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# **Effective Implementation Strategies For Poverty Reduction Programmes In Nigeria**

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## **Abstract**

The paper examines the menacing effects of poverty in Nigeria. It noted that the rate of increase in poverty is so high that it has affected the overall socio-economic growth of the country. This is reflected in the Human Poverty Index (HPI) conducted by the United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) where Nigeria ranks the least among all the OPEC countries. The paper assesses the strategies used in implementing the policies and observed that poverty in Nigeria is on the increase as a result of wrong implementation strategies. The paper highlights the constraints of the strategies and comes up with effective, comprehensive strategies for implementing the policies.

## **Introduction**

Poverty is a global phenomenon, which is now threatening the survival of humanity. It is a condition in which a person is unable to meet minimum basic requirements of food, health, housing, education and clothing (Aliyu, 1998:155). In Nigeria, poverty has been a long-standing issue. Since independence, successive development plans have been concerned with distributive equity and income policies with particular reference to the pricing of land, capital and labour as production inputs and the shares of wages, rent, interest and profit in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

With the country's perennial political and economic crises, the poverty situation is now worse. For instance, recent estimates by the World Bank (1995) indicate that over 45 per cent of the country's population

exists below the poverty line, while about two-thirds of this group are extremely poor. According to UNDP (Human Development Report 1996:31), poverty in Nigeria will rise by two-thirds and almost half the population will be below the poverty line in ten years.

It is as a result of the menacing effects of poverty globally, that the United Nations declared 1996 as the international year for the eradication of poverty. The theme for the Decade is "That eradicating poverty is an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind." The inspiration for the proclamation of the Decade has come from the World Summit on Social Development held in Copenhagen, Denmark in 1995, which committed all countries to the goal of poverty eradication in the world, through decisive national actions and international cooperation.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted in 1948, with its charter followed by other seminal declarations and conventions recognise that poverty is a brutal denial of human rights. In their programmes and actions, they have mapped out strategies for effectively reduced and if possible eradicated poverty. At the academic and intellectual levels, a great deal of attention has been paid to the problem of poverty in Nigeria. In 1975, the Nigerian Economic Society chose 'Poverty in Nigeria' as the theme for its annual conference. Research centres like NISER, Ibadan, Centre for Management Studies, Lagos, Centre for Development Studies, University of Jos have also initiated some empirical studies.

Despite the above efforts, about 50 percent of Nigerians live below poverty line (Aliyu, 1998:56). This then means that appropriate strategies for alleviating poverty have not been put in place. The questions then are: what are the shortcomings of the implementing strategies? Is there need to fashion out alternative implementation strategies, which will make the policy effective? The paper sets out to answer these questions and more. To this end, the paper is divided into eight sections. The first gives a broad introduction to the focus of the paper and its mission. Section two examines the conceptual framework of poverty. Measurement of poverty is what is contained in section three. The fourth section discusses poverty in Nigeria while section five assesses the policies and the existing implementation strategies. Sections six and seven highlight the constraints on the implementation of the policies and strategies and a comprehensive,

effective implementation strategies, respectively. Section eight concludes the work.

### **Conceptual Framework of Poverty**

Poverty is more easily recognised than defined. It is not only a concept that is commonly used by the generality of the people but also one that has no specialised content as a concept. Besides, it is a multi-dimensional socio-economic and cultural situation that transcends economic description and analysis (Human Development Report 1998:10). Poverty is both concrete phenomena and can be easily identified, yet it is also relative. This is because a population that may be classified as poor in a developed economy would be regarded as materially well off in least developed countries. For instance, a poverty line of \$1 per day (1985 PPP\$) (PPP\$ means Purchasing Power Parity (expressed in US\$) is set by the World Bank for international comparison and is generally applied in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), whereas \$2 (PPP\$) and \$4 (PPP\$) are suggested respectively for Latin America on the one hand and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries on the other.

The above discussion shows that perceptions of and about poverty have not only evolved historically but also vary tremendously from culture to culture. The criteria for distinguishing the poor from the non-poor tend to reflect national normative concepts and priorities. Also, as countries become wealthier, their perceptions of acceptable deprivations change. Poverty and deprivation go hand in hand. Poverty manifests itself in deprivation of the lives of the people.

Poverty, being multidimensional, takes different forms or topologies of which three broad ones can be identified. They are physiological deprivation, social deprivation and human freedom deprivation. Below is the table, which illustrates that.

