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Social Exclusion Theory and Poverty Alleviation: Addressing Inequality in Nigeria Under Buhari Administration

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Abstract: *Over the years, various administrations have undertaken different economic policies and programmes with the aim of reducing, if not totally eradicating, poverty in Nigeria. These programmes were expected to at least raise the standard of living of Nigerians yet many are still economically alienated. Either these programmes are the causes of poverty themselves or that their implementations have the tendency of engendering poverty and widening economic inequality in Nigeria. This paper therefore investigated Buhari's administration economic policies on poverty alleviation programmes and to examine how his poverty alleviation programmes have addressed economic inequality and poverty in Nigeria. This study is qualitative in nature and adopted explanatory research design. Documentary method of data collection was considered appropriate; therefore, data were collected through secondary sources such as article, and journals. The data generated in the course of this study were analyzed using descriptive analysis while Social Exclusion Theory served as the theoretical frame work of analysis. The study found out that Buhari's Social Intervention Programmes were more politically motivated than to address the problem of inequality and poverty in the country. Among others, the study recommends that the federal government should adopt economic policies that are attainable, inclusive and sustainable, especially while formulating poverty alleviation programmes. This means embracing democratic governance that is sincere, accountable, practicable and inclusive in nature, as this will lead to a proper functioning of the institutions of governance and bring about equitable distribution of wealth and income. Economic policies of government should also be examined and measured from their inclusiveness and sustainability.*

Keywords: *Social Exclusion, Poverty, Poverty Alleviation, and Inequality.*

Introduction

Over the years, various administrations have undertaken different economic policies and programmes with the aim of reducing, if not totally eradicating, poverty in Nigeria. These programmes were expected to at least raise the standard of living of Nigerians yet many are still alienated from basic needs of life (Arisi-Nwugballa et al., 2016). Either these programmes are the causes of poverty themselves or that their implementations have the tendency of engendering poverty. Nigeria history has been dominated by economic policies that alienated the people from the economy and thereby engender poverty to the majority of the population. This could be traced from pre-independence. The economic system of the colonial era was highly regulated and the policy was aimed at protecting British interests both of the government establishments and the sponsored trading firms (Dauda, 2017). This policy was perhaps best reflected in agriculture-where all activities were directed at subsistence farming and the only commercial production was basically made for export. No genuine effort was made towards developing the technical and managerial capacity of the local farmers beyond that of being mere producers of primary products or raw materials. This implies that little or no research was encouraged which could have provided the platform for the local farmers to improve their technical knowledge and develop better farm management practices and administration in their business.

However, it remains a paradox-poverty in the midst of plenty and rising in periods of economic growth (Omoyibo, 2013). This may be true to the extent that Nigeria is endowed with human and natural resources and has had an increasing national income; yet, a larger section of her population languishes in poverty due to uneven distribution and allocation of income and wealth (Oshewolo, 2010). Dauda (2017) note that poverty in Nigeria differs with the pattern in many other countries given that even with the economic growth recorded, poverty is still on the increase with the North-West and North –East geopolitical zones leading in the poverty indices. This situation is at variance with the experiences of developing countries in Europe, America and Asia where economic growth results in poverty reduction (Jhingan, 2007). This lends credence to the long-standing assumption that the relationship between poverty, economic growth and development is not even. Several poverty reduction policies and programmes have been adopted to alleviate or eradicate poverty in Nigeria. Some of these were sectoral interventions but their goal was poverty reduction (Oshewolo, 2010).

Even with this wide array of programmes, poverty alleviation has remained a mirage in Nigeria.

Arisi-Nwugballa, Elom, and Onyeizugbe (2016) opine that the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) and post-SAP eras in Nigeria were characterized by active government intervention in poverty alleviation initiatives with significant improvement in living standards. disputes this claim by asserting that SAP removed all the social benefits and welfare services previously enjoyed by the generality of the masses. Anyanwu (1992, p. 5) also berates SAP for promoting the emergence of an ‘unregulated and dependent capitalist development model, while allowing only a supportive role for the government in a refurbished economic environment of highly reduced government ownership and control of enterprises’. He suggested that SAP allowed poverty and inflation to flourish by the removal of subsidies on petroleum products and fertilizer, trade liberalization, deregulation, privatization and commercialization.

