



Failure of poverty alleviation efforts in Nigeria: A critique of Obasanjo's Poverty Alleviation Program (PAP)

Osai O Jason¹, Amugo O Frank²

¹ Institute of Foundation Studies, Rivers State University, Nkpolu, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

² School of Foundation Studies, Captain Elechi Amadi Polytechnic, Rumuola, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Abstract

The subject of poverty is a global topical issue and has become rather disturbing in Nigeria, and Moreso as the country has recently been described as the "Headquarters of Poverty". Furthermore, it is rather paradoxical that in spite of the huge material and human resources in Nigeria the country is still wearing the toga of a very poor country in the comity of Nations. One of the major government efforts at addressing the issue of poverty and food shortages in Nigeria was President Olusegun Obasanjo's Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP). The programme was launched in the year 2000 with a budget of N10 billion Naira. The thrust of this effort is to critique this programme with the aim of identifying the pitfalls that led to its failure, and as well proffer recommendations towards formulation of better programmes that could get the nation up, above poverty line and enable the nation feed its population.

Keywords: poverty, food shortages, alleviation and critique

Introduction

The issue of poverty alleviation in Nigeria has been very crucial and imperative as a result of the fact that, in spite of enormous material and human resources, Nigeria is poor in terms of human developmental index. Indices of poverty like lack of adequate health care, delivery system, high unemployment, lack of infrastructural facilities, inadequate and unbalanced food supply, inadequate education and high rise of social ills go to show the poor state of existence and quality of life.

The paradox of the state of poverty in Nigeria vis-a-vis the nation's wealth is brought to the fore with the reports & statistics which show that Nigeria is the 6th highest oil producer in the world and yet adjudged to be at the frontline of poverty ratings in the world. Again, contrary to the global trend of general reduction in the world poverty, the situation in Nigeria has been a drastic rise in the proportion of people living below poverty line. It is estimated that 80% of Nigeria population is living below poverty line.

Applying the basic indicators in analysing the incidence of poverty, Nigeria came out as the poorest of selected developing countries. With a population growth rate of 2.9% per annum, GNP per capital of N240 as at 1976, and a 3 percent annual economic growth rate (CBN 1999:30), Nigeria does not stand a chance of making any serious dent on its poverty situation for some time to come. This present scenario has made the study of poverty alleviation in Nigeria urgent and fundamental if the nation is to survive.

In this paper, we shall first look at the mechanism of Government with regard to policy and programme formulation as a theoretical framework before critically examining Obasanjo's Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP).

Government and Policy Formulation

Government, which form a major instrument of the political process, according to David Easton's 'systems model', is a

set of individuals and institutions that interact in regularised, regulated and recurring manner to solve problems that cannot otherwise be solved through the non-governmental segments of society. The peculiarity of the political system is found in the fact that it deals with all actions more or less directly related to making binding decisions for society.

Governance is more or less an exchange process involving inputs, the processing of these inputs through the machinery of the system and the emergence of outputs by way of policies. Through representatives and public opinion, citizens transmit demands (inputs) for government to do certain things and take certain actions. Based on these demands and some initiatives, decision-makers devise policies and programmes which are then administered by the bureaucracy. The resultant policies and programmes reach the citizenry as authoritative decisions (outputs) that become binding on all parties. Thereafter, the reactions of the citizenry to the outputs determine the degree of support, acceptability, popularity and therefore, the legitimacy Government enjoys. The continuity of Government, irrespective of frequency of change is found in that enduring institution of Government and the cyclically of their relationship and consequent interactions. (Osai, 1996) [8], Easton (1953:136-137) has written that Even in the smallest and simplest society, someone must intervene in the name of the society with its authority behind him, to decide how differences over valued things are to be resolved. It is therefore the responsibility of the political system to maintain order in human society such that people are able to satisfy their needs.

Dalen and Zeigler (1977:150) [3] hold that "no society contains perfectly satisfied population". Resulting from the pervading presence and dangerous trend of poverty in Nigeria, the masses always cry out for solutions to the problems. In responses, various Nigeria Governments, both military and civilian have fashioned out different poverty alleviation programmes such as: Operation. Feed the Nation (OFN), Green Revolution Programme (GRP), Directorate of

Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) and Family Support Programme (IFSP), among others. The question is how far these various programmes have effectively addressed the issue of poverty alleviation.

