

The State and Empowerment Policies in Nigeria

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Abstract

Since independence in 1960, successive governments in Nigeria have come up with various poverty alleviation strategies aimed at empowering Nigerians in rural and urban areas. Several of these programmes notwithstanding, poverty in Nigeria remains an issue of great concern as over 75 per cent of the citizens live below poverty line. This paper seeks to examine the constructions of empowerment in Nigeria's poverty alleviation programmes with particular focus on the Obasanjo regime's Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP).

Methodologically, the paper utilizes predominantly secondary sources of data given its nature. And our findings reveal that poverty subsists in Nigeria despite all counter measures because the programmes and empowerment strategies so far adopted have remained remedial, and have fundamentally failed to address basic issues like enhancing the productive base of the society and youth empowerment.

Thus, the paper concludes that poverty alleviation programmes can only make meaning when they seek a radical transformation of the society through qualitative and mass education both in rural and urban centres among other things.

Keywords: *State, Poverty Alleviation, Economic Empowerment, Political Corruption*

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Conceptual Issues

There is no externally fixed poverty standard applicable to all social circumstances: This means that one can hardly find an unambiguous and a universally acceptable definition of poverty. Because the phenomenon is situational, one can only meaningfully explain it in the context of the historical setting and prevailing circumstances of a particular society. And because poverty is multi-dimensional in meaning, magnitude and scale, we can also understand it from economic and socio-psychological dimensions.

From the economic perspective, poverty can be viewed as a situation of low income and / or low consumption. This approach has often been used for constructing poverty – line; line which represents the values of income or consumption necessary to purchase the minimum standard of nutrition and other necessities of life (Obadan, 1997:2). Going by this definition, people are said to be poor when their measured standard of living, calculated in terms of their incomes or their consumption patterns, fall below the poverty - line. The poverty - line, according to Adams (2004:53) is an imaginary index that is used to separate the poor - those who cannot afford the basic necessities of life from the non-poor - those who can afford the basic needs of life such adequate healthcare, good nutrition, education, etc.

From a socio-psychological perspective, poverty is seen in terms of deprivation, lack of access to property such as land, inadequate medical facilities, poor living conditions, lack of access to educational facilities, and the inability to realize one's potentials and aspirations. Thus, people here are classified as poor if they cannot afford the basic needs of life; are not employed, dwell in poor living conditions, are illiterate, are lacking in adequate healthcare and social amenities that can give them decent living.

Whether seen from the economic or socio-psychological perspective, poverty, according to the World Bank Report (1990), is the inability to attain a minimum standard of living. This means that people whether living in slums around urban areas or in villages at the territorial level are said to be poor if what they earn cannot purchase for them the basic necessities of life as we have already enumerated earlier. For such people who are classified as poor, their incomes, even if adequate for survival, fall radically behind that of the community; they are degraded, for they live outside the grade or categories which the community regards as acceptable.

From the above explications, even though not completely exhaustive, we can decipher that poverty is relative. This means that it depends on the prevailing system of values, resource endowment and state of economic and social organization of

societies (Olaide and Essang, 1975: 153).

From the Nigerian perspective, the concept of empowerment means different things to different people depending on their role position in the society. For the Nigerian state and those acting on its behalf, empowerment is a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people while the disempowered includes the rural poor. This group include small - scale farmers, tenants and the landless (World Bank Report, 1975:3). Empowerment also means extending the benefits of development to the poorest among those who seek a livelihood in the rural areas (Ekanem, 2004: 52).

For our purpose here, empowerment is taken to mean socio-economic or political act by the state or its agencies, private individuals or corporate organizations aimed at transforming the socio-economic well - being of the disempowered. This group includes the rural and urban poor, small - scale farmers, the landless and the unemployed, the economically and politically excluded and even those, though employed, but whose remuneration cannot afford them the basic necessities of life. The group also includes the sick and the maimed who cannot have access to quality healthcare services, the illiterate, who have no access to educational facilities and the destitute who cannot afford decent meals and shelter.

Poverty in Nigeria: Theory and Evidence

Having looked at the various definitions of the key concepts in this work, we shall now turn our attention to a theoretical explanation of the incidence of poverty with particular focus on Nigeria. This theoretical explanation is necessary to give us a better understanding of how the Nigerian state or those who act on its behalf define and understand empowerment, who they consider the empowered and the disempowered, as well as a proper understanding of the various poverty alleviation policies that have been formulated and implemented by successive governments in an attempt to reduce the incidence of poverty and empower the citizens.