Many reasons have been given for the abysmal performance of poverty alleviation initiatives in Nigeria- poor design and implementation, policy inconsistencies and discontinuity, poor funding and corruption (Elumilade, Asaolu, & Adereti, 2006) . Arisi-Nwugballa et al. (2016) note that poverty alleviation initiatives tend to be geared towards providing financial credit and grants to drive the development of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) leading to job creation and capacity utilization. Some of these interventions enhanced the incomes of the target beneficiaries engaged in MSMEs but this could not be sustained due to obstacles such as the high cost of running businesses, infrastructural decay and competition caused by the proliferation of cheaper imported substitutes. The articulation of government policies and programmes to spur innovations, entrepreneurship, infrastructural development and improved welfare has proven to be inadequate to address the poverty situation in Nigeria.

The causes of persistent poverty and the impact of these programmes on alleviating poverty has been contentious. Some studies in Nigeria have argued to the contrary, that the poor has benefited more from these policies (Aigbokhan, 2008). But Aigbokhan (2000) found that there was positive real growth throughout the period of his study, 1980 to 1997, yet poverty and inequality still worsened. This negates the principle of the "trickle down" phenomenon underlying the view that growth improves poverty and inequality, and this can be traced to the nature of these economic policies. It is in this respect that this study evaluates economic alienation as the main cause of poverty in Nigeria with particular focus on Buhari's first term economic policies and poverty alleviation programmes.

Definition of Terms

Poverty

Being multidimensional, poverty takes different forms or typologies of which three broad ones can be identified as follows: Physiological deprivation, Social deprivation and Human freedom deprivation the incidence of poverty (head count) is to be distinguished from the depth, the breath and severity of poverty. And all these are not to be confused with inequality.

These three concepts derive from the attempt to determine how much poverty there is. On the basis of some norm (poverty line) the number of the poor (incidence) will be the total population whose per capita household expenditure is below the line: the depth of a person's poverty is the average percentage by which his/her per capita expenditure falls below the poverty line. Because in Nigeria there is no officially proclaimed poverty line, the Federal Office of Statistics (FOS) has selected one base on two-third means per capita expenditure. The extreme poverty line is one-third of mean per capita household expenditure.

Poverty Alleviation

According to United Nations Development Program, (2016), poverty alleviation means strategies and programmes put in place by relevant stakeholders both home and abroad to address inequality gap in any given society, with implementation of these strategies and programmes requiring adequate capital to achieve its full benefits. Shitile &Sule, (2019) also sees it as a set of measures put in place to eradicate poverty. In the words of Inam, (2015) successive governments in Nigeria have initiated and implemented diverse policies and programmes as part of their development strategies aimed at poverty reduction . Toluwase & Omonijo, (2013) observed that some of these include programmes to generate employment, enhance income earning, increase productivity and provision of basic amenities like social and economic infrastructure. Attempts to eradicate or mitigate poverty are not new; legislation and community efforts to assist the poor are reported at least as far back as biblical times. Poverty exists and has existed in every country, and the struggle against poverty has been just as widespread. Poverty reduction lies at the heart of development discourse and practice.

Approaches to poverty alleviation require the implementation, of mutually consistent and reinforcing multifaceted packages of policies plans and programmes.

Inequality:

There are three main types of inequality; Income Inequality, Pay Inequality, Wealth Inequality Income inequality is the extent to which income is distributed unevenly in a group of people. Income is not just the money received through pay, but all the money received from employment (wages, salaries, bonuses etc.), investments, such as interest on savings accounts and dividends from shares of stock, savings, state benefits, pensions (state, personal, company) and rent. A person's pay is different to their income. Pay refers to payment from employment only. This can be on an hourly, monthly or annual basis, is typically paid weekly or monthly and may also include bonuses. Pay inequality therefore describes the difference between people's pay and this may be within one company or across all pay received. Wealth refers to the total amount of assets of an individual or household. This may include financial assets, such as bonds and stocks, property and private pension rights. Wealth inequality therefore refers to the unequal distribution of assets in a group of people.

Social Exclusion

Social exclusion is the process in which individuals are blocked from (or denied full access to) various rights, opportunities and resources that are normally available to members of a different group, and which are fundamental to social integration and observance of human rights within that particular group (e.g., housing, employment, healthcare, civic engagement, democratic participation, and due process).

Theoretical Framework: This paper adopted social exclusion theory **(Red Lenoir 1970)**

Social exclusion or **social Marginalization** is the social disadvantage and relegation to the fringe of society. It is a term used widely in Europe and was first used in France. It is used across disciplines including education, sociology, psychology, politics and economics.

Social exclusion is the process in which individuals are blocked from (or denied full access to) various rights, opportunities and resources that are normally available to members of a different group, and which are fundamental to social integration and observance of human rights within that particular group (e.g., housing, employment, healthcare, civic engagement, democratic participation, and due process).

