid emphasis on food production. In fact, every available space was to be made green through planting of crops. Everybody was encouraged to cultivate food. Even civil and public servants were to use any available space to plant crops, thus making every place green with food crops. This lasted from 1979 to 1983 when his government was overthrown in a military coup. In 1983, Muhammad Buhari came to power also through a military coup with a mantra, War Against Indiscipline (WAI). He shifted focus from food production to fighting indiscipline and corruption which he believed were the cause of trouble to Nigeria. This period between 1983 and 1985 when Buhari as Head of State, represented a halt in the quest to direct the country toward increase in food production and to increase the lot of the poor in Nigeria. His government was overthrown in 1985 by Babangida who became the military President of Nigeria. He initiated robust poverty alleviation programmes throughout his tenure till his exit in 1993. His tenure witnessed a determined reinvigoration in government's effort at poverty alleviation.

Ibrahim Babangida is known to be one Head of State that introduced a welter of poverty alleviation programmes. These include the Peoples Bank, which sought to provide loans to prospective entrepreneurs on soft terms and without stringent requirements of collaterals. It also regulated, to an extent, the activities of Community Banks that also sprouted as adjuncts of the Peoples Bank and as sources of cheap funds for communities and their members. (<https://www.PovertyAlleviationinNigeria-APerspective>)

One of the well thought out programmes of Babangida was the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DIFFRI). This program sought to make the rural areas, the basic food producing unit, accessible through road constructions. This is based on the understanding that the rural population constitutes the poorest compared to the urban population. With a strong infrastructural base through rural road constructions, the rural areas would be open up and empowered for growth. Such effort would have the multiplier effect of creating self-employment among the rural population where poverty is more endemic. The incidence of poverty in the rural areas serves as push for rural-urban migrants, whose perception is to make money in the urban

centers and improve their lots. Thus, their migration to urban centers is based on the notion that people in the urban centers are well off than rural dwellers, a response to, as Todaro perceived, “differences to expected rather than actual earnings” (9). To stem this tide, DFFRI sought to construct roads in rural areas, provide rural infrastructure like electricity to help to create jobs for the rural dwellers. Road construction would make transportation of goods and services easier for rural areas and thereby increase their profit and thereby reduce poverty among them.

Another scheme at poverty reduction was the formation of the Nigerian Agricultural Land Development Authority. This body was to assist farmers embark on large-scale commercial farming. The authority was to assist farmers with “inputs and developing land for them to the point of planting at subsidized rates”. The vision was to bring to an end subsistence farming, or at best, a reduction of subsistence agriculture in Nigeria.

The National Directorate of Employment was also created by Babangida. This program was designed to articulate policies to fight against poverty. The fall in the prices of petroleum products in the 1980s led to the deregulation of the economy and had so impacted on the economy. “The situation led to low capacity utilization in the nation’s industry and the outright closure of some, subsequent lay-offs due to closure and rationalisation informed on the need to introduce a system that would accommodate such people, so that the already bloated job market, will suffer more congestion” ([https://www.Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria- A Perspective](https://www.PovertyAlleviationinNigeria-APerspective))

Huge sum of money was used for vocational training, entrepreneurial training, rural employment training as a way of sustaining the programme. The scheme also had a special offer for women. Many youths were trained and employed across Nigeria. “While the directorate asserts that it disbursed N536, 901, 313.11 since inception, for its various programs, only 24.4% of this total or N129, 048, 757.63 was recovered from beneficiaries”. This program which enjoyed a longer life-span than most programs had lack of supervision and follow-up of the beneficiaries and a major weakness. ([https://www.Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria- A Perspective](https://www.PovertyAlleviationinNigeria-APerspective)). In spite of these innovative programmes, huge investment of money and resources, poverty persisted in Nigeria.

Between 1993 and 1998, Abacha came up with his own programme which lasted for two years, disbursed N7 million, N 3.3 million. This went as loan to assist poultry production, garri processing, soap making and animal husbandry (Dawodu). Within this period of the first phase, spouses of Heads of State ran their own programmes with state funds. Mariam Babangida flaunted her program tagged Better Life for Rural Women, while Mariam Sani Abacha came up with the Family Support Programme. This was the period of global crusade for gender equality. Gender issues were introduced into anti-poverty programmes in Nigeria.

All these anti-poverty alleviation programmes between 1978 and 1998 failed. Several reasons accounted for their epileptic performances and eventual collapse. Among the reasons, they lacked continuity. Each regime came up with a new nomenclature even if it was the same programme; lack of political and economic stability; there were no clearly defined modus operandi for their success, some of them were mere duplication of programmes some of which overlapped with existing ones. Examples can be seen in the activities of DFFRI and Better Life Programmes. These programmes looked largely like hand-outs from government to people without adequate sensitisation of the populace to embrace them. On the whole, they were more like adhoc. The success we may attribute to these efforts was that they identified poverty and introduced means of curbing poverty, no matter how small, otherwise beyond that, the first phase of government poverty reduction programmes ended as dismal failure.