**Table 1: Conceptions of Poverty/Deprivation**

Physiological Deprivation		Social Deprivation		Human Freedom Deprivation	
I/C Approach	BHN Approach	HP Approach	SE Approach		PA Approach
Inadequate Consumption of basic need of goods, primary food.	Inadequate basic fulfillment including nutrition, health, education, etc.	Lack of basic capabilities to live a long, health life with freedom.	Lack of resources required for participation in customary activities.	Denial of rights and freedom.	Lack of dignity, self respect, security, health and justice.

**Key to abbreviations**

I/C = Income/Consumption

BHN = Basic Human Needs

HP = Human Poverty

SE = Social Exclusion

PA = Participatory Approach

**Source:** Paul Schaffer, *Poverty Reduction Strategies* (Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex January, 1998).

The above three concepts derive from the attempt to determine how much poverty exists. Based on some norms, the number of the poor will be the total population whose per capita household expenditure is below the poverty line; the depth of a person's poverty is the average percentage by which his per capita expenditure falls below the poverty line. According to Federal Office of Statistics (FOS) (1997:15), poverty line is based on two-third means per capita household expenditure. The incidence of poverty in Nigeria was 48.5 per cent, with the ration of the population of the extreme poor being two-third of this as at the end of 1997.

**Measurement of Poverty**

Measuring poverty seeks to answer two related questions – how many are poor and how poor are they? The approaches that were used in measuring poverty usually start with the specification of a poverty line – the value of basic (food and non-food) needs considered adequate for meeting minimum levels of decent living in the affected society. Then,

poverty measures include head count ratio or percentage of individuals or household whose income fall below the poverty line. Other measures include the income gap ratio which measures the intensity of poverty.

In his empirical study of poverty in Nigeria in 1987, 1991, Ogwumike examined the utility of a poverty measure that takes into account the basic needs of life, based on the Nigerian scene. Using data from a sample survey of 980 households, he conducted in Borno, Imo and Oyo states and data from Federal Office of Statistics, on prices of selected items, he derived food poverty line based on the weekly requirement of an average household of six members. The food poverty line derived was ₦38 per head, permonth or approximately ₦456 per head per year. Using income per head (based on Ogwumike's survey), the study estimated that 46 million Nigerians were living in poverty as at 1987. The projection was based on estimated population of about 100 million in 1986. The World Bank (1995) in its study, used two-thirds of mean household expenditure as poverty line and was able to assess poverty trend between 1985 and 1992.

In 1997, UNDP in its Human Development Report, came out with a Human Poverty Index (HPI) which measures human poverty. The HPI concentrates on deprivation in the three essential elements of human life – longevity, knowledge and standard of living. According to the index, the first deprivation relates to survival – vulnerability to death at a relatively early age, that is the percentage of people not expected to survive to age 40. The second relates to deprivation in knowledge. This has to do with the percentage of adults who are illiterate and are therefore excluded from the world of reading and communication. The third relates to deprivation in decent living standard in terms of economic variables – the percentage of people without access to safe water, the percentage of people without access to health services and the percentage of children under five who are underweight as a result of malnutrition. Calculation was carried out by the Nigerian Human Development Report (1988:14) and the Nigerian HPI was 41.6 while its HPI ranks in 1997, among 78 developing countries was 54. Below is the table which compares Nigeria's HPI with those of nine Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

**Table 2: Nigeria's HPI With Other OPEC Member Countries**

OPEC Countries	HPI Rank	Human Poverty Index Value (%)	Survival Deprivation People not Expected to Survive to age 40 (%) (P1)	Deprivation in Education and Knowledge in adult Illiteracy (%) (P2)	Deprivation in Economic Provision P3			Overall (P3)
					Population without Access to Safe Water (%) (P31)	Population without Access to Health (%) (P32)	Underweight Children Under age 5 (%) (P33)	
Mexico	7	10.9	8.3	10.8	17.0	7.0	14.0	13
Uruguay	10	11.7	5.4	2.9	25.0	18.0	7.0	17
United Arab Emirate	14	14.9	3.6	21.4	5.0	1.0	6.0	4
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	21	18.8	16.2	25.0	3.0	5.0	5.0	4
Indonesia	23	20.8	14.8	16.8	38.0	7.0	35.0	27
Syria Arab Republic	24	21.7	10.3	30.2	15.0	10.0	12.0	12
Iran	27	22.6	11.7	31.4	10.0	12.0	16.0	13
Algeria	37	28.6	10.6	40.6	22.0	2.0	13.0	12
Iraq	39	30.7	15.4	43.2	22.0	7.0	12.0	14
Nigeria	54	41.6	33.8	44.4	49.0	49.0	36.0	45

Source: Human Development Report 1997 (UNDP, New York).