Just as the definition of poverty varies from author to author, so do theories on causes and characteristics of poverty. Within the Nigerian context, Akaredolu - Ale (1975) has identified four theoretical postulations to the explanation of the causes of poverty. These theories include; the necessity theory, the individual attributes theory, the natural circumstantial theory and the power theory.

The necessity theory with three variants namely; functionalist, evolutionist and capitalist entrepreneurial variants explain the emergence of poverty from role strat-

ification and associated reward. Poverty in this regard emerges spontaneously with inequality arising from a system of evaluation that rewards some roles higher than the others. Those whose roles are rewarded meagerly automatically form the poor population. This theory draws a nexus between economic inequality and the division of labour within the society as a function of job performed by the individual and attendant reward. The thrust of this theory is that because of the marked inequalities in our society that create a lacuna between the rich and the poor, and given the different jobs that individuals perform in the society and attendant rewards that accrue, categories such as 'the poor' and 'the non-poor' develop. What this theory, however, fails to do is to establish clearly who does the valuation of roles. Is it the society generally or the powerful few (Agbor, 2005: 63)?

The natural circumstantial theory explains the causes of poverty from environmental and geographical constraints. The geographical location of the individual and the natural endowment of his environment are capable of making him poor. In this case, unfavourable geographical location and scanty natural endowment automatically spell poverty. Other explanatory variables enunciated by this theory include old age, unemployment, sex and race (Agbor, 2005: 63).

The power theory of poverty asserts that what determines the extent and distribution of poverty is the structure of political power. In this context, the powerful few who are largely instrumental to public policies organizes and influences the economic system in a manner that places them in advantageous position to amass wealth.

Objectively, poverty in Nigeria can be explained in terms of the structure of political power. Those who rule are in the minority and those who are governed are in the majority. Poverty in Nigeria results from the disproportionate distribution of opportunities, income, and national wealth by the ruling few. In doing this, majority of Nigerians are marginalized. The marginalization pushes the deprived people further into poverty. The worst hits are the majority of the people at the peripheral level. This results from the composition of Nigeria's economy, especially the energy (oil) and agriculture sectors. Oil exports contribute significantly to government revenues and about 15 per cent of GDP, despite employing only a fraction of the population. Agriculture, however, contributes to about 45 per cent of GDP, and employs close to 90 per cent of the rural population (Rural Poverty Portal, 2008). Yet while the oil sector is subsidized by the government, the agricultural sector is not. For instance, the Federal Government in 2012 budgeted N881 billion for fuel subsidy (Budget Office, 2012). This is because investment and employment in the oil sector is restricted to the ruling elite while the mass poor engage in peasant agriculture. This explains

income inequality in Nigeria which worsened from 0.429 in 2004 to 0.447 in 2010 (NBS, 2011). This also explains the differential poverty rate in Nigeria. For instance, using head-count index, Aigbokhan (2000:2) found that an increasing number of Nigerians in the rural areas were living in absolute poverty; 37 per cent in 1985; 49 per cent in 1992 and 51 per cent in 1996. The corresponding figures in the urban areas (among the elite) are; 35 per cent, 41 per cent and 49 per cent respectively over the study period.

The ruling elites do very little in providing the basic needs for the rural people. Even when poverty alleviation policies are adopted, they usually fail at the level of implementation largely as a result of the lack of political will on the part of the political elites in ensuring effective implementation of such programmes. Consequently, the poverty situation in Nigeria has remained unabated. Amid political and economic instability, poverty in Nigeria has grown worse since it was first measured in 1980. In that year, the expenditure poverty rate stood at 27.2 per cent with close to 1.8 million people classified as poor. In 1985, the rate increased to 46 per cent and then declined slightly in subsequent years. The poverty rate surged again to nearly 66 per cent of the population in a 1996 survey, affecting 67 million people. About 30 million of these people were extremely poor and could not meet their basic food needs (Canagarajah, et al, 2000; Narayan & Petesch, 2007: 7).

In 1999, the poverty rate could only change a little from the 1996 rate (Canagarajah, Ngwafon & Okunmadewa, 2000). The little positive change in poverty rate from 1998 to 2001 could be attributed to the increase in public servants' salaries introduced by Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar (Rtd) and Chief Olusegun Obasanjo within the period. But such little changes could not be sustained as there is a return to the status quo following a pulsating inflationary trend that started from the Obasanjo era.