(b) Phase Two: 1999- 2010.

In spite of all the poverty alleviations programmes embarked upon by the previous governments, poverty remained endemic with no sign of reduction. The UN Human Index which was realised in 1999 gave a shocking revelation which reemphasised the failure of the previous programmes. It showed that Nigeria was the 25th poorest nations of the world with 41.6% ([https://www Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria- A Perspective](https://www.PovertyAlleviationinNigeria-APerspective)). These revelations came just when Nigeria began a new democratic experiment in May 1999 after several years of military rule. This begins the second phase of government's second phase of the anti-poverty programmes.

Obasanjo, on assumption of office as a civilian President, embarked on ambitious programs to eradicate poverty in Nigeria. The first step was the setting up a body to coordinate all forms of poverty eradication programs from local governments, states, federal government and non-governmental organisations (NGO). This body was the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP). Several schemes with the intention of eradicating poverty were floated. There was the Youth Empowerment Scheme (RIDS), Social Welfare Services Scheme (SOWESS) and Natural Resource Development and Conversation Scheme (NRDCS). These schemes were intended to tackle poverty by giving individuals and groups the basic requirements in the area of food, clothing, health, transport, education and recreation.

Inaugurated in 2001, NPEP as a coordinating body which ensured "that the core poverty, eradication ministries were effective" ([https://www Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria- A Perspective](https://www.PovertyAlleviationinNigeria-APerspective)) and given the power to intervene and provide a complimentary assistance to ministries and parastatals which were directly involved. It ensured that there were no duplication of programmes as it was the case with most of the programmes during the first phase as shown earlier. Obadan's projection showed that NAPEP, complimented by the National Poverty Eradication Council (NAPEC) was empowered to:

Coordinate the poverty-reduction related activities of all relevant Ministries, Parastatals and Agencies. It has mandate to ensure that the wide range of activities are centrally-planned, coordinated and complement one another so that the objectives of policy continuity and sustainability are achieved (9)

To ensure better coordination for efficient result, the Joda panel and the Abdullah Committee were formed. Their reports identified fourteen areas of poverty to be tackled. The areas as identified by these bodies were:

1. Agricultural and Rural Development
2. Education
3. Water Resources
4. Industry
5. Power and Steel
6. Employment, Labour and Productivity
7. Women Affairs and Youth Development
8. Health
9. Works and Housing
10. Environment
11. Solid Minerals Development
12. Science and Technology
13. Finance
14. National Planning Commission.

Having seen the cause of failure of previous poverty alleviation programmes, a more formidable approach needed to be adopted. In addition to the identified areas itemised above, thirty-seven

poverty alleviation institutions, agencies and programmes were equally earmarked and included in the scheme. NAPEP, as we noted earlier, coordinated all of them. All of these agencies were summarised into four groups.

The first was the Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES). This scheme was directed at empowering youths in skills acquisition, develop them in technology and enterprise promotion by attaching them to vocations in order to increase their productive capacity.

The second was the Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS). The rural areas have been identified as places where poverty is more endemic. As a consequence of poverty, many youths still migrated from rural to urban areas, unskilled, caused congestion, and increased the number of the unemployed. This scheme was intended to address the imbalance in infrastructural development between the urban and rural areas and therefore keep the teeming youths in the rural areas. The provision of good water, irrigation water, rural energy and power were targeted at making the rural areas attractive to the rural dwellers.

The Social Welfare Service Scheme (SOWESS) was the third. It was to provide education, primary health care services, establish and maintain recreational centers, micro and macro credit facilities, mass transit, and telecommunication, among others. These are amenities which are considered as pull for rural dwellers to urban centres.

The fourth was the Natural Resource Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS). The focus of this scheme was to harness the natural resources of the country in agriculture, water, solid mineral resources, and conserve land and space to enable small scale operators and communities for effective and productive utilisation. From our study so far, between 2001 and 2009, the fulcrum of poverty alleviation in Nigeria was infrastructure, provision of social welfare services and natural resource development.

ANALYSIS AND PERFORMANCE

An analysis of these programs reveals that basically, Nigeria is a poverty stricken economy. Between 1986 and 1996 during the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP), 1980 – 1996, the growth rate of real Gross Domestic Products (GDP) has been discouraging. Inflation rate aggravated poverty, thereby making meaningless the poverty alleviation programmes of the time. In 1986, inflation rate was 5.4 percent, and by 1995, it soared to 72.8 percent. Under capacity utilization has characterized the manufacturing sector since the adoption of SAP. The highest capacity utilization of 42.4 percent recorded in 1989, was even still lower than 45 percent before the adjustment programs. This is due to the devaluation of the Naira because of deregulation of the foreign exchange during the period. This raised the cost of production in the manufacturing sector, hence its low contribution to the GDP.