From the above table, it is evidently clear that even though Nigeria is one of the world's major petroleum producers, it is the poorest and the most deprived, in all the components used to calculate the HPI and consequently ranks lowest.

### **Poverty in Nigeria**

Over the years, Nigeria has always had a large population of poor people and the incidence and severity of poverty have been changing. For instance, the period from 1980 – about 1985 was one of increasing poverty in Nigeria. Real average family income and average unskilled labour wage, in both rural and urban areas declined throughout the period. Agricultural production stagnated and rate of unemployment increased. Major expansion in social services, which took place in the 1970s was enough to ensure that the social condition of the average Nigerian did not deteriorate appreciably in the 1980-1985 period. Health, education, infrastructure, utilities and other social services were still available to a good proportion of the poor. Hence, though the economy was in a state of near collapse by 1985, the social sector was able to survive with relative minor damage.

Aliyu (1998:155) in his work, demonstrated the level of poverty in Nigeria as follows:

- about 50 per cent of Nigerians live below poverty line.
- only 40 per cent of the population have access to safe water.
- about 85 per cent of the urban population live in single rooms with about eight (8) occupants per room on the average.
- about 62 per cent of the population have no access to primary health care.
- about 50 per cent of Nigerians are illiterate.
- most Nigerians consume less than one-third of the minimum required protein and vitamins intake due to low purchasing power.
- about 70 per cent of the population live in rural areas without access to infrastructure facilities like roads and social services.
- most of the poor, households in Nigeria who live in rural areas, have large extended families and do not have jobs.
- the Gross National Product (GNP) per capita for Nigeria by 1996 was only \$260 compared to \$390 for Ghana, \$400 for Zambia and \$950 for Indonesia.

The period from 1985 to 1992 recorded some negative economic performance. Among them are:

- an increase in rate of inflation from only about 5 per cent in 1986 to about 45 per cent in 1992.
- a continued decline in real wages both in and out of agriculture, including public sector.
- a systematic deterioration in the condition of the country's infrastructure and social services.

On the whole, the incidence and depth of poverty in the country were on the increase, and became even more pervasive.

The period from 1993-1996 was also one of increasing overtly and human misery. For example, rate of inflation increased from 45 per cent in 1992 to about 73 per cent in 1994, but fell to 28 per cent in 1996. The conditions of physical and socio-economic infrastructure, as well as social services, deteriorated very badly. In the entire 1985-96 period, real government expenditure on programmes, which were of immediate relevance to the poor, declined. The percentage share of the total government expenditure, going to the social sector declined from 13.1 per cent in 1985 to 9.3 per cent in 1992 and increased only to the level of 13.1 per cent in 1995. In the health sector, the total expenditure declined from 3.1 per cent in 1986 to 2.0 per cent in 1992 but eventually increased slightly in 1995 (UNDP, 1996:34).

The Federal Office of Statistics (1996) and the World Bank (1995) observed that the population of the poor which was 36.1 million in 1985 and 34.7 million in 1992 had jumped to 55.8 million in 1997. This shows from a reduction of about 6 per cent between 1985 and 1992, there was however an escalation of 61 per cent between 1992 and 1997 in the country's poor population. On the whole, most Nigerians felt poorer in 1995 than in 1992. Nigeria's rank in the global Human Development Index (HDI) remains low, being 137<sup>th</sup> out of 174 countries. Nigeria ranks very much below the medium human development countries in Africa such as South Africa (100), Swaziland (110), Namibia (116), Zimbabwe (124) and Congo (125).

### **Assessment of Policies and Strategies on Poverty Alleviation**

The overall impact of policies and strategies for programmes on poverty is more clearly reflected in changes, which have taken place in major socio-economic indicators over the years. The patterns of movement



in some of these indicators over the years, illustrate the particular directions of impact of policies and strategies employed in the programmes of governments. Indeed, it is difficult to assess the actual contribution of the various programmes put in place for poverty reduction. But given the increase in the number of people in poverty since 1986 till date, we cannot but conclude that all the programmes have failed to achieve their respective objectives. To support this also, is the fact that most of these programmes fall between 1986 and 1993 – the Structural Adjustment Programme era. A period that saw a massive diminishing in living standards and increase in poverty. This programme resulted in deteriorating economic, political and social conditions for millions of Nigerians as they have for people in many other African countries that implemented the programme.