Every sector of the Nigerian society is caught by the web of poverty. The rural sector records the highest level of poverty with 70 per cent rate in 1996, and 76 per cent in 2004 (Agbor, 2005:59). What is common is the sight of people living in squalor, hunger and utter destitution. Urban poverty is growing at a very fast rate from 17.1 per cent in 1980 to 55 per cent in 1996 and 60 per cent in 2004 (UNDP, 2006:35). Public servants cannot effectively take care of their needs with their monthly emoluments. Housing cost has soared to a level where an average civil servant cannot afford a decent accommodation. The urban population is, therefore, not disentangled from this web. Human degradation has become an established feature of the Nigerian people and the prevalence and ubiquity of poverty is competing favourably with the very air that we breathe. These situations as highlighted above aptly justified

the rating of Nigeria by the 2005 Britannica Book of the Year as one of the eighteen poorest countries of the world with male life expectancy of 50.9 years. The rating has not abated since then.

Empowerment Policies in Nigeria: A Focus on Obasanjo Regime's Poverty Alleviation Programme (Pap)

Successive governments in Nigeria since independence in 1960 have come up with various empowerment programmes aimed at alleviating poverty both in rural and urban areas. From the Green Revolution Programme (GRP) of the early 1960s, the Agricultural Development Project (ADP), the River Basin and Rural Development Authorities (RBRDA) of the 1970s, the Directorate for Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Integrated Rural Development (IRD) of the 1980s, Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), Better Life Programme (BLP), and Family Support Programme (FSP) of the military era in the 1990s which targeted urban and rural women, to the Obasanjo regime's National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) of 2000 to 2007; the list is long and in-exhaustive.

The Green Revolution Programme was designed to achieve food sufficiency for local consumption and for export and also to ensure rural development. Given the capital intensive nature of the programme, the rural poor did not benefit from the programme. Rather the protest against the conversion of their ancestor lands by government resulted in the death of many in as witnessed in Sokoto and other States of the Federation (Madunagu, 1984). Thus, analysts have shown that the programme benefitted "mainly the state and a few wee-chosen individuals at the international consultancy level for feasibility and other studies" (Ekamen, 2004: 263).

The Agricultural Development Project (ADP) was initiated by the Federal Government and co-sponsored by the World Bank. It employed an integrated approach to the development of agriculture and rural infrastructure as a way of raising the productivity and standard of living of the rural dwellers. The foundation was laid in 1969 and was built around the assumption that blending of factors such as technology, appropriate physical inputs, extension services, market and basic infrastructural facilities is essential for enhancing productivity and standard of living for the rural dwellers. While it must be acknowledged that the ADP recorded certain practical successes especially in the provision of basic infrastructure in the rural areas (The Guardian, November 11, 1986:10-12), funding constraints on the part of the Federal Government and political instability resulted in the demise of the Programme and by 1980 when when poverty was first measured in Nigeria, the expenditure poverty

rate stood at 27.2 per cent with close to 1.8 million people classified as poor (Obiukwu & Olisa, 1991; Narayan & Petesch, 2008).

The River Basin and Rural Develop Authorities (RBRDA) had its nucleus from the initiatives of some states in instituting River Basin projects as far back as 1963 when the United Nations' Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) was commissioned to investigate the possibilities of establishing a pilot irrigation scheme in Sokoto-ima River Basin. As a poverty reduction strategy, the RBDAs were created to embark on a systematic exploration and exploitation of land and water resources that abound in Nigeria. Beside being closely identified with rural problems, the authorities facilitated the smooth preparation and execution of projects, especially infrastructures that cut across state boundaries. In this regard, the RBDAs were conceived not only as agents to spread the traits of development but also ones capable of fostering rapid development of the rural areas of the country (Cross River Basin News, No. 1, April-June, 1984:2).

Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), Better Life Programme (BLP) and Family Support Programme (FSP) were poverty reduction strategies of the military era. The programmes were the first time that poverty alleviation programmes addressed the issue from gender perspective. Basically, the campaign targeted rural women and sought improve the living conditions of rural women. Through these programmes, rural women were socialized to participate in national affairs. The programmes also helped to diversify skill acquisition by the rural women who were trained to manufacture several items of trade in 'factories' located at their backyards. However, these skill acquisition programmes and training were not accompanied by any investment facility or capital in form of micro-credit facility to enable the women establish small scale enterprises (Duru, 1999; Izugbara & Ukwai, 2002).

