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GOOD GOVERNANCE AND POVERTY REDUCTION POLICIES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
A major symptom of good governance in any country is evident reduction in poverty level and improved standard of living for the generality of its citizens. Nigeria is a country blessed with abundant human and material resources. The country is ranked among the richest countries in the entire world due to its enormous natural resources and it is undoubted the most popular and wealthiest black nation. Notwithstanding, the rate of poverty and hardship in the country has persistently remained at the crescendo. Thus, in an effort to engender good governance and social and economic development, successive administrations in the country, military and civilian, have consistently rolled-out various policies targeted at reducing the scourge of poverty and extreme hardship among the citizens. Unfortunately, these policies and programmes have, however, failed to yield the expected result. That is, significant reduction in poverty level in the country, due to certain notable challenges facing them. This paper, therefore, examines these challenges and recommends strategies on how to increase the effectiveness of government poverty alleviation policies in order to achieve the desired results and promote good governance for development in the country. Some of the recommendations of the paper include; need for demonstration of strong political will and sincerity of purpose by governments at all levels, proper tracking of every stage in the execution of government poverty alleviation programmes, and anchoring subsequent poverty alleviation measures on well-conducted researches in order substantially increase their impact levels on the social and economic lives of the target beneficiaries.

Keywords: Development; Good governance; Poverty reduction policies; Poverty alleviation

Introduction

Poverty, a universal phenomenon is the greatest problem of mankind. Indeed, the international community and governments all over the world are faced with the challenge of how to build a vibrant and robust citizenry free of the scourge of absolute poverty and hardship in order to make development agenda easily realizable. The survival of every nation depends to a large extent on the quality or state of the health of its citizenry. Poverty is a symptom of underdevelopment and the bane of development in many

countries. It has been used to group nation-states into two divergent categories – North and South. The north here is representing the wealthy nations of Europe and North America while the south comprises of the poor countries of Africa, Asia and Latin American known for their endemic development crises indicated by high poverty level.

This is not to insinuate that there are some countries entirely free of poverty. What is to be noted therefore is that poverty varies in degrees and forms from countries to countries. However, it is worthy of note that about 1.5 billion people live below poverty of less than one dollar per day, worldwide. Out of this number, 250 million constituting 17% of the world's total poor population are in Africa (Nasir, 2002).

A good parameter for measuring the quality of governance in any country is the extent of the socioeconomic welfare enjoyed by its people. Consequently, governments have consistently struggled to entrench good governance occasioned by a drastic reduction in the level of poverty and improved standard of living among the people. Even the so-called advanced or wealthy countries also have social welfare policies and schemes for assisting their citizens as a way of checkmating the menace of poverty in the society.

Nigeria is a country of paradox. The country is blessed with abundant natural resources but poverty is rife among its citizens. This is corroborated by the popular assertion that 90 million Nigerians live in abject poverty, and the figure accounts for the population of Nigerians living on less than one dollar a day. This high poverty rate portends serious danger to the actualization of the Millennium Development Goal in Nigeria, and by extension in other African countries if effective measures are not put in place to quickly curtail the trend (Ogunleye, 2006). Indeed, a large proportion of Nigerian citizens live below poverty level; the country's GDP is low; unemployment rate has assumed a crisis-status; illiteracy level degenerates daily as more and more children drop out of school; life expectancy is low; infant mortality rate is very high; basic essential public services (drinkable water and electricity) are in short supply; available socio-economic infrastructures are in deplorable states; the number of homeless people increases speedily; juvenile delinquency is rampant; and security is highly unstable. Poverty is the root cause of this myriad of problems in the country since independence.

The factors responsible for this prevailing state of poverty in the country are, among others, corruption, bad governance, debt overhang, unemployment, low productivity, burgeoning population growth, globalization, unfocused government policies, lack of effective skills training (Arogundade et al, 2011). In the words of Obadan (1996),

> Poverty has earned recognition in the extent of its ravaging society and the affairs of humanity at the international, national and local levels, the need exists now for urgent actions towards its eradication and control. Indeed, poverty is a snare. It is dehumanizing. It must be eradicated (cited in Arogundade et al, 2011:42).

Successive governments in Nigeria, both military and civilian, have over the years embarked on measures to reduce the odious trend of poverty among the citizens through various poverty reduction policies and programmes as a way of establishing good governance and socio-economic development. However, all the policies and programmes

put in place to reduce poverty among the people have not produced generally desired outcome as poverty rate has consistently increased. The reason for this is that poverty alleviation programmes in the country have met with certain notable obstacles that militate against their efficacy. Against this background, therefore, this paper is primarily concerned with examining these challenges and recommending strategies for strengthening government poverty alleviation programmes with a view to boosting their impact on poverty reduction so as to promote good governance and national development in the country.

The Concepts of Good Governance, Poverty, and Poverty Reduction Policies

Governance as a concept has for long time gained wide popularity in the literature of political and development discourse, and it has attracted differing definitions by researchers in the field. The World Bank (1992) defines governance as the manner in which power is exercise in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development. Although it may be argued that this definition focuses on the economic aspect of governance while undermining other dimensions, it should be noted that the real substance of governance is use of power to allocate resources in the society. Landell-Mills and Serageldin (1999) similarly defines governance as he use of political authority and exercise of control over a society and the management of its resources for social and economic development. Boeninger (1992) defines it as good governance of society, with capacity for efficient problem-solving and conflict resolution.