As earlier mentioned, elaborate sets of programmes were put in place by different governments. Some of these programmes are Directorate of Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA), River Basin Development Authorities (RBDA), Agricultural Development Projects (AD), Strategic Grain Reserved Programme (SGRP). These were set up to take care of food and agricultural problems while National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Mass Mobilisation for Social and Economic Reconstruction (MAMSER), National Economic Reconstruction Fund (NERFUND), Community Action Programme for Poverty Alleviation (CAPPA) and Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) were for mobilization, participation, employment and skill improvement. The policies and strategies for implementation may be faulty, hence the objectives could not be achieved.

Assessing the programmes from economic point of view, we observed that the average annual rate of growth in food production declined in the 1985-95 period (UNDP, 1996:34). There is also general high rate of inflation. The rate accelerated from 13 per cent in 1991 to about 72 per cent in 1995 (UNDP *ibid*). The increase in rate of inflation is higher in rural sector than in the urban sector. While the rate of inflation in the urban sector increased from about 18 per cent in 1991 to about 62 per cent in 1995, the rate in the rural sector increased from about 12 per cent in 1991 to about 75 per cent in 1995. The overall inference from these inflation rates is that the cost of living in Nigeria has increased tremendously since 1991, in the rural than in the urban areas.

**Socially, the percentage of poor households in Nigeria was about 72 per cent in 1995 (World Bank 1995:16). Health-wise, about 89 per cent of all households in Nigeria used unhygienic refuse disposal methods in 1995. This shows a serious refuse disposal problem in the country. Furthermore, about 32 per cent of all households in Nigeria get their household water from streams, pond and other natural and unhygienic sources. As at 1995, average food nutrient intake in the country was still below the acceptable minimum by international standards.**

**From the evidence provided by the economic, social and health indicators above, it is clear that the general impact of policies, strategies for the programmes on the incidence and depth of poverty in Nigeria has been low. Trends in the social, economic and health spheres have pointed to a general decline in the average individual economic social well-being. All of these have resulted in the high and rising level of general poverty in Nigeria.**

### **Constraints on the Implementation of the Policies/Strategies**

The ineffectiveness of policies and strategies of these programmes on poverty alleviation can be traced to many factors. First and foremost is the 'top down approach' which is being employed during policy making. In this approach, people who are most directly affected are never consulted. The federal authorities have taken all the initiatives. The state and local governments were reduced to mere implementing authorities. Even here, their areas of manoeuvre were limited as autonomous institutions manned by people with extremely limited relevant experience were set up. So, it clearly shows that the involvement of the supposed beneficiaries both in the conceptualisation and the implementation of the programmes was clearly negligible.

The programmes and their strategies are also seen as anti-people and anti-poor. This is because they have not only been designed at levels far removed from the people and the poor but they have also been implemented through government machinery, with little or no involvement of the local people. Worst still, these projects were shoddily executed with the result that no sooner have they been commissioned than they suffered constant breakdown. Consequently, the poor end up not benefiting from the programmes.

Thirdly, is the fact that Nigeria has suffered a lot from policy discontinuities, which have affected progress negatively, and created a

climate of uncertainties. Policy discontinuities give rise to serious inconsistencies in policy making and implementation. Each new government will like to abandon an existing or on-going project/policy for a new one, which it could call its own. An example of this is the Jos main stadium, which was started by a military regime, the subsequent ones refused to continue the project. It is the present civilian government, which came to power in 1999 that took up the project again. There are other cases of abandoned programmes all over the country. This, automatically affects the achievement of the objectives – poverty alleviation.

Fourthly, there exist inadequate attention to people – centred development strategies in the country. Most of the times, emphasis seems to be on investment in the country's resources rather than investment in people's welfare. There is investment emphasis on large-scale, capital-intensive resource-development projects which are often not directly relevant to the socio-economic circumstances of the poor and other less privileged groups in the society. The increase in the rate of deterioration in the infrastructure and basic social services that directly touch the lives of the poor and ordinary people is a clear testimony to this tendency. Also, the withdrawal of subsidies on some consumer goods and services that the poor need, as well as the commercialisation of some other services has pushed their prices beyond the reach of the poor.