Alienation or disenfranchisement resulting from social exclusion can be connected to a person's social class, race, skin color, religious affiliation, ethnic origin, educational status, childhood relationships, living standards, and or political opinions, and appearance. Such exclusionary forms of discrimination may also apply to people with a disability, minorities, drug users, institutional care leavers, the elderly and the young. Anyone who appears to deviate in any way from perceived norms of a population may thereby become subject to coarse or subtle forms of social exclusion.

The outcome of social exclusion is that affected individuals or communities are prevented from participating fully in the economic, social, and political life of the society in which they live. This may result in resistance in the form of demonstrations, protests or lobbying from the excluded people. The concept of social exclusion has led to the researcher's conclusion that in many European countries the impact of social disadvantages, that influence the well-being of all people, including with special needs, has an increasingly negative impact.

Most of the characteristics listed here are present together in studies of social exclusion, due to exclusion's multidimensionality.mAnother way of articulating the definition of social exclusion is as follows:

Social exclusion is a multidimensional process of progressive social rupture, detaching groups and individuals from social relations and institutions and preventing them from full participation in the normal, normatively prescribed activities of the society in which they live.

In an alternative conceptualization, social exclusion theoretically emerges at the individual or group level on four correlated dimensions: insufficient access to social rights, material deprivation, limited social participation and a lack of normative integration. It is then regarded as the combined result of personal risk factors (age, gender, race); macro-societal changes (demographic, economic and labor market developments, technological innovation, the evolution of social norms); government legislation and social policy; and the actual behavior of businesses, administrative organisations and fellow citizens.

Poverty Alleviation and Economic Policies in Nigeria

The government has over the years introduced some macroeconomic policies to reduce poverty. The focus was more on Agriculture policies and rural development policies. Although other policies like Trade, Fiscal and Monetary, were also implemented but they were centred mostly toward the development of the Agriculture-sector which the government at each regime believe was the basis to fight against poverty in the country.

In 1956, the colonial government inaugurated a ten-year development and welfare plan for the country. This welfare package was to take care of needs of the masses. From 1962 to 1985, the four development plans of the Nigerian government contained welfare programmes aimed at enhancing the living standard of the populace. Besides these development plans various policies and programmes were designed to bring about economic growth that could trickle down poverty thereby leading to higher standards of living for the populace, the poor inclusive (Mbanefoh, 1988).

Some of these programme include; Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), Better Life / Family Support Programme (BLPFSP), the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Rural Financing Institution (i.e. The People's Bank of Nigeria (PBN), The Community Banks), Petroleum (Special) Trust Fund (PTF), Mass Eradication Programme / Global 2000, the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP). Poverty is mostly in rural areas as such most of the programme are aimed at helping the rural population. Particular attention is paid to the roles of the National Directorate of

Employment (NDE) and the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI). Also since independence, the government has been stressing the provision of social overhead capital and allowing private entrepreneurs provide directly productive activities as a way of developing the rural sector as well as reducing poverty Shitile &Sule, (2019).

Since the emergence of Buhari's administration, Nigeria has witnessed an increase in the number of youths who are unemployed and constitute serious threat to the peaceful existence of the state. Trapped with the geometric increase of jobless youths, the administration was left with no option than to initiate certain schemes that would help ameliorate the suffering of the people. It was on this philosophy to give the citizens the needed sense of belonging that the following programmes were launched.

The National Social Intervention Programmes

The programme is aimed at poverty reduction, fight against hunger and poor human development indices (FGN 2017, 50). It is coordinated by the Social Investment Office within the office of the Vice President of Nigeria with a national coordinator. To ensure credible targeting of the poor and vulnerable, a National Social Register has been established. NSIP has four suite programmes designed and implemented at the national level. (FRN, 2017:50). They are:

National Home Grown School feeding Programme (NHGSFP)

The objectives of the NHGSFP are to:

- Improve the enrollment of primary school children in Nigeria and reduce the current dropout rates from primary school which is estimated at 30 percent. It is also to address the poor nutrition and health status of many children arising from poverty, which has affected the learning outcome of the children
- Stimulate local agricultural production and boost the income of famers by creating a viable and ready market through the school feeding programme.

It aims to create jobs along the value chain and provide a multiplier effect for economic growth and development (National Social Investment Office, 2017:8).