These policies and programmes notwithstanding, poverty in Nigeria remained un-abating. Some reasons have been suggested for this policy failure. According to Koinyan (1990) and Ekamen (2004), programmes such as the River Basin Development Authorities, the Directorate for Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), and Integrated Rural Development were not indigenous to the Nigerian society. Their ideological underpinnings and operational methodologies were based on their applications in other countries without considering their practicability in Nigeria. Secondly, the programmes, may be with the exception of the gender-based ones did not seek for socio-economic and income equality nor did they seek to improve the social wellbeing of the people and the productive base of the society. Thirdly, none of those programmes sought to create opportunities for youth empowerment

and productivity.

In any case, we are concerned here with the Obasanjo regime's Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) which lasted between 2000 and 2007 rather than a detailed analysis of previous empowerment programmes. In 1999, Nigeria re-established democratic governance headed by President Olusegun Obasanjo, after fifteen years of military rule. By 2000, poverty level in Nigeria stood at 74.2 per cent with over 37 million Nigerians classified as poor and a Gross National Product (GNP) per capita of less \$750 (United States Dollars). Consequently, Nigeria was rated among the 25 poorest countries in the world (Okpe & Abu, 2009; Oshewolo, 2010; Ekpe, 2011). Thus, the concern of the Nigerian state at this time under Olusegun Obasanjo was to reduce poverty to its barest minimum. Thus, by 2001 President Obasanjo announced a Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) to offer micro-credit to semiskilled and unskilled Nigerians as part of his administration's plan to turn around the prostrate economy. With about ₦10 Billion, it was hoped that PAP would not only increase skills but also create jobs for the unemployed Nigerians thereby stimulating the productivity of rural dwellers (Newswatch, August 10, 2000:10).

In line with this, the Obasanjo administration set up poverty alleviation committees in every state of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, to monitor and supervise the implementation of the poverty alleviation programme. In addition, modalities were immediately set up to implement the PAP. One of such modalities was the issuance of application forms to interested candidates and the disbursement of funds to successful applicants. But as with previous poverty intervention programmes, Obasanjo's PAP fell short of alleviating poverty in Nigeria. Some scholars have argued that PAP rather exacerbated poverty especially among non-Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) henchmen (Adams, 2004:55).

One of the major problems that PAP faced at inception was inadequate funding and also corruption on the part of those saddled with the responsibility of implementing the programme. The ₦10 Billion earmarked for the programme for one year was insufficient to attack, head-long, the incidence of rising poverty. The sum was barely enough to settle the salary of 50,000 Nigerians who were given jobs under PAP apart from the administrative cost of running the programmes in each state and the FCT (Adams, 2004: 58).

The second major problem was that the programme was not under any ministry or minister or even commission. The then Works and Housing Minister, Chief Anthony Anenih was made the national co-coordinator of PAP to oversee its implementation at the state levels. This lack of institutional backing marked the programme for

failure. This is in addition to the fact that most of the jobs created by PAP were not productive ones. Jobs such as filling of potholes on the highways, cleaning of public institutions, maintaining of public parks, and renovation of public buildings could not have improved the productive capabilities of the rural populace, being non-productive jobs.

It was in the light of the above failures of PAP that in just one year after gulping about ₦10 Billion, the programme was scrapped and replaced with the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP). With a budgetary allocation of ₦25.4 Billion, the Federal Government under Obasanjo was set to tackle the problem of poverty by avoiding the pitfalls of PAP (Newswatch, April, 2001: 30). With four separate schemes, namely; Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES); Rural Infrastructural Development Scheme (RIDS); Social Welfare Service Scheme (SWSS); and Natural Resources Development Scheme (NRDS), it was hoped that NAPEP would attack poverty on all fronts. Also, with the allocation of ₦10 Billion to YES, the allocation of ₦5 Billion each to the other three schemes and the setting aside of ₦ 410.7 million for logistics and office facilities at the states and local governments levels across the country and the appointment of LGA Coordinators in all the 774 LGAs across the country, NAPEP would fulfill its objectives of eradicating poverty (Newswatch, April 2001: 30).

This was not to be as poverty has remained unabated in Nigeria since then. By 2010, The Nation News Papers in its November 30 editorial reported that over 75 per cent of Nigerians live below the poverty line. A factual indicator is the result of the Harmonized Nigerian Living Standard Survey published by the National Bureau of Statistics in 2011 that showed that large proportion of Nigerians live in poverty (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1 Relative Poverty Headcount from 1980 – 2010.