By May 1999, there was increasing level of unemployment and poverty was compounded by over two decades of political instability, Marco economic policy in consistencies, low capacity utilization in industries and massive turn out of school leavers and graduates by the educational institutions. The overall situation now is that most Nigerian's go hungry because they cannot effort to buy food. This situation is the immediate background to the formulation of present Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) of the present government.

Obasanjo's poverty alleviation programme (PAP)

The Federal Government Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) was launched on February 14, 2000 by President Olusegun Obasanjo, with N10 billion earmarked for the execution of the project for the year 2000. The overall objectives of this programme are as follows:

- Provide direct jobs for 200,000 unemployed persons and stimulate production within the period of one year.
- Stimulate economic growth through the engagement of semi-skilled and unskilled labour in productive activities.
- Immediate reduction of social vices and tension in the society by removing idle hands from streets.
- Engage the unemployed in direct activities as veritable means of relating the economy.
- Improve the environmental degradation
- Minimize rural urban drift through the improvement of rural communities,
- Committing the fund to direct benefit of the participant rather than on services or overheads.

The Programme activities and strategies include.

- Patching of potholes on highways
- Environmental sanitation
- Aforestation
- Control of Vegetation along high ways
- Cleaning of hospitals and cutting of grasses therein
- Renovation of schools and public places, which would include the removal of posters displayed indiscriminately on public buildings.
- Rehabilitation of public utilities and facilities for communities.
- Construction of low-cost building and assistance in food production.

The target group for the activities of the programme include, youths which should benefit 50% of the jobs to be created. Women shall benefit 25% and men 25%. Each state of the federation including the federal capital territory Abuja; shall engage 5,000 persons to carry out various poverty alleviation activities in the respective states. This shall engage a total of 185,000 hitherto unemployed persons. The balance of 15,000 shall be shared among the thickly populated cities. The programme has three levels of implementation institutional bodies namely:

1. National council on poverty alleviation programme which is made up of the President (as chairman), Vice-President and Ministers of: Works and Housing, Labour and Productivity, Agriculture, Finance, Education,

Environment, Women Affairs and Youth Development, and Health.

2. State committee on poverty alleviation, includes: Controller, Federal Ministry of Works and Housing (chairman), NYSC Director, Federal Inspector of Education, Federal Pay Officer, NDE state Co-ordinator, Head of field monitory unit, Federal Ministry of Agriculture, controller Federal Ministry of Environment, two Representatives of the State Government, State Chairman of the Nigerian Labour Congress, one Woman Leader and Federal Health Inspector.
3. Local Government Committee includes: Representative of Federal Ministry of Works (Chairman), the District Head of the Local Government Area, two Religious leaders, a Councilor representing the Local Government Area, two Women Leaders (one of which must be a teacher) and any other person to be appointed by the committee from the Local Government Area. All beneficiaries under the programme will be entitled to allowance of N2,500 per month.

The socio-economic benefits expected from the programmes as contained in the handbook include:

1. The removal of two hundred thousand semi-skilled and unskilled persons as well as retired/retrrenched workers from the unemployed group to reduce a lot of the socio-economic and political problems the country is facing,
2. In pure economic sense, the proposed expenditure on the target group will be a positive way of enhancing purchasing power in the economy,
3. It will bring about immediate physical cleanliness of the environment, which could particularly impact on health hazards such as epidemics, flooding during the rains that leads to collapse of houses and sometimes loss of lives.
4. The active participation of the graduates in rural and community development will bring about an accelerated rehabilitation of infrastructure, thereby ensuring a harmonised development of the country. Environment hazards such as desertification, erosion and pollution would be adequately tackled with the available manpower in the programme.

The foregoing is the concise literature of the Obasanjo's poverty alleviation programme as contained in the handbook on the guidelines for the implementation of the programme (PAP). Looking at the entire programme as spelt out in the handbook, one observes that the formulators of PAP appear not to have a full grasp of the dimension and nature of poverty as a phenomenon. This is reflected in the policy thrust statement as contained in the introduction of the handbook, which states that:

This (Obansajo) administration took upon itself the major task of redressing the twin problem of poverty and employment generation. To demonstrate its commitment towards the achievement of this task, the Government has earmarked the sum of N10 billion for the creation of 200,000 jobs in the year 2000.

From the above statement, we can deduce that the formulators see poverty merely as a problem of unemployment. This is profoundly simplistic perception and approach to tackling the deep-seated problems associated with and emanating from poverty.