The N-Power Programme

N-power is one of the social intervention schemes initiated by the Federal Government of Nigeria under the present administration of President Mohammad Buhari. It was designed to help provide job creation and empowerment for young Nigerians to acquire and develop life-long skills to become solution providers in their communities and to become players in the domestic and global markets. In the quest to actualize the policy frame and safe guard the needful social safety nets, N-power is aimed at addressing the challenges of unemployment especially among graduate youths. It targeted 500,000 Nigerian graduates, 25,000 non-graduates while N-power Build targets 75,000 non-graduates recruitment. Through N-power, young Nigerians youths will be empowered with the necessary tools to go and create, develop, build, fix and work on exceptional ideas, projects and enterprises that will change the communities, the economy and the nation (Wikipedia, 2021).

However, the programme has been designed for young Nigerians between the ages of 18-35 years. The focus is to provide the young graduates and non-graduates with the skills, tools and livelihood to enable them advance from unemployment to employment, entrepreneurship and innovation. Also, the first phase of this programme is targeted towards Nigeria's critical needs in education, agriculture, and technology construction, creative and artisanal industries. It will also prepare Nigerian youths for a global outstanding push where young Nigerians can export their services to work on global projects that can earn Nigeria foreign exchange. Accordingly, the goals of N-power included the following; to reduce the rate of unemployment in the country, bring about a system that would facilitate transferring of employability, entrepreneurial and technical skills and to bring solutions to poorly public service and government diversification policy.

Conditional Cash Money Transfer

In order to cushion the high level of poverty among poor Nigerians, President Buhari introduced the payment of #5000 each to over one million indigent citizens of Nigeria in which youths were among. This is one of the social intervention schemes which aimed at addressing poverty among the Nigerian citizens. It is important to note that few months of excuses about the state of the nation's poor economic fortunes; Nigerians became excited following the commencement of the payment of #5000 naira conditional cash transfer. The programme has never been left unchallenged but has received a lot of criticisms from different quarters including important stakeholders in the government. Some argued that the poverty alleviation is caricature of youth empowerment. For instance, some questions had been asked on the yardstick for measuring poverty in Nigeria and the value of #5000 monthly to these vulnerable Nigerians. These are some of the questions which have been used to criticize the programme.

However, the initiation of multifarious social schemes in Nigeria by different political regimes have become a source of empowerment to the citizens especially the vulnerable youths who are jobless and roaming the streets. Social schemes and packages like Graduate Internship Scheme, N-power and Conditional transfer of money to the youths have become succor and empowerment. The beneficiaries are bent on using the acquired knowledge to develop themselves and the entire society. The implication is the involvement of the youths in the decision making process and imparting economically to the growth of the economy.

Trader Moni

Trader Moni is the latest strain of the Federal Government's Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP), targeted at the economically most vulnerable, to combat mass poverty. *Trader Moni* was launched on August 14, in five markets in Lagos. According to Laolu Akande, chief spokesperson to the Vice President YemiOsinbajo, *Trader Moni* would grant a minimum of 30, 000 loans in each of the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Abuja. Also, according to him, the scheme has taken off in Lagos, Kano and Abia states. Every state would have 30, 000 beneficiaries. However, Lagos and Kano, being the most populous of the 36 states, are each likely to get more than 30, 000 beneficiaries. If well implemented, with zero tolerance for abuse and corruption, *Trader Moni* stands becoming the most radical pro-poor financial infrastructure, aimed at tackling mass poverty, by boosting all cadres of enterprise.

With a Nigerian population of around 200 million, giving soft loans to only two million could appear rather funny. Yet, it is doubtful if ever before the poverty question had been this systematically approached, targeted at expanding existing enterprises, no matter how small the scale. Yes, there had been pro-poor efforts before — what past governments called poverty alleviation programmes (PAP). That swirled mainly around pooling funds to buy bikes and tricycles; and give these machines to citizens to operate, more or less on wet lease basis, after depositing a percentage deposit. Though these past schemes somewhat served their purposes — of alleviating poverty — they were most times driven by party patronage. That often led to abuses, and huge corruption; since many times, those who needed the help were not those that got it.

Trader Moni Social Welfare Intervention Policy of the Federal Government:

Issues, Challenges and Prospects

The TraderMoni is one of the federal government's social welfare policies aimed at addressing the challenges of income inequality through the funding of small businesses in the country in order to help boost the economic activities of small business owners. The scheme, which was activated on September 6, 2018, advances interest- and collateral-free loans starting with N10,000 to the lowest level of market traders (particularly market women and artisans) with a view to upgrading those who pay back up to N50,000. The program is a component of the Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP), an initiative of the Nigerian government's Bank of Industry (BOI) to boost access to credit for micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) (Galimberti, 2018).