TABLE 1: Selected economic indicator of Nigeria's Economy

Year	Manufacturing capacity utilization	Real GDP growth rate	Unemployment rate	INFLATION RATE
1986	38.9	3.2	5.3	4.5
1987	40.4	0.6	7.0	10.2
1988	41.5	10.0	5.3	38.3
1989	42.4	7.3	4.5	40.9
1990	39.0	8.3	3.2	7.4
1991	39.4	4.7	3.1	13.0
1992	41.8	3.0	3.4	44.6
1993	37.2	2.7	2.7	56.2
1994	30.4	1.0	2.0	57.0
1995	29.3	2.2	1.8	72.8
1996	32.5	3.2	NA	28.0

Source: Central Bank of Nigeria, Annual Report and Statement of Account, 1986 – 1995, where NA: not available

The analysis shows that government's huge investment on human capacity development has not achieved the desired objective of poverty alleviation. For instance, the number of primary schools were 36,677, secondary schools 6,452, and tertiary institutions 138, with enrolment figures of 17.99 million, 5.88 million and 0.39 million respectively (CBN 1995). Notwithstanding, educational service delivery experienced a gradual decline in quality and efficiency.

The health sector shows that same trend; infant mortality, and short life expectancy. According to the Federal Office of Statistics (1995), the number of people having water closet system fell from 18.0 percent in 1980.90 to 16.6 percent.

A recent official report by the National Bureau of Statistics of the living standard of Nigeria is both demining and alarming. According to the report, UN Human Development Index when compared with Nigeria's neighbours like Ghana, Togo and Benin Republic is quite low (NBS 2010). NBS found that almost 100 million Nigerians were living in absolute poverty of less than \$1 a day in 2010.

Comparing the table above with the impressive GDP growth rate of 7.75 percent, Nigeria is like the proverbial whitewashed tomb, which is full of dead bones. It is a picture of extreme poverty in a flourishing economy, an irony suggesting that the poverty of Nigerians may have partly been induced or, as has been suggested elsewhere, self-inflicted through mismanagement.

In their study of Nigerian Economic Performance, 1980 – 1992, titled "Poverty in a Wealthy Economy: The case of Nigeria", Sudhashan and Thomas Saji proposed the promotion of a broad-based growth and targeted intervention in health education and infrastructure as panacea for poverty eradication (2001). Reviewing the NBS' 2010 report, *The Nigerian Guardian* in its editorial column of February 2012, observed that:

Curiously, as poverty and unemployment are increasing and the manufacturing sector is in doldrums, Nigeria continues to record impressive GDP growth rate of 7.75 percent. With population growing by a mere three percent per year, such a growth rate would ordinarily indicate that things are getting better for Nigerians. With no visible improvement on the ground, we agree with NBS that there must be a disconnect somewhere between these touted growth rate and the endemic poverty all around. (18).

It is obvious that in spite of all the touted poverty alleviation programs, Nigerians are still poor. If these growth rate figures are correct, why are they not accompanied by social transformation?

EXPLAINING THE FAILURE

One major reason for the failure of poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria lies at the foot of corruption and kleptocracy which have bedevilled the country. "It is now public knowledge", *The Guardian* observes, "that the money from sale of crude oil is being used as platform for corruption by rent-collecting elite. The widespread corruption that is visible in almost all aspects of Nigerian life is eating up the life of this nation." James Wolfensohn has identified corruption as the root cause of poverty, and predicted that "corruption would worsen the lot of poor Nigerians". Many individual public office holders are richer than the country. Almost all poverty alleviation programs introduced by the various governments ended up enriching a few. As many of the operators of poverty alleviation programmes corruptly enriched themselves, Nigerians became poorer while the privileged few got richer. As Ray Ekpu rightly observed, "Nigeria is a poor country with many rich people". The inordinate quest for wealth by some of Nigerian political leaders has been a major reason for the failure of the poverty alleviation programmes in the country.

Poor leadership and bad governance have been identified as some of the factors which have hampered grassroots development in Nigeria (Egbe 2001). Lack of transparency, accountability, good morals, and ethical conduct are wanting among many of Nigeria's leaders. The result is that some of the resources meant for the implementation of some of the programmes are either misplaced, diverted or even misappropriated, with gross impunity. There is no stringent monitoring regulatory system to check mismanagement of funds.