Poverty is a phenomenon, which has economic, social and political dimensions. The economic dimension revolves

around material deprivation, in terms of low income or low consumption, the lack of basic physical necessities of life, the lack of assets and other vocational or objective handicaps. Its social dimensions manifest in terms of social inferiority, low status and lack of dignity or self-esteem, insecurity, vulnerability and marginalization. In political terms, poverty is associated with powerlessness, exclusion from the decision-making process, dehumanisation and denial of basic natural and political rights.

The way we conceive poverty therefore has fundamental implications towards the formulation of effective policies or programmes that can tackle it or provide solutions to the problem. Therefore, the parochial and erroneous perception of poverty by the formulators of PAP guaranteed its failure. That PAP focuses on providing menial temporary employment for an infinitesimal percentage of unemployed Nigerians is preposterous, to say the least. The problem of unemployment is a superficial aspect of the poverty. In tackling poverty, the issues of macro-economic framework, as well as, socio-political structures, which account for poverty requires high priority attention. So, in addressing faulty socio-economic structures and physical infrastructure, the rural areas where over 70% of those living below poverty line reside, should be the target of any meaningful poverty alleviation programme and not just the youths and school leavers that roam about in the cities. So the target group of PAP which is mainly youths cannot make any meaningful impact on the rural poverty.

Furthermore, the adhoc nature and structure of the implementation agencies and institutions at the national, state and local government levels will not be effective and successful

Recommendation

The English author, Owen Felthan (1602-1668) said that "perfection is immutable, but for things imperfect, to change is the way to perfect." (Edward's, 1963:8). In view of the obvious defects in the focus, design and implementation of the poverty alleviation programme, we suggest that the programme be drawn with a multi-dimensional policy that will adequately tackle the problem of poverty in Nigeria. We therefore recommend the restructuring of the programme with following strategies and targets:

1. The provision of those necessary social and physical infrastructures which will boost the income, productivity and welfare of the rural poor.
2. The integrated development of the different sectors of the rural economy, both agricultural and non-agricultural,
3. The provision of the basic needs of the poor through raising their purchasing power and access to basic social services,
4. The investment of a certain percentage of national income on projects and programmes whose benefits would accrue directly to the poor,

It is our considered opinion and sure expectation that, over time, these measures will bring about a transfer of substantial income-yielding assets and opportunities to the poor, which will enable them to achieve significant increase in their income and living standard.

Conclusion

Nigeria is a country that has been blessed by nature with huge material and human resources which unfortunately has been

mismanaged over the years, resulting in creation of abject poverty condition among over 80% of the citizenry. The poor condition of Nigerians is therefore an artificial creation that can be reversed by the formulation and execution of effective and well-articulated Poverty Alleviation Programmes (PAP). PAP is merely one of the examples of policy bungles that have characterised the numerous poverty alleviation efforts by various governments.

It is our fervent belief that if PAP is restructured with a multi-dimensional approach, the problem of poverty in Nigeria can be effectively tackled. Most importantly, Nigeria must return to fiscal federalism (true federalism), so as to appreciably minimize mismanagement and waste, which manifest in insincere and economic fraud-ridden characteristic of the unitarized federation.

References

1. Addison D. "Nigeria-A poverty Assessment" in Nigeria: Prospect for Development a.k.a Vision 2020. Lagos: CBN/World Bank Collaborative Study: Proceedings of Workshop, 1996.
2. Central Bank of Nigeria. Nigeria's Development Prospects-Poverty Assessment and Alleviation Study. Lagos: CBN, 1999.
3. Van Dalen H, Ziegler LH. Introduction to Political Science: People, Politics and Perception. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, hic, 1977.
4. David E. A Framework for Political Analysis. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall Inc, 1965.
5. Edwards T. New Dictionary of Thoughts. New York: Standard Books, 1963.
6. Federal Government of Nigeria. Handbook on Guidelines for the Implementation of Poverty Alleviation Programme. Lagos: Federal Ministry of Information, 2000.
7. Nkom SA. Rural Development, Popular Participation and Basic Needs." A Fadahunsi *et al.* (eds) Basic Needs Approach to National Planning. Zaria: Center for Social Economic Research ABU, 1982.
8. Osai OJ. The Role of the Legislative Arm of the Local Government in the Development and Sustenance of a Stable Democratic Polity in Nigeria." A paper presented at the one-day Workshop for the Councillors of Obiol Akpor Local Government Council, Rivers State on Thursday, at Delta Hotels Ltd. Port Harcourt, 1999.
9. World Bank. Nigeria: Poverty in the Midst of Plenty, 1996, (Report No. 14733 UNI, World Bank).