Good governance simply means a governance environment that is very inclusive, respects the rights of the minority, is accountable, transparent, efficient and effective, participatory, responsive, respects the rule of law and follows due process and is open and there is the existence of strong institutions, not big men of power (Calderisi, 2007). Asobie (2012) is almost completely in consensus with the above views. For him, good governance embodies certain standards principles: transparency, accountability, civic participation, achievement of results and impact. To this end, he further alludes that bad governance is characterized by opacity, corruption, exclusiveness, and focus on output, rather than outcome. In his submission, corruption is, thus, a component of governance, albeit bad governance or the negation of good governance. Good governance is a policy framework that imposes demands on policy makers in their exercise of power (Afeikhena, 2004). It pre-supposes a government highly attentive, transparent, accountable and responsive to the needs and aspirations of the people.

On the other hand, as a socio-economic and multi-dimensional concept, poverty has equally been conceived in different ways by scholars and researchers. The term suffers from lack of precision in terms of meaning as available definitions offered in attempt to explain the term largely reflect the personal perception and worldview of each definer. According to Anikpo (1995), poverty is the history process of individuals or groups being forcefully eliminated from control of the decision-making machinery that determines the production and distribution of resources in a society. He further explains that poverty manifest in various forms such as hunger, lack of food, good drinking water, clothes, shelter, good health, poor education and distribution of resources coupled with monopoly of the machinery of decision-making through coercive state apparatus.

For Aliyu (2002:2), poverty is the condition where an individual or group of people are unable to satisfy their basic requirements for human survival in terms of education, health, housing, feeding employment, transportation, etc. Aboyade (1987:7) cited in (Oyemomi, 2003) sees poverty as the insufficient or total lack of necessities and facilities like food, housing, medical care, education, social and environmental service, consumer goods, recreational opportunities, neighbourhood amenities and transport facilities. Along the same line, Oyemomi (2003), states that poverty refers to a state where an individual is not able to cater adequately for his or her basic needs of food, clothing and shelter; is unable to meet social and economic obligations, lacks gainful employment, skills, assets and self-esteem; and has limited access to social and economic infrastructure such as education, health, portable water, and sanitation; and consequently, has limited chance of advancing his or her welfare to the limit of his or her capabilities.

Narayan et al (2000:30) aver that poverty is humiliation, the sense of being dependent, and of being forced to accept rudeness, insults, and indifference when we seek help. Further, as observed by Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Economic Co-operation and Development (1992:3), poverty may also be seen as not having enough to eat, a high rate of infant mortality, a low life expectancy, low educational opportunities, poor water, inadequate heath care, unfit housing and a lack of active participation in the decision making process. Also, as Aluko (1975) quoted in (Oyemomi, 2003) puts it, poverty is the absence or lack of basic necessities of life or lack of command over basic consumption needs such as food, clothing and or shelter, glaring defects in the economy, etc.

The Central Bank of Nigeria (1999:1) views poverty as a state where an individual is not able to cater adequately for his or her basic needs of food, clothing and shelter; is unable to meet social and economic obligations; lacks gainful employment, skills, assets and self-esteem; and has limited access to social and economic Infrastructure such as education, health, portable water, and sanitation; and consequently, has limited chance of advancing his or her welfare to the limit of his or her capabilities. Thus the poor are conceived as those individuals or households in a particular society, incapable of purchasing a specified basket of basic goods and services. Basic goods as used here include; food, shelter, water, health care, access to productive resources including education, working skill and tools, political and civil rights to participate in decisions concerning socio-economic conditions (Ajakaiye and Adeyeye 2001; in Gbosi and Omoke, 2004).

From the above definitions, it is discernible that poverty is a state of helplessness or despair accompanied by loss of self-worth and respect. It is a condition in which one needs everything but cannot afford anything by oneself, rather he or she leans on others for survival. Poverty in all its forms is a desecration of human dignity.

Poverty reduction policies refer to deliberate measures or efforts by government to combat or reduce the incidence of poverty among the people. The need for this stems from the fact that development cannot take place, or be said to have taken place in a country where a large proportion of the citizens are under the scourge of high level impoverishment. Poverty itself is, in fact, a hindrance to development and good governance, hence effort by government to eradicate the menace so that development can take firm root.

Manifestations of Poverty in Nigeria

Poverty is a global problem in that it is found everywhere, but the effects of the plague are comparatively much more devastating in developing countries. Therefore, despite Nigeria's enormous resources, wealth and status as the richest of all African nations, poverty in all its manifestations has reached an alarming rate in the country. When she attained political independence in 1960, there was a latent optimism regarding the attainment of rapid and sustained growth, the eradication of poverty and improvement in living standards. This was reinforced by unprecedented large inflow from oil exports a decade later. Unfortunately, the development trajectory has largely been unstable (Afeikhena, 2004). Iwayemi (1994) attests that the development experience of the post-independence period has been characterized by the premature termination of the economic take-off of the 1970, dramatic reversals in per capita income and consumption gains and the growing immunization of a large segment of the population. The immediate cause of this unpalatable condition is bad governance and reckless economic management on the part of leaders.

Nigeria is currently one of the world's twenty poorest countries. GDP per capital has fallen from $1160 in 1980 to $250 in 1997. It is estimated that one third of the country's 120 million people are poor and ten percent extremely poor. The proportion of the population with access to safe drinking water, electricity and modern health care facilities has declined from an average of 60 percent in the early 1980s to 40 percent in 1997 (Afeikhena, 2004).To lend more credence, statistical data from the Federal Office of Statistics (FOS) indicate that by 1960 poverty covered about 15% of the population of Nigeria and by 1980 it grew to 28%. By 1985 the extent of poverty was about 46% and then dropped to 43% by 1992. By 1996, poverty incidence in Nigeria was estimated to be about 66% in a total population of about 110 million (Oyemomi, 2003). Consequently, according to the United Nations Reports (1999) in (Worldeconomics, 2010), Nigeria's Human Poverty Index (HPI) was only 41.6%, which places the country among the 25 poorest nations in the world.