The scheme was launched in partnership with the BoI, in order to enlarge government's financial inclusion agenda down to the grassroots, the bottom of the ladder, considering the contribution of petty traders to economic development of any nation. It is a federal government empowerment scheme to help alleviate poverty in Nigeria by empowering traders and artisans. Tradermoni is similar to MarketMoni which is another cash transfer loan scheme of the Federal Government under the same Social Investment Programmes, but they are not the same. While Marketmoni loans start at N50, 000 and target medium-scale traders, market women, artisans, and youth in market associations. Tradermoni loans on the other hand starts at N10, 000 and target petty traders and petty artisans.

This is the first time the federal government is involving the very bottom of Nigeria's economic pyramid for direct financial stimulus aimed at creating wealth within the informal sector of the economy through the trader moni intervention scheme. The federal government says the scheme has already been launched in 33 states, with two million people targeted nationwide. Vice President Yemi Osinbajo has been touring the states to inaugurate the scheme or check how it is being implemented. He has also been meeting with the traders and artisans and encouraging them to get involved. Previous regimes had targeted mostly big economic players, as in Corporate Nigeria and the middle class during the Olusegun Obasanjo administration, while the Goodluck Jonathan government benefited graduates and young aspiring entrepreneurs through its 'You Win' and 'Sure-P' programmes. Trader Moni is a laudable development because every sector of the economy needs the support and assistance of government to grow. The "Trader Moni scheme is targeted at petty traders, market women, artisans and small scale business enterprises to cater for ultra-micro enterprises. The policy of the federal government is to support businesses, not just big business but particularly small, medium-sized businesses and micro businesses. The whole idea is to ensure that the government gives whatever support to people to alleviate their businesses. For instance, if a trader is given N10,000 and able to pay back the loan within six months, then the trader is qualified to collect N15,000. If the person pays back the sum of N15,000, the person is qualified to get N20,000" and then N50,000, and then N100,000 (Osinbajo, 2018).

Performing the official launch, the Vice President of Nigeria, Professor Yemi Osinbajo said that; "the Traders' Moni programme was part of the federal government's social intervention aimed at funding micro business in the country." Osinbajo, who said no government in the history of the country has done such an economic boosting programme, said the All Progressives Congress (APC)-led government has done well in the area of people's welfare. The vice-president further noted that; the 'Trader Moni' programme will help in boosting micro and small scale businesses, petty trading and commercial activities across the country. Osinbajo, said that the beneficiaries would be given a loan of N10,000 each, which would be repayable within six months, adding that any of the beneficiaries that pay back the loan within the stipulated period would qualify for another bigger amount of N15,000. Speaking at the launching of the intervention policy, the Executive Director, Bank of Industry (BoI), Mrs Toyin Adeniji, noted that no fewer than 30,000 beneficiaries would have access to the loan. Adeniji further explained that the beneficiaries of the Trader Moni scheme are in all 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). According to her;

Our agents have already met the market women at their point of sales to register them. They would get the money and pay it back immediately through Mobile Wallet. In fact, many people have started receiving the alert. "Under 'Trader Moni', traders don't need any documents or property to collect N10,000 loan from the federal government. "They only need to register, get captured and receive the money through their phones. The repayment plan is for six months and beneficiaries would pay a paltry N250 interest on the N10,000 and qualify for a bigger loan thereafter.

Trader Moni Social Welfare Intervention Policy: A Critique

Commending President Muhammadu Buhari for giving priority to the welfare of Nigerians,

Osinbajo said there was the need for the people to reciprocate the president's good work by re-electing him in 2019. The VP was seen flashing the victory sign among the traders. The excitement elicited by the trader moni programme has been clouded by allegations that the All Progressives Congress (APC) led federal government is capitalizing on it to score cheap political yardage. For instance, the Vice President chose to launch the scheme in Osun State on September 7, 2018, barely two weeks to the governorship election of Saturday September 22, 2018, while the campaigns were on. The launch of the social intervention programme by the federal government in Osun State that was into an election in few weeks time by the APC government is seen as being too partisan as the vice president was seen openly campaigning for his own party, forgetting that APC may be the ruling party for today, but it is not the only political party in the country, or the only political party contesting the Osun state governorship election.

The major opposition party the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) accused the vice president of using the scheme for alleged “vote buying”. The trader Moni is being used as a tool of political patronage by the All Progressive Congress (APC) led federal government targeted at generating support for the party as against the stated aims or objectives of the policy. Also, a senator from Ekiti State, Biodun Olujimi, called on the Nigerian Senate to investigate the Trader Moni disbursements. She alleged to possess evidence to show that traders were asked to provide details of their Permanent Voters Cards (PVC), Bank Verification Number (BVN), and made to fill forms with “I Stand With Buhari” printed on them. She even alleged that some of the traders were defrauded and paid N8,000 instead of N10,000”. The media office of the vice president debunked the claims stating that the money being disbursed to the traders belongs to the Nigerian people and should not be used to promote the interests of any political party or candidate. A thorough probe will reveal the truth, and the public has the right to know if indeed it is being abused.