Furthermore, resources for social development and rural poverty alleviation programmes do not often get to their target recipients. Financial resources from local and external sources end up too often in federal and state bureaucracies rather than being transferred to the people for whom they were intended. Accountability and transparency are major problems in public service management of development programmes meant for the benefit of the poor. Efforts to distribute development to the people at ward and community levels where the needs are greater, are systematically frustrated by the existing bureaucratic procedures in central administrations.

Also, there exist inadequate institutional mechanism for policies, strategies and programmes coordination. As a result, there has often been duplication of effort and general inefficiency in resource use among development institutions in the country. Inadequate impact assessment and evaluation arrangement as well as general indiscipline have also led to situations in which many institutions have lost their focus and the very essence of their existence without any corrective measures being taken.

The political crisis that enveloped the country over the decade seems to contribute to the problem of alleviating poverty. It was during these periods of political crisis/uncertainty that most of these policies and strategies were made. Because of the near absence of freedom of opinion, these policies and strategies were packaged and brought out by those who do not experience poverty. This affected the implementation, which witnessed unseriousness and lack of commitment.

Finally, almost all the country's annual budgets recognise the need for job creation. For instance, one of the objectives of both the 1997 and 1998 budgets was job creation (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1997:4). Yet, in addition to thousands of Federal Civil Servants whose jobs are under threat, thousands of employed people in the private sector are now being laid off as industries feel the full brunt of inefficient public services. For example, constant power failures have slashed production, both in the formal and informal sectors.

### **Suggestions for Effective Policies and Strategies of Implementation**

Haven seen the constraints on the policies and strategies of the existing programmes, it is necessary to come up with effective, comprehensive strategies, which when implemented, will go a long way towards achieving the objective of reducing poverty in Nigeria. But before this, it is necessary that Nigerians share the vision that a poverty-free society is achievable. For a vision to become shared national value and aspiration, it must be owned by the people and not generally perceived as government vision. The policies and strategies must be people-centred and 'bottom-up' in approach. This is because any policy on poverty alleviation, that fails to immerse the entire populace of the poor in its process, mobilise and motivate them, will surely fail. It is through participation that the people can be transformed and their values and attitude positively changed. So, inputs from the masses popular participation, to both the policy and strategies are imperative.

Also, there is need for a well articulated policy which will target short-term programmes, for a period of between 18 to 24 months. This will enable the country achieve a significant success within a recorded time.

For the strategies for effective implementation of the policy, a holistic package, drawn from social and economic empowerment is imperative.

Socially, one of the strategies should be compulsory education for all and reduction in adult illiteracy and this must be pursued with a single minded determination by the governments and people of Nigeria. Presently, illiteracy remains a very serious problem in Nigeria. For instance, it is estimated that only about 62.5 per cent of the male population and about 39.5 per cent of the female population are literate, the country's overall adult literacy rate thus is about 54.0 per cent. There is then need for government to give special attention to the quality of education provided.

Another strategy for achieving the policy is providing primary health care to all. The reason behind this is to halt the deterioration in the nation's health system. Health centres, clinics, dispensaries and out-patient departments of hospitals should be evenly distributed especially to local government areas. Government should make sure that health services is provided in all the three levels of government.

To be included also in the strategies is provision of house to all. Before 1971, governments were laying emphasis on provision of houses for government officials in exclusive suburbs. It was only in 1971 that the Federal Government established the National Council on Housing, charged with the duties of formulating a national housing policy. Subsequently, there exist similar policies but the poor are yet to experience the gain. In rural areas, good houses are very few. The concentration is in the urban areas. Even in the urban areas, houses are inadequate. Low income groups and the jobless are to be specially favoured through concessionary interest rates.

Employment has always been regarded as an important means of eradicating poverty in any society. The provision of employment opportunities has therefore, been seen as an essential component of a basic needs approach of welfare programme. Although problems of unemployment and under-employment are well known to policy makers in Nigeria, it is unfortunate that all the policies have so far failed to produce the desired results. This is the most important area where urgent and permanent action is most desired.

Economic empowerment requires the satisfaction of three conditions. These are accessibility, availability and equality of opportunity. There must be access to factors of production-land, capital, technology, appropriate institutions as well as consumable goods and services. To ensure accessibility, there is need to provide income-generating

- that annual budgets must take care of poverty alleviation and its implementation must be thoroughly monitored and evaluated.
- finally, that expenditure on social services should be shifted from urban to rural areas.

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