Additional data from the Federal Office of Statistics (1996) further indicate that life expectancy for Nigeria was 51 years, literacy rate was 56% and 70% of the rural population do not have access to potable water, healthcare facilities and electricity. The adult literacy rate for Zaire, Zambia and Zimbabwe were 76%, 77% and 85% respectively. Infant mortality rate (per 1000 live birth) and under-five mortality rates for Nigeria were 82 and 191 respectively by 1995. The same data for South Africa, Cameroon and Zimbabwe were 51 and 67; 62 and 106; 70 and 74, respectively (Oyemomi, 2003). Also, based on the data from the FOS, the State-by-State poverty incidence in Nigeria between 1980 and 1996 clearly indicate high and varying poverty levels among the States of the Federation. The data further show that poverty in Nigeria increased sharply both between 1980 and 1985 and between 1992 and 1996. The data also indicate that by 1992 only 10 States have more than half of their population in poverty, but by 1996 all States except Bayelsa have more than half of their population in poverty (Oyemomi, 2003). This explains why several development organizations have consistently ranked Nigeria among the World's poorest nations.

Importantly, the analysis of the depth and severity of poverty in Nigeria showed that rural areas were the most affected. Several reasons accounted for the situation viz; a.

the large concentration of the populace in the rural areas, b. many years of neglect of the rural areas in terms of infrastructural development and lack of information on the way government is being run (Worldeconomics, 2010). Attesting to this, the CBN/World Bank study on poverty Assessment and Alleviation in Nigeria (1999) revealed the that the living and environmental conditions of those living in the rural areas have worsened. Urban poverty is also on the increase in the country. This has been attributed to the under provision of facilities and amenities which are already inadequate to match the growing demand of the urban populace as well as the rural-urban movement which has caused serious pressure on the existing infrastructural facilities (Worldeconomics, 2010). It becomes clear thus that substantial improvement in social and economic wellbeing built on an established culture of good governance has remained elusive in Nigeria due to increasing instance of poverty and extreme hardship in the country.

It is these worrisome and increasing levels of poverty in Nigeria that have attracted the concern and efforts of various administrations at eradicating or at least reducing the socioeconomic menace of poverty in the country. The implication of this is that attempt at reducing or combating poverty in Nigeria is not new. It has been a recurrent practice since the post-independence period involving international donor agencies. These efforts have been multi-dimensional involving the use of different practical approaches at different periods most of which were seen in the creation of institutions and agencies to anchor the initiatives. However, the general concern is that poverty alleviation programmes ever initiated and implemented have not made significant impact on poverty reduction as the menace continues to ravage the nation and its citizens. This general concern forms the thrust of this current discourse as the paper seeks to examine the factors responsible for the poor performance of poverty alleviation policies in the country.

Nexus between Poverty Reduction and Good Governance

Good governance and poverty reduction are intrinsically intertwined. Extreme poverty negates the realization of good governance dreams in a society. On the other hand, good governance greatly facilitates reduction in poverty rate, and increased poverty reduction accelerates the establishment of good governance and development. Poverty constitutes a serious global problem. It is a challenge that confronts mankind all over the world. Not surprising, therefore, that government, leaders, international organizations are actively searching for solution to contain and eliminate poverty globally. Poverty reduction is the basic element to ensure social justice and sustainable growth; and it needs good governance to support and provide opportunity for the poor to get out of poverty hole. This means that the problems of poverty and governance are inextricably linked. Weak governance of public institutions imposes direct costs on the poor (Soksreng Te, 2007). Good governance is perhaps the single most important factor in eradicating poverty and promoting development. By good governance is meant creating well-functioning and accountable institution – political, judicial and administrative (Annan, 1998). Bad governance is in direct opposition to this.

Good governance is the most important precondition to economic development with sustainability, equity and social justice. Good governance requires wide participation, enhanced sharing of information, accountability, equality, inclusiveness and

the rule of law. Good governance requires that corruption be reduced to minimum, the views of the minority and the voices of the most vulnerable in the society be fully heard and considered in decision making process (Royal Government of Cambodia, 2004). The firm entrenchment of these important elements in a society automatically produces a great deal of direct impact on poverty reduction. Without good governance, the scarce resources available are generally not put to their best use in combating poverty. Thus good governance is necessary if all aspects of poverty are to be reduced. Good governance facilitates participatory, pro-poor policies as well as sound macroeconomic management. It ensures transparent use of public funds, encourages growth of all sectors, helps to establish the rule of law, and promotes effective delivery of public services to benefit the poor (Soksreng Te, 2007). In nutshell, good governance is an effective antidote to absolute poverty. It is for this reason that the concept of good governance has become increasingly popular and is now a self-regulated force shaping states relations in the committee of nations.