Poor prioritization have crippled good programmes. Most times some of the laudable but ambitious programmes are mere exercises in futility with no iota of intention by the protagonists to implement them. Some programs like Better Life for Rural Women or the Family Support Programs were rather elitist. Women were recruited into the elite club while the real women who should have been empowered were largely left out. Agriculture as the mainstay of the economy and the highest employer of labour was not properly nurtured because of revenue from the oil sector. Instead, the oil sector is given attention because revenue from it is quick without much investment of personal energy, unlike in agriculture where time and close supervision are required, and the returns are gradual.

Some programmes failed because of lack of political will and insincerity of leaders. In spite of huge sums of money targeted for poverty alleviation programmes in rural areas, only a negligible number benefited from it. For instance, between 1986 and 1990, DFFRI claimed to have spent 1.8 billion naira in project execution (United Bank of for Africa, 1987), yet very few communities benefitted from it (Egbe 2001). In 2001, NAPEP, had an initial take off grant of N6 billion. It has enjoyed yearly budgetary allocation since then, which will run into many billions of naira. It has trained casual and menial workers some of whom graduated with take-off grant of fifty thousand naira. What happened to these beneficiaries whom this money is spent on? How long can the government sustain this?

Statistics have shown that between 2004 and 2009 the contribution of the energy sector (oil) to Nigeria's GDP was 15% and but the sector employed only a fraction of the population; Agriculture, on the other hand, contributed 45% to GDP and employed 90% of the rural population (Wikipedia, 2011). Rural infrastructure in Nigeria has been in a state of neglect. Lack of rural roads impedes the movement of the marketing of agricultural commodities.

The notion of taking poverty alleviation programmes to the rural dwellers as a hand-out is misleading. Sometimes it is at the core of the failure of some of them because those at the grassroots never identify with such programs because some of them could not serve their needs. The farmers know their need more than a novice. If it an expert advice, then it should be done in such a manner that the beneficiaries can follow and benefit from and therefore be willing to accept the new ideas.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From our assessment in this study, it is clear that poverty alleviation programmes have not only failed to challenge poverty, the incidence of poverty has both spread and deepened. It remains a paradox that sometimes Nigeria has recorded growth in per capita income while the masses continue to live in abject poverty. Obadan has rightly observed that:

In spite of the expressed concerns of past governments and the plethora of programmes and policies that have a bearing on poverty, the incidence and scourge of poverty have worsened over the years (11).

Several factors which inhibited the success of the programmes are diverse, some have been highlighted already. There have been several studies by individuals on the causes of poverty. This paper did not bother to repeat them. The over politicisation of poverty eradication

programmes should be avoided. Rather, there should be a strong and purposeful commitment to poverty eradication.

Government should draw out an economic policy with the purpose of driving all sectors of the economy towards poverty eradication. Stake holders at all levels should be properly coordinated toward achieving a common goal. In this way duplication or overlapping of programs would be avoided.

Poverty eradication should be broad based. It should be able to address the issues of income inequality among the various sectors of the economy. A farmer should have dignity in his work just like the political office holder and workers in the oil industry do. This will naturally create a sense of job satisfaction and fulfilment. Good planning of the demography of the country where people are encouraged to control the rate of child bearing is essential if poverty is to be eradicated. This is because the poor tend to procreate more than the rich, thereby compounding the incidence of poverty.

Transparency, and more importantly, good governance is not negotiable. One of the reasons for the failure of most of the programmes has been a result of corruption. Poverty alleviation programmes have sometimes been used as conduit pipes for siphoning money from public to private use. As a consequence and because of the insincerity of leaders, the recipients come to look at the programmes as their part of the public funds. More often than not, some of the monies for the programmes do not get to those who truly need them and can gainfully utilize the resources. Poverty alleviation should be engrafted into government development plan which should be a continuum. We have witnessed that programmes kept changing according to the whims of each leader. This should not be.

This paper has examined poverty and poverty alleviation programs of Nigeria between 1978 and 2010 by looking at all the poverty alleviation programs within this period. It has identified the rural areas, where majority of the poor reside, as having higher incidence of poverty. It follows therefore that the fight against poverty must be rooted in the rural areas and be given the adequate attention it deserves.

It acknowledges that several efforts have been made, some well-intended but generally have been unable to alleviate poverty in Nigeria most especially in the rural areas. The failure is due to all factors mentioned in the paper. As a way out, the paper suggests that there should be a concerted, well-focused, sincere, and transparent approach by all the stakeholders in their efforts to free the rural dwellers from this vexing malady. The war against poverty among the grassroots in Nigeria can be won. Government should curb the insurgence of ethnic and religious conflicts which have their roots in poverty and illiteracy which are as a result of the failure of governance.

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