Year	Poverty Incidence (%)	Estimated Population (Million)	Population in Poverty (million)
1980	27.2	65	17.1
1985	46.3	75	34.7
1992	42.7	91.5	39.2
1996	65.6	102.3	67.1
2004	54.4	126.3	68.7
2010	69.0	163	112.47

Source: NBS Harmonized Living Standard Survey, 2010.

Table 2: Relative Poverty: Non-Poor, Moderately Poor and Extremely Poor.

Year	Non-Poor	Moderately Poor	Extremely Poor
1980	72.8	21.0	6.2
1985	53.7	34.2	12.1
1992	57.3	28.9	13.9
1996	34.4	36.3	29.3
2004	43.3	32.4	22.0
2010	31.0	30.3	38.7

Source: NBS Harmonized Living Standard Survey, 2010.

Distributing the population into extremely poor, moderately poor and non-poor, the proportion of the extremely poor increased from 6.2 per cent in 1980 to 29.3 per cent in 1996 and then came down to 22.0 per cent in 2004 before reaching 38.7 per cent in 2010. For the moderately poor, the picture was quite different as the proportion rose between 1980 and 1985 from 21.0 per cent to 34.2 per cent. It went down between 1996 and 2004, from 36.3 per cent to 32.4 per cent, and even further in 2010 to 30.3 per cent. On the other hand, the proportion of non-poor was much higher in the country in 1980 (72.8 per cent) compared to 1992 (57.3 per cent). It dropped significantly in 1996 to 34.4 per cent, falling further in 2010 to 31 percent (NBS, 2011).

The consequence of this has been the security challenge threatening the functionality of Nigerian state and its democratic process. For instance, scholars have argued that the Niger Delta militancy, increasing spate of kidnapping in the South-East, armed robbery in the South-West and the Boko Haram insurgency in the Northern state that have been confronting the country are caused by high level of poverty (Awoyemi, 2012; Harrington, 2012). This breeds state of anarchy that threaten the secularity, unity and corporate existence of the Nigerian state upon which its democratic process is anchored.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the foregoing analysis, the incidence of poverty in Nigeria is reasonably explained by the power structure of the country. This phenomenon equally explains the failure of empowerment policies and poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria. For instance, all empowerment policies and poverty alleviation programmes

have fundamentally failed to enhance the productive base of the society by providing productive employment for the people especially the youth. This is deliberate and ideological as doing this will result in the restructuring of class relationship that may torpedo existing regime of rural class nexus that enforces macro level exploitation (Olaniyan, 1997).

Secondly, the power structure relationship also explains why none of the policies has sought to provide qualitative and adequate formal and informal education for majority of the populace, especially rural dwellers. This is because there exists a strong nexus between economic empowerment and education (Obadan, 1997; Agbor, 2004).

Thirdly, political corruption in Nigeria has contributed in the failure of empowerment policies especially at the level of implementation. This is because resources which are supposed to be used to ameliorate the poor living conditions of the people are misdirected, far away from where they are needed. Thus, corrupt practices among state functionaries induce poverty. That corruption induces poverty in the society has long been established (Akeredolu-Ale. 1975; Adams; 2004, Olu-Olu; 2006).

Thus, to make meaning, empowerment policies in Nigeria must seek to do the following, amongst other things;

Seek to radically transform the existing power structure and regime of economic ownership and vested interest by a few that enforce macro level exploitation and engender poverty;

Provide not just employment for the people but productive employment that can enhance the productive capabilities and base of the society, especially at the rural level. It is in the enhancement of society's productive capability and base that the high level of incidence of poverty can be tackled effectively and reduced. This can be achieved through the provision of investment capital for the people rather than the giving of handouts as has been the case;

Empowerment policies must be geared towards the provision of qualitative formal and informal education for the masses of the people, especially those at the rural level. The failure of poverty intervention programmes to address the problem of mass illiteracy is at the root of the rising incidence of poverty in Nigeria. Those who go to school must be made to acquire qualitative vocational skills to enable them be self-employed and productive. This, therefore, calls for the restructuring and reformation of Nigeria's educational sector to meet this objective;

Appropriate institutional measures and machinery must be put in place to en-

sure total eradication of corruption and corrupt practices among public office holders. Also, existing institutions and machinery such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Independent Corrupt Practices (and other related offences) Commission (ICPC), etc; must be strengthened and given more autonomy in the war against corruption. This is because; poverty-free society is realizable if public accountability is imbibed as a principle by public office holders, among other things (Olu-Olu, 2006; Salawu, 2007).

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