Excessive poverty indicates the presence of bad governance in a country and determines the perception of such state in the international community. Nations with low incidences of poverty enjoy great deal of respect and reputation and vice-versa. Consequently, the quest for good governance has become one of the greatest concerns of nations. This is more so given the wide acknowledgement that increased rate of poverty is a cog in the wheel of social and economic progress of any country. Absolute poverty is inimical to societal transformation and it hinders smooth and effective governance. Poverty instigates class struggle in the society, truncates government policies and efforts, creates a sense of marginalization or deprivation, breeds social crimes and upheavals and makes development planning and implementation difficult. The shift of emphasis from concept of governance to good governance has brought about a new dimension to the notion of development. Development no longer connotes structural advancement alone; it has come to include the human aspect. And the only most effective means of determining human development is evident improvement in the quality of life brought about by a drastic reduction in general poverty level. The quality of governance in a society is a necessary check for the quality of life enjoyed by the citizens of that country. Bad governance increases suffering and hardship, while good governance promotes the socioeconomic wellbeing of the people. Poverty reduction is thus an expected role of governance, albeit, good governance.

Overview of Poverty Reduction Policies in Nigeria

Most early poverty alleviation programs in Nigeria were mainly targeted at the rural areas. This was based on the perceived assumption by governments that the effects of poverty in Nigeria is more felt and borne by the large population of the country's citizens in the rural areas, where there is limited access to basic social and economic amenities than the situation in most urban areas. This does not suggest, however, that essential socioeconomic infrastructures are in adequate supply in all the urban centres in the country, the point being made is that the conditions in majority of the urban areas were seen to be far better than those in the rural areas. More so, the fact that the rural centres lack industries and modern business organizations (public and private) to provide white-collar jobs and other essential elements that enhance standard of living makes the

case that poverty rate is higher in the rural centres than in the urban areas. As such, most of the early attempts by governments at reducing poverty in the country were essentially aimed at alleviating high level poverty among the rural dwellers. More pertinent to note is also the fact that the larger population of Nigeria's rural settlers are pre-dominantly farmers. Hence, the first set of government poverty reduction policies were predominantly agricultural development schemes aimed at assisting the rural farmers in order to increase their farming outputs and invariably improve their living standards.

Unarguably, even from the colonial period, what seemed to be effort at alleviating poverty by the colonial authorities was the expansion of communication routes to encourage easy and smooth movement of agricultural products from the hinterlands to the port of exportation (Ogunleye, 2006). Therefore, the period of post World-War II till the end of the second National Development Plan in 1975 witnessed increasing agricultural production. This encouraged the establishment of farm settlement schemes in the Western and Eastern parts of the country. Also, in the third National Development Plan (1975-1980), greater attention was given to integrated rural development. The vision remained to raise agricultural productivity and the provision of basic social amenities such as water, medical services, schools, electricity, etc. (Ogunleye, 2006). However, deliberate and pragmatic rural poverty alleviation attempts in Nigeria began in 1972 during the General Yakubu Gowon's Administration named National Accelerated Food Production Programme - NAFPP and the Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank - NACB. These programmes were entirely devoted to funding agriculture (Arogundade et al, 2011) and to increase agricultural production. Although the programmes raised agricultural productions, they did not achieve any significant success in terms of raising the standard of living of the rural people and engendering social and economic development. In other words, their impact on poverty reduction was very minimal and largely unimpressive.

Unforgettably, these first two programmes were followed by the Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo's Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), which was enunciated in 1979. The OFN expended more money and efforts in getting ill-prepared University graduates to go to the rural areas to teach the peasant farmers how to farm. The irony of the programme is that theoretical farming graduates were teaching farmers, who make their living on farming; how to farm. The scheme's only success was in creating awareness of food shortages and the need to tackle the problem (Arogundade et al, 2011). Like the preceding programmes, the OFN had the specific focus of increasing food production on the premise that availability of cheap food will mean higher nutrition level and invariably lead to national growth and development. OFN lasted until Shehu Shagari's government took over in 1979. Shagari (1979- 1983) shared almost the same poverty reduction idea with his predecessor. He came up with his own pet project named the Green Revolution, which also emphasized food production. The objectives of the green revolution programme were: reduction in food importation, virile boosting of crops and fibre production in the country. Besides, the overall objective was mechanized farming. Meanwhile, various manipulations for selfish gain; particularly with respect to land acquisition, characterized this programme, most especially, by top civil service employees. At the end of the programme, by 1983, a colossal amount of money was considered wasted. It must also be stated though that lack of continuity and shift in approach trailed poverty alleviation

programmes since the ouster of Shagari from power in 1983. Each subsequent military administration came with a different idea or no idea at all. Poverty reduction programmes became more 'regime specific' because there was hardly any continuity with those initiated by previous governments (Arogundade et al, 2011). This underscores the general failure by the programmes to achieve their stipulated aims and objectives.

The rural development policy of the fourth National Development plan (1981-1985) focused more on man. Poverty alleviation was not seen as merely providing infrastructure and improving on agricultural activities but improving economic life of the rural areas (Ogunleye, 2006). During this period, cooperative development and community development programmes were given more priorities (Adeyinka et al, 2002). However, despite all these, the standard of living of an average rural dweller did not improve (Ogunleye, 2006). Indeed, the quality of life in the rural areas remained generally poor and demanded more serious attention. To worsen the whole situation, the military regime of Gen. Muhammad Buhari/Brig. Tunde Idiagbon (1983 -1985) did not have a specific poverty alleviation programme as it clearly focused on fighting indiscipline and corruption. This initiative better known as 'War Against Indiscipline' (WAI), primarily sought to inculcate a military-style regimen of discipline such as queuing for public services, observing road signs, memorizing the national anthem and generally sprucing up the national psyche on the distinctions of right and wrong, handling of public property etc. Although some argue that the fight against indiscipline and corruption were equal to a poverty alleviation programme in the sense that the two were partly the reason why many Nigerians are poor (Arogundade et al, 2011), the point to note is that the programme was not originally designed to tackle the problem of poverty in the country. In other words, though it is agreeable that reduction in corruption, especially official or governmental corruption could have direct impact on poverty reduction, WAI's aim was simply to rid the system of all sorts of corrupt practices, not a deliberate attempt at alleviating poverty. Be it as it may, the Buhari/Idiagbon regime was also noted for the "go back to the land" programme, which was a poverty alleviation strategy (Arogundade et al, 2011). Notwithstanding, fighting corruption through the WAI initiative was obviously of prior interest to the regime than the 'go back to the land' programme.