Given the exchange rate of the Naira to the Dollar, ten thousand Naira, which is equivalent of thirty dollars is too minute to boost any business in Nigeria in an environment where there are multiple taxations from the local government, state government and federal government by their agents. One of the major functions of the Microfinance banks is the responsibility of providing soft loans to small traders in order to boost their micro businesses. The government is accusing the Microfinance banks of making their interest rates so high that no low income trader would dare consider going to them for loan. The government seem to forget that it is her primary duty to regulate every sector of the Nigerian economy including the financial sector of which the Microfinance banks are part of, especially the interest rates of these lending house. The vice president participation in the trader moni scheme has rendered the scheme inefficient as it is now seen especially by the opposition, as kind of political patronage tool used to garner support for the ruling, as the vice president is always telling the market women in the markets he has visited so far to vote for the ruling party in 2019 general elections.

Implementation and Achievements of NSIP

Government has put in place machineries for the smooth running of the programme. To this effect, it has established State and National Database with the support of the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC). A policy Framework for all programmes under NSIP within the Nigeria Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (NERGP) has equally been formulated. A National Social Register domiciled with the ministry of budget and National Planning (MBNP) has been established. Modules and operational manual to guide the implementation of the N-power programme has been produced and a portal for the unemployed youth, created. Facilities for payment through mobile banking to reach those in remote areas have been put in place and an audit trail for all programmes established.(Social Investment Office. 2017: 5) The sum of N500 billion was to be budgeted for the programme each year giving a total of N1.5 trillion. However, information from the Presidency shows that only N300 billion has been spent on the programme since its inception in 2016 (Iyabosa Uwugiaren, 2019)

Table I below presents an overview of the key activities and beneficiaries of the suite programmes as at the close of 2019.

Overview of the achievements of NSIP 2016-2019.

N-Power	NHGSF	CCT	GEEP	Monitors	National Social Register
	Pupils being Fed: 9,300,892				
Volunteers 500,000	N0 of cooks 96,972		Loans Disbursed market moni & farmer moni 317,212	N0 of third party monitors paid in September 1,689	
N Build 20,000	Schools 49,837	No of Beneficiaries 297,973	Trader monitor 1,061,592 N0 of cooperatives 4,084		551, 755 Poor & vulnerable house holds (PVHH) in 23 states.

Source: Office of the Vice President (www.yemiosibanjo.ng/national-social-investment-programmes-october-2018-update.htm)

The table indicates that 520,000 persons have benefitted under the N-power programme. 9,300,892 pupils from 49,837 schools were being fed under the NHGSFP. This has also generated employment for 96,972 cooks. Through the CCT, 297, 973 core poor have been reached and been paid on monthly basis. Under GEEP, 317, 212 and 1,061, 592 have benefited from market moni and trader moni respectively as well as 4,084 cooperatives. Third party monitors numbering 1,689 have been paid. A total of 551, 755 poor and vulnerable households in 23 states have been documented in the National Social Investment Register.

NSIP And Sustainable Poverty Reduction.

In the course of our discussion, some poverty alleviation programmes embarked on by governments, have been highlighted. These programmes failed to have significant impact as the country's population living below global poverty has continued to rise. By June 2018, a report by the Brookings Institution showed that Nigeria had the highest number of extremely poor population in the world (Vanguard News-www.vanguardnews.com) . This raises concern about the potentials of NSIP to achieve the reduction of poverty in Nigeria on sustainable basis considering that it has been in operation for over two years.. The potential of NSIP can be examined from three perspectives namely;

i Appropriateness of the contents of the programme for addressing poverty on sustainable basis.

ii Adequacy of the operational procedure for reaching the targeted beneficiaries.

iii Impediments to effective implementation and the possibility of surmounting them.

Appropriateness of Contents

A critical analysis of the four suite programmes through which NSIP is implemented reveals that they are clearly focused on these three policy dimensions of G-MPI. The School meal programme (NHGSFP) focuses on health and education. They address nutrition and by extension child mortality, as well as years of schooling and school attendance.

The N-Power programme aims at improving the living standards of beneficiaries through

entrepreneurship promotion, employment and skills acquisition. The Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) is directed towards the core poor. The monthly direct cash transfer of five thousand naira (N5,000.00) is directed towards raising the living standards of the beneficiaries. The programme aims to lift five million Nigerians out of poverty within 3 years of commencement (FGN, 2017:50).