On assuming the leadership mantle of Nigeria in 1985, Gen. Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida came up with a plan on poverty alleviation in continuance of the previous development plans (Ogunleye, 2006). Gen. Babangida is known for his enunciation of a plethora of poverty alleviation programmes more than any other Head of State in Nigeria. The blueprint of Babangida's rural development and poverty alleviation policy centered on encouraging the role of women, eradication of rural illiteracy, supporting rural markets, rural construction and infrastructures creation of rural credit system that is grassroots oriented etc (Ogunleye, 2006). To make this a reality, the regime articulated and implemented a number of poverty eradication programmes including; 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 (Arogundade et al, 2011).

Another programme initiated by Gen. Babangida was the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI) which sought to open up rural areas via construction of feeder roads and provision of basic amenities that would turn them into production centres for the national economy. The DFFRI was on offer as the most comprehensive programme on the nation's war against poverty. Considering the truism that rural populations in Nigeria are significantly poorer than their urban counterparts, this programme targeted this core group. Its premise was just not to open the rural areas, but the hinterland, which ordinarily would not have been accessible. It also aimed at promoting rural employment based on the assumption that if rural infrastructure, such as electricity, was available in the villages, many welders, for example, would operate from there, instead of scrambling for spaces in congested urban centres. On the other hand, DFRRI assumed that if the hinterland was linked by road, farmers would transport their products to the markets easily and at cheaper rates, thereby reducing the cost of food production as a way out of poverty (Arogundade et al, 2011).

Another programme of Babangida's regime that tried to head-off the scourge of poverty by targeting the agricultural sector was the Nigerian Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA). The Authority was intended to reduce the prevalence of subsistence agriculture in the country and in its place infuse large scale commercial farming by assisting farmers with inputs and developing land for them to the point of planting, at subsidized rates. While all these programmes collapsed at one point or the other, nonetheless, at least one of these programmes enunciated by the Babangida regime –the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) – has had some years of staying power up till date. By its mandate, NDE was to design and implement programmes to combat mass unemployment and articulate policies aimed at developing work programmes with labour intensive potentials. From its programmes and its staying power, this was a scheme that could be adjudged as the most successful of Babangida's poverty alleviation policies. Babangida saw unemployment as one of the key issues challenging the agenda of government since it posed a potential danger to the socio-political and economic system of the nation (Arogundade et al, 2011). The NDE is acclaimed to have made tremendous impact as the initiative exists till date, but it is imperative to mention that these programmes did not meet the general expectation of the masses as they have not brought about concrete socioeconomic transformation in the quality of life of the citizens. It is often claimed that the NDE has empowered hundreds of thousands of youths and women through its skills acquisition and vocational training programmes, but events have proven that this empowerment is lacking in many components as they were not properly designed and followed-up. As such, the depth and strength of the impact of the empowerment scheme has remained an issue of concern. As a matter of fact, the standards of living of the acclaimed beneficiaries have not been made any better as many of them soon ceased to live on the skills and vocations acquired from the scheme due to realization that the initiative has no prospects of tremendously transforming their lives as would expect. Babangida's regime is also notable for the 'Better Life for Rural Women' programme championed by his wife, Mariam Babangida.

The regime of Late Gen. Sani Abacha (1993 – 1998) was known to midwife the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) in Nigeria's quest for a way out of debilitating poverty, as this was the period that marked Nigeria's relapse into the global

bracket of 25 poorest nations. Significantly, FEAP existed for about two years (1998 – 2000) during which it received funding to the tune of N7 billion out of which about N3.3 billion was disbursed as loans to about 21,000 cooperative societies nationwide that were production oriented. Such projects targeted for assistance included poultry production, garri making, soap making and animal husbandry (Arogundade et al, 2011). Like her predecessor , Mariam Abacha, also championed the Family Support Programme (FSP), which aimed at making government poverty eradication policies gender sensitive with particular attention paid to alleviating the perceived ill-treatment received by women in the society. Despite these laudable efforts, however, anti-poverty policies in Nigeria before the advent of the Fourth Republic generally failed to address the problem of extreme poverty and hardship that has inhibited the progress of the country and its citizens over the period. As a consequence, the social menace of poverty continues to constitute a major hindrance to all practical efforts at engendering good governance for development in Nigeria.

Thus, realizing that poverty would be a major obstacle to his administration's effort at recording meaningful development strides, President Olusegun Obasanjo, whose government came into power in 1999 as the first government under the current democratic dispensation, spontaneously announced an anti-poverty programme known as 'Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP). This was subsequently renamed 'National Poverty Eradication Programme' (NAPEP). The programme aimed at eradicating absolute poverty in the country by providing job opportunities to the growing population of jobless Nigerians. The NAPEP involves four main schemes which are:

- Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES);
- Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS);
- Social Welfare Services Scheme (SOWESS); and
- Natural Resources Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS) (Alese, 2013).