The Government Enterprise Empowerment Programme (GEEP), provides access to loans to traders, market women, artisans, women cooperatives, small and medium enterprises. Such funds would enable them start their own business, raise their living standards and increase their access to drinking water, electricity, housing and assets. Based on the above brief review, we aver that the content of NSIP are adequate for poverty reduction in Nigeria on sustainable basis, baring other impediments.

Adequacy of operational procedure

Another focal point in the analysis of the potentials of NSIP to bring about sustainable poverty reduction is the operational procedure. The stipulation that the 36 states of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory should partner with the Federal Government in the implementation of the suite programmes are in line with participatory policy implementation which enhances effectiveness. The formulation of a policy framework for all the programmes under NSIP, the establishment of a National Social Register as well as payment through mobile banking, are all aimed at creating enabling environment for the smooth running of the programme. Although the operational procedure and mode of implementation are clearly spelt out, a wide chasm exists between the prescription and the actual implementation.

Impediments to Effective Implementation of NSIP for Poverty Reduction

The Minister of State, Ministry of Budget and National Planning identified some challenges that face NSIP. These include the need to design a sustainable enrolment and payment syste m. This is necessitated by rural terrain as well as long distances between communities. This problem she said, is compounded by the lack of technology and banking infrastructure. The Treasury Single Account (TSA) policy was identified as a disincentive for commercial banks to engage in the programme She a lso pointed out communication gap and overlap of responsibilities by state actors (especially between the state focal persons and the ministries, departments and agencies) as constituting challenges. The problem of funding to cover logistics was also disclosed. Another challenge is low literacy levels of most beneficiaries which without adequate advocacy and sensitization at the community level, makes seamless integration difficult (Ndubisi, 2017)

In addition to the challenges identified by the Minister of State, there are other existing and potential challenges that constitute impediments to the effective implementation of NSIP. These include:

- Poor information management and accountability

A major criticism against the implementation of NSIP is lack of transparency and accountability arising from inadequate documentation of information on fund acquisition and application. A World Bank representative in the Social Investment Programme lamented the unprecedented lack of tra nsparency and accountability she witnessed in fund application especially with regard to Trader moni aspect of GEEP. It is informative that shortly before the 2019 general elections, government teams went into market places and distributed N5,000 on the spot without due record of who got what and of what use such monies were to be put to. A corollary of this poor documentation is the lack of official document for dependable a information on the management of NSIP. Hence, there is undue reliance on newspaper and other on-line sources which validity cannot be assured for data and other information on the programme..

Information is a resource which can be effectively utilised through other relevant institutions to capture the target beneficiaries namely, the abject poor, the vulnerable groups and those who suffer exclusion. However, not much of the activities of NSIP trickle down to a large percentage of these expected beneficiaries as most of them are either rural based or urban poor. They neither enjoy the privileged access to newspapers nor television and internet. They rely on third parties who may put their relations and cronies in their priority list. Beyond the beneficiaries, other stakeholders and interested public lament the paucity of information about NSIP implementation. The Chairman Senate Committee on Appropriation, Mohammed Goje, lamented the committee‟s inability to excise oversight function owing to information asymmetry. (Jimoh and Akhamo,2018).

The committee‟s inability to excise oversight function owing to information asymmetry. (Jimoh and Akhamo, In line with the public policy implementation theory (Solihin, 2012) information is a critical variable that determines policy performance. Consequently, its effective management is crucial for the success of NSIP.

- Politics and primordial factors.

The separation of politics and other parochial factors from the programme constitute major impediments to the effective implementation of NSIP. Literature (Jebbin and Osu, 2016, Taiwo and Agwu, 2016, Hotness, Akim Musi, Morgan and Buck, 2011) show that the major factors that led to the failure of previous poverty alleviation programmes and social policies in Nigeria are politicisation, ethnicity, favouritism and nepotism.. These are often brought to bear on the generation of data and other vital indicators and they impact negatively on the validity of such information. Implementation of NSIP is not unaffected by these factors. Severe hardship orchestrated by the high rate of inflation, hike in the price of petroleum products and other essential commodities and the low purchasing power of the Naira make many people desperate for the N5,000.00 monthly stipend. Hence, political, kinship and other primordial considerations predominate in the selection process.

- Funding:

The National Director of NSIP reveals that only 15.8 percent of the 2016 and 2017 appropriation for the programme was actually released (Wakali, 2018; Guardian, 20 Feb, 2018) As already stated, only N300 billion out of the budgeted N1.5 trillion has been utilised for running the programme.. Appropriation without release and actual cash backing make effective project execution impossible. This is buttressed by the theory of public policy implementation by Meter and Horn (2002) which identified available resources as critical in policy implementation. Adequate funding is central to the success of NSIP.

During interview with vendors and head teachers of Central school Amalla and Central School I Obollo Afor both in Udenu local government and Community Primary School, Ugwu/Agbo Edem-Ani, in Nsukka local government, it was revealed that the school feeding programme was on hold for the first and second quarter of 2019, as no funds were released to the food vendors. This situation may not be unconnected with the last general election. Another challenge associated with funding is irregular remittances. According to the Enugu state Project Manager, these unnecessary gaps in payment results in non feeding of pupils. The food vendors interviewed corroborated this by confirming that, they stopped cooking any time funds were not remitted.

There is also the issue of equitable distribution of vendors. It was observed that some schools with large population do not have commensurate number of food vendors. This was the case with Central school Amalla and Central School I Obollo Afor, among others. Another area of concern is the management of funds released for the execution of the programme. The Presidency reportedly identified corrupt practices by some state officials in its social investment programmes.

The Special Adviser to the President on special investment programmes identified these corrupt practices as comprising short-changing of beneficiaries, racketeering and harassing of beneficiaries as well as exploitation of the vulnerable (Wakali, 2018). She acknowledged that the Federal Government was weak in monitoring. This alleged fraud had occurred in spite of the engagement of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Department of State Services (DSS), the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) as well as traditional rulers in monitoring exercises.

The cost of food in Nigeria increased 17.59 percent in February, 2018, over the same month in 2017. The food inflation in Nigeria reportedly averaged 11.49 percent from 1996 to 2018. (trading economic.com) and as at Jan 2018, the rate was 19.42 percent. The N70.00 per meal approved under the school feeding programme is not adjusted for inflation and as reported by the food vendors, is inadequate as it is unable to provide a standard meal and the complementary fruits for a balanced diet.

- Widening the net of beneficiaries

With as many as 67 million Nigerians living below the poverty line, it becomes a herculean task for the impact of NSIP to be felt. The net of beneficiaries needs to be widened to reflect the magnitude of the problem of poverty. In line with the recommendation in the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP)

Findings

It is obvious from our observations above that Buhari's administration has continued to make the same mistake of the SAP economic policies. SAP programmes brought untold hardship to the people which include; Subsidy removal, commercialization and privatization of services, retrenchment, deregulation of the economy, free trade, devaluation of currency. These policies and programmes alienated the poor from the economy. Fees were increased but there was no wage increase. Everything was subjected to market forces except wages. The scenario is not far from the same today. The money policies of Buhari's administration have made nonsense of any poverty alleviation programmes. The incessant increases of the petroleum pump price, increase in electricity tariff, and the devaluation of naira among others have demeaned the purchasing power of the poor. It became clear that Buhari has compounded the nation's economic problems by pursuing economic policies which have triggered inflation in addition to the already existing stagnation thereby engendering poverty in the land.

In the course of our discussion, some poverty alleviation programmes embarked on by governments, have been highlighted. These programmes failed to have significant impact as the country's population living below global poverty has continued to rise. Social intervention programmes of Buhari"s administration have also been eyed with political suspicion given the time of launching the programmes. They have been termed vote buying for the ruling party APC, lacking in accountability and inclusiveness. Poor information management and accountability, politics and primordial factors, funding, widening the net of beneficiaries are some of the factors responsible for the inability of the poverty alleviation programmes to address the widening economic inequality in Nigeria.

Recommendations

- Federal government should adopt economic policies that are attainable, inclusive and sustainable, especially while formulating poverty alleviation programmes. This means embracing democratic governance that is sincere, accountable, practicable and inclusive in nature, as this will lead to a proper functioning of the institutions of governance and bring about equitable distribution of wealth and income. Economic policies of government should be examined and measured from their inclusiveness and sustainability.

- The federal government should adopt policies that would improve income distribution through agrarian-focused and employment-intensive growth strategies; industrialization through a sustained government funding and support; high and widely spread expenditure on education (research and development inclusive); redistribution of assets; a structured market to direct education, training, and asset accumulation towards deprived groups; and strong policies towards social protection and social income. This is far better than going into the market to share ten thousand Naira each to market women as this would not yield any significant increase in the income generation capacity of the micro business owners

- Government and all the relevant agencies should provide ways of making credit available to the citizenry and also pursue policies of financial inclusion to accommodate the poor and the vulnerable either through deposit money banks or special development banks to reduce inequality in the country.

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