The Youth Empowerment Scheme consists of Capacity Acquisition Programme (CAP), Mandatory Attachment Programme (MAP) and Credit Delivery Programme (CDP). The Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS) consists of Rural Transport Programme (RTP), Rural Energy Programme (REP), Rural Water Programme (RWP) and Rural Communication Programme (RCP). The Social Welfare Services Scheme (SOWESS) consists of Qualitative Education Programme (QEP), Primary Health Care Programme (PHP), Farmers Empowerment Programme (FEP) and Social Service Programme (SSP). The National Resource Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS) consists of Agricultural Resource Programme (ARP), Water Resource Programme (WRP), Solid Minerals Resource Programme (SMRP) and Environmental Protection Programme (EPP) (Aliyu, 2001, p. 33, quoted in Alese, 2013).

As noted by Arogundade et al (2011), the difference between NAPEP and past poverty reduction agencies is that it is not a sector project implementation agency but a coordination facility that ensures that the core poverty eradication Ministries were effective. However, Ajakaiye and Adeyeye (2001) observe that a major pitfall of the programme is the apparent lack of ownership of the programme by the major stakeholders, that is, the beneficiaries which may create an impression that it is their own share of the national cake. Whatever be the case, however, it is unarguable that this

scheme has not made any significant impact on poverty reduction effort in Nigeria. Apparently, despite the enormous amount of resources expended pursuant to the implementation of the programme, the rate of joblessness has continued to grow on daily basis just as extreme poverty has remained unabated in the country. In the whole, therefore, regardless of the numerous poverty eradication programmes launched by the various governments in Nigeria, the country is yet to be free of the scourge of poverty. The ugly trend has remained persistent, constituting one of the major impediments to good governance and development in the country. It is in view of this that the subsequent section of this paper is devoted to examining the underscoring factors to the general failure of poverty reduction policies in Nigeria to significantly reduce the rate of poverty in the country since independence in 1960 till date.

Major Challenges of Poverty Reduction Policies in Nigeria

All poverty reduction policies or porgrammes in Nigeria from inception generally suffer from a myriad of uniformed set of constraints, which reduce their potency to achieve their expected aims and objectives in the long run. Scholars and researchers have consistently been in agreement in terms of the findings of their various diagnoses of the core challenges to the effectiveness of anti-poverty policies in Nigeria. For instance, in his analysis of the major problems of poverty eradication programmes in Nigeria, Ajakaiye (2003) has identified a number of factors. He summarizes the banes of poverty reduction programmes in Nigeria as followed:

- Policy inconsistency and poor governance;
- Ineffective targeting of the poor (leading to leakage of benefits to unintended beneficiaries);
- Unwieldy scope of the programmes resulting in resources being thinly spread among projects;
- Overlapping of functions which ultimately led to institutional rivalry and conflicts;
- Lack of complementarities from beneficiaries;
- Uncoordinated sectoral policy initiatives;
- Lack of involvement of social partners and other stakeholders in planning, implementation and evaluation; and
- Poor human capital development and inadequate funding (Ajakaiye, 2003).

Jega (2003) unequivocally attests that he wholly agrees with Ajakaiye on the above mentioned factors as the main barriers to effective and pro-active poverty eradication programmes in Nigeria.

Lending credence to the earlier assertion that scholars are in consensus in the presentation of their results on factors responsible for the failure of poverty reduction policies in the country, the reasons given by Arogundade et al (2011) are substantially similar to those mentioned above by Ajakaiye. According to Arogundade et al, poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria failed largely due to the fact that:

- They were mostly not designed to alleviate poverty.

- They lacked a clearly defined policy framework with proper guidelines for poverty alleviation.
- They suffered from polity instability, political interference, policy and macroeconomic dislocations.
- They also lacked continuity.
- They are in most cases poorly implemented.
- They are characterized by corruption on the part of government officials and public servants (Arogundade et al, 2011).

Corroborating the views of Ajakaiye and Arogundade et al, the Presidential Panel on Streamlining and Rationalization of Poverty Alleviation Institutions and Agencies in its main report of 1999 identifies the salient factors it considers instrumental to the ineffectiveness of poverty eradication measures in Nigeria as:

i. Gross mismanagement and lack of financial discipline;
ii. Poor and inconsistent funding;
iii. Policy inconsistencies occasioned by frequent changes in Government and absence of in-built sustainability mechanism; and
iv. Absence of a coordinating body necessary for effective implementation, co-ordination,
planning, monitoring and evaluation of achievements and constraints (FRN, 1999).

In furtherance of the same line of argument, Egware (1997) broadly categorized the reasons for the failure of poverty reduction programmes in Nigeria into two, namely; designing and implementation, policy acceptability which are tagged as 'aspirin solution' and 'benefit capture'. The 'aspirin solution' refers to a situation where instant solutions are prescribed to treat the perceived symptoms of a problem without considering the root causes(s) of the problem. He asserts, for instance, that a health centre may be recommended for a community with a high incidence of illness that only needs good drinking water to stay healthy. The 'benefit capture', according to him, depicts a scenario where benefits that should accrue to the beneficiary of designed projects are 'captured' away at every stage of the project development. Olobatoke (2005) alludes that other reasons for the failure of poverty alleviation programmes includes their adhoc nature, poor design and execution. Inadequate staffing and equipment also contribute to the failure of poverty alleviation programmes. In addition, it has been noted that the scope of the activities of most agencies set up for PAP is too broad. Consequently, the available resources are thinly spread into too many activities. An example is the case of DFRRI and Better Life for Rural Women whose programmes covered almost every sector and overlapped with many other existing programmes (Olobatoke, 2005).

Wrong location of poverty alleviation projects can also lead to failure in achieving the set objectives. Designers and planners often make the mistake of sitting projects in places of their own choice without recourse to their appropriateness in view of the population which may be served by such projects. These choices were often informed by personal interests in terms of religions, politics, ethnicity or social inclination. The use of over-sophisticated equipment is another cause of failure. In an attempt to impress certain individuals, some government/donors often provide sophisticated equipment to

communities instead of simple but equally effective and efficient machine. When this equipment got damaged, the programmes too collapsed because there were no spare parts or the technical know-how to operate and maintain them. Besides, the running cost of such equipment may be beyond the reach of the beneficiaries of the project. It is therefore important to put into consideration the maintenance and operation of equipment as constant breakdown of equipment often discourage young entrepreneurs (Aliyu, 2002).

Moreover, the numerous poverty eradication programmes failed to achieve set objectives because poverty alleviation policies of successive government have always remained a mere political slogan or statement. Government at the Federal, State and Local Government levels in Nigeria have always introduced one form of poverty alleviation programmes to better the lots of the people, but, no sooner that the policies are formulated and launched with fun-fare that they are abandoned. The implementation aspect of the policies has been weak as people who manage the programme at one level or the other continue to pursue their own personal benefits at the expense of the government. Lack of proper funding on the part of the government is also a problem. As good as the latest policy of the Federal Government on poverty alleviation would have been, co-ordinators at the state and local government levels have turned the exercise to their property and they do and undo at the stage of servicing the people the program was meant to serve (Ogunleye, 2006). As a result, most poverty reduction policies did not live up to expectation due to undue personalization of the programmes by the overseers.

The Poverty Reduction Programmes of Nigeria, like many other programmes in the nation, are always brilliant in conception but their implementations are anything but effective thereby vitiating the objectives. While some of the poverty reduction programmes are vague in scope as a result of the weak and ad-hoc nature of their conception, design and identification, some are conceived ab initio to fail as they were only designed for the benefit of just very few privileged instead of the target poor. In addition, their targets were vaguely and loosely stated thereby giving room for lack of clear focus. Moreover, corruption, nepotism, unnecessary politicization, over-centralization, uncoordinated management, ineffective or poor monitoring mechanisms, etc characterized most of the programmes. Additionally, failure to insulate the poverty reduction programmes from instability within the political, macroeconomic and policy environments significantly contributed to the ineffectiveness of poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria (Oyemomi, 2003). This combination of factors can, in short, be rightly said to be a succinct summary of all the ills befalling successive poverty eradication policies in Nigeria over the years.

To be more precise, Aliyu (2002) argues that the recent National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) also suffers from problems associated with implementation like its predecessors. He identified the problems with the programme to include:

- Weak response and commitment of the Federal Ministries on the roles of members of the State Coordination Committee (SCC) and contributions to the SCC;
- Weak capacities of the State and LGA offices of the ministries in generating and processing the required data in their field operations;

- Weak facilities and logistical support for NAPEP to effectively monitor all poverty related operations in the LGAs; and
- Lack of a compendium of information on all operational NGOs sorted out by States and Local Government Areas (Aliyu, 2002:59).

More so, poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon that must be attacked with a multidirectional and integrative approach. However, the approaches had been so unidirectional that little achievements made in one direction, if any, are usually eroded by problems emanating from other dimensions (Oyemomi, 2003). The Federal Office of Statistics (1996:124) also offers its own view of the constraints of poverty alleviation programmes as thus: "perhaps worst of all, is the administrative nightmare in terms of bureaucracies in the provision of some services such as rural credit, credit to SSEs, rural electrification, education and health."

Mention must also be made of the non-inclusion or involvement of the target masses at both the conception, designing and implementation stages of policies that are meant to affect their lives as being another major reason why poverty eradication programmes have not made the desired impact in Nigeria. Indeed, successive governments in Nigeria have always failed to carry the target population that poverty alleviation programmes are meant for along in the entire process of initiating and executing anti-poverty programmes. The usual scenario is often that poverty eradication programmes are designed by the government and launched for public consumption without carrying out proper investigation to ascertain the most pressing needs of the people and seeking their opinions on the most effective means of addressing them. The end result of this top-bottom approach to poverty eradication is not only that poverty alleviation policies end up not solving the socioeconomic problems of the poor masses, it also propels the people to quickly get disenchanted and withdraw their patronage and support for the initiatives. Another problem in this direction is the issue of elitism. Both the government and its poverty alleviation programmes' managers in Nigeria apparently appear to consist mainly of 'big men' at the corridors of power, who are far distanced from the ordinary people for whom poverty reductions policies are designed. Entrusting big men, who are not at the reach of the poor masses with such sensitive task as overseeing poverty reduction programmes underscores the reason why corruption, favouritism, cleintelism and lack of accountability and transparency have remained the inherent factors bedevilling all poverty eradication efforts in Nigeria. Sincere and meaningful poverty alleviation programmes ought to be managed by the people they are meant for themselves, howbeit, under due watch of the government. This would enable the masses to hold the mangers accountable and responsible for their actions.

An expectedly result oriented poverty eradication strategy meant to up-root the scourge of poverty in any human society ideally ought to be research driven. Poverty is a hydra-headed social menace with multifaceted characteristics. Thus adequate understanding of the particular nature of the prevailing circumstance in a given society is a roadmap to evolving robust, pro-active and purpose-driven anti-poverty measures that would make lasting impacts. Achieving this height demands that thorough diagnostic studies are conducted to ensure a comprehensive analysis and understanding of all variables and components that are necessary to institutionalizing meaningful poverty alleviation frameworks. The absence of this practice is among the several reasons for the

failure of anti-poverty strategies in Nigeria. Successive governments in Nigeria have been very good at haphazardly launching measures for combating the high rate of poverty in the country without anchoring them on well-conducted research. Owing to this lack of diagnosis of the intrinsic nature of poverty in the land and the prescription of appropriate sensitivity treatment for the ailment, most poverty reduction measures have tended to be mere anti-dotes to the symptoms of poverty rather than actual cure for the illness itself.

It is also important to bring to consciousness the fact that there is virtually no poverty eradication policy that has ever been introduced in Nigeria without clear provision in the policy document for active civil society participation in the programme execution process. The reasons for this are to provide a platform for proper citizens' representation; to ensure appreciable degree of transparency as well as to avoid favouritism, nepotisms, and ethnicism or tribalism and related underhand practices in the programmes' implementation process. However, in practical sense, government poverty alleviation programmes' managers only allow the relevant Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) partial or limited access to observe or monitor the process of execution of most of the poverty eradication programmes due to their selfish motives. At other times, rather opaque procedures are introduced during programmes' execution and CSOs suffer complete exclusion from the process, which allows wide range of chance to the regulators of the programmes to compromise and sabotage the entire process for their own interest. This undesired development largely accounts for the wide erosion of public confidence and trust in government as not being sincere in the on-going fight against the menace of endemic poverty in the country.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Right from the dawn of independence in 1960 till date, there has been a wide realization by successive governments in Nigeria, that absolute poverty among the citizens could hamper the dream and aspiration of engendering good governance and socioeconomic development in the country. As an upshot, governments, both civilians and their military counterparts, have consistently demonstrated tremendous effort at addressing the problem of poverty through the introduction of various forms of poverty eradication measures. Some of the past and present programmes aimed at tackling the scourge of poverty in Nigeria include; National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP), Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB), Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), the Green Revolution (GR), the Peoples' Bank, Community Banks, Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI), Nigerian Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Better Life for Rural Women (BLRW), Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) and National Poverty Eradication Programme' (NAPEP) among others.

Despite the differences in their nomenclatures and the fact that these anti-poverty programmes were launched by different governments at different times in the history of the country, one common fact about them is that they were all aimed at eradicating or reducing the social evil of absolute poverty in the Nigerian society. This relentless effort on the part of governments is propelled by a common belief that meaningful development progress cannot take root in the country in the face of persistent acute poverty among the

people. The effort is also hinged on the supposition that one intrinsic feature or proof of good governance practice in any country is practical reduction in general poverty rate and improved quality of life for the masses of the citizenry.

However, regardless of the pragmatic effort and huge financial resources expended by successive governments in Nigeria in a bid to tackle the challenge of poverty in the country, the menace has continued to worsen on daily basis, bringing all government efforts to naught. As a result, good governance has remained a dream rather than reality. The sole reason for this unimpressive development is the general failure of all government anti-poverty measures to make the expected level of impact in terms of reducing absolute poverty in the country.

Notwithstanding the prevailing situation, it is the opinion of this paper that the attainment of the expected height in poverty reduction and the institutionalization of the long-desired good governance for socioeconomic change are possible if appropriate strategies are adopted to tackle the major challenges confronting government poverty alleviation policies in the country. In the light of this, it is important to observe that a lot of strategies have been offered by previous authors on how to overcome the myriad of challenges identified as facing government poverty reduction policies in Nigeria. However, as its own contribution to the existing body of knowledge in this regard, the paper puts forth the following recommendations as measures for reinvigorating and increasing the effectiveness of poverty reduction policies in Nigeria in order to make the desired impact and pave way for the institutionalization of good governance and all-round development in the country:

Government at all levels must demonstrate strong political will and absolute sincerity of purpose to rid the society of endemic poverty and hardship. In this sense, the current war against absolute poverty should be taken to a greater height. Bolder steps must be taken to ensure that those who sabotage government poverty alleviation programmes for their selfish interests at the expense of the poor masses are brought to book, no matter their status in the society.

Effective implementation strategies should be employed, and there is the need for proper tracking of every stage in the execution of government poverty alleviation programmes to ensure strict adherence to set standards. Relevant Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) should be made important stakeholders and close monitors of the implementation process of all government anti-poverty policies. This is to keep an eagle eye on the selfish and manipulative tendencies of the officials and executors of government poverty alleviation policies who often mortgage the interest of the poor masses for their personal interests.

All subsequent poverty alleviation measures in Nigeria should stem from well-conducted researches as that would substantially increase their impact levels on the social and economic lives of the target beneficiaries. Basing government poverty reduction policies on well-established research findings would also serve as a proof of sincere commitment on the part of government in the current fight against the menace of severe poverty among the masses.

The top-bottom approach to poverty alleviation must be stopped and the target beneficiaries should be made to be involved in the conception, design and implementation of poverty reduction programmes. This would not only create in them a

great sense of responsibility and belonging in the entire process, it would also illicit their patronage and support for the programmes, thereby making them successful.

The phenomenon of using 'big-men' at corridors of power as managers of government poverty alleviation programmes should equally be stopped. Ordinary people with proven honesty and untainted integrity should be selected to manage the programmes under the supervision of the government. Granting the directly affected masses opportunity to manage programmes meant for them would help to eliminate associated illegalities that often characterize most government policies, and increase the level of accountability and responsiveness in the management of public affairs.

Also, all poverty alleviation programmes or projects should be located at the reach of the poor masses that are to benefit from them. It is also needful that government poverty reduction programmes are designed and conveyed in the language and manner that the ordinary people understand. This essence of this is to increase the programmes' attraction levels to the people and stimulate their interest in opportunities that are meant to transform their socioeconomic lives.

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