the concern over increasing poverty levels especially in the developing countries and the need for its alleviation as a means of improving the standard of living of the people has led to the conceptualization and implementation of various targeted and non-targeted poverty alleviation programmes worldwide. In Nigeria, both the Nigerian government and donor agencies have been active in efforts to analyze and find solutions to the menace of poverty in the country.

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The level of poverty has increased in Nigeria since the implementation of the structural adjustment programmes in the 80’s (UNDP Nigeria, 1998; FOS, 1999; World Bank, 1999). Data from the Federal Office of Statistics (1999) on poverty profile in Nigeria showed that the incidence of poverty increased from 28.6% in 1980 to 43.6% in 1985 but declined to 42.7% in 1992 and rose again to 65.6% in 1996 (see table 1). Since 1990, the country has been classified as a poor nation.

The UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) for 2000 ranked Nigeria 142nd with HDI of 0.40 (among poorest countries).

For the period 1980 to 1996, the population of poor Nigerians increased fourfold in absolute terms. The percentage of the core poor increased from 62% in 1980 to 93% in 1996, whereas the moderately poor only rose from 28.9% in 1992 to 36.3% in 1996.

The proportion of total income spent on food by the core poor and moderately poor were approximately 75% and 73% respectively while the non-poor category spent 53% of their total income on food (FOS, 1999).

The analysis of the depth and severity of poverty in Nigeria shows rural areas as the most affected. The reasons accounted for this situation; the large concentration of the populace in the rural areas, many years of neglect of the rural areas in terms of infrastructural development and lack of information on the way government is being run. The CNB/Word Bank study of poverty assessment and alleviation in Nigeria (1999) attested to the fact 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 inadequate to meet the growing demand of the urban populace as well as rural-urban movement which has put serious pressure in the existing infrastructural facilities.

Concern about the problem as well as efforts made to reduce it cannot be said to be new. However, while there has been major reductions in poverty level in the developed countries, the same cannot be said regarding the underdeveloped countries of the world.

The discussion above lends credence to the fact that poverty has not only persisted in Nigeria, but has been increasing geographically despite efforts made by both the Nigeria government and foreign donors to alleviate it. We shall therefore devote the rest of this paper to a description of the various poverty alleviation programmes and projects in Nigeria and reasons for their dismal performance.

Section 2 takes a hard look on the theoretical approaches to poverty alleviation. Section 3 of this work shall take an overview of the various programs, projects and agencies that are designed to reduce poverty in Nigeria. Section 4 focuses on the reasons for the apparent failure of those efforts while section 5 makes some concluding remarks and recommendations.
2. THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO POVERTY ALLEVIATION

Ogwumike (2003) highlights the various approaches to poverty alleviation as follows:

a) Economics growth approach: Given the low labour absorption capacity of the industrial sector, broad based economic growth should be encouraged. This should focus on capital formation as it relates to capital stock and human capital. Human capital formation has to do with education, health, nutrition and housing needs of labour. This is obvious from the fact that investment in these sources of human capital improves the quality of labour and thus its productivity. Hence to ensure growth that takes care of poverty, the share of human capital as a source of growth in output should increase consistently overtime.

b) Basic Needs Approach: this call for the provision of basic needs such as food, shelter, water, sanitation, health care, basic education, transportation etc. Unless there is proper targeting, this approach may not directly impact on the poor because of their inherent disadvantage in terms of political power and the ability to influence the choice and location of government programs and projects.

c) Rural Development Approach: This approach sees the rural sector as a unique sector in terms of poverty reduction. This is because majority of the poor live in this sector. In addition, the level of paid employment in this sector is very minimal. Hence, traditional measures of alleviating poverty may not easily work in the rural sector without radical changes in the assets ownership structure, credit structure, etc. Emphasis on this approach to development has focused on the integrated approach to rural development. This approach recognizes that poverty is multi-dimensional and therefore, requires a multi-pronged approach. The approach aims at the provision of basic necessities of life such as food, shelter safe drinking water, education, health care, employment and income generating opportunities to the rural dwellers in general and the poor in particular. One basic problem with this approach to poverty reduction is that it is difficult to focus attention on the real poor given that poverty in the rural areas is pervasive. In other words it makes targeting of poverty reduction programs very difficult.

d) Target approach: This approach favours the directing of poverty alleviation programs to specific groups within the country. This approach includes such programs as Social Safety Micro Credit, and School Meal programs. This approach requires proper identification of the target group so as to enhance proper focusing, delivery and evaluation.
3. OVERVIEW OF POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMS AND POLICIES IN NIGERIA.

3.1 National Development Plans

It can be observed from the national development plan documents that: “the primary goals of economic planning in Nigeria is the attainment of rapid increase in the nation’s productive capacity with a view to improving the living standards of the people”. This statement suggests some concerns with poverty reduction, which entails improved standard of living. However, poverty alleviation objectives were tangential and not explicit objectives of all plans. The poverty-related objectives during 1962-85 included:

a. Increase in per capita income
b. More even distribution of income
c. Reduction in the level of unemployment
d. Increase in the supply of high level manpower.

In the same vein, the first National Rolling Plan contained some ingredients of poverty reduction, including:

a. Creating ample employment opportunities as a means of containing the employment problem; and
b. Enhancing the level of socio-political awareness of the people and further strengthening the base for a market-oriented economy and mitigating the adverse impact of the economic downturn on the most affected groups.

Generally, the priorities and strategies enunciated in virtually all the plans under reference show that agricultural production was always accorded the highest priority, even though the third plan emphasized the mutual development of agriculture and industry for balanced growth (PRN, 1975:30). Against the background that the poor are preponderantly located in rural areas, and are mainly engaged in agriculture, the accord of highest priority to agriculture in the plan documents would suggest favourable disposition towards poverty alleviation.

From the foregoing, two distinct approaches to poverty could be said to have featured prominently in Nigeria’s national development plans and planning. These are the economic growth strategy that presumes the trickling down of the benefits of growth to the poor, and the strategy of rural/agricultural development. Indeed, rural development could be viewed as having been central to Nigeria’s poverty alleviation strategies. And the center-piece of the rural development policy has been agricultural development, complemented by the social and economic infrastructure. For a long time now, the growth performance of the country has not been satisfactory, with negative growth in the first half of the 1980s and very low growth since 1992 (an average of 2.5 percent from 1992-1999). Even in periods of economic growth,
Nigerians did not experience considerable or commensurate poverty reduction. In 1985-1992, there was a slight increase in GDP and per capita income, and there was a slight drop in aggregate poverty headcount level (from 46.3 to 42.7 percent), but inequality worsened and the core-poor did not share in the growth as the depth and severity of poverty did not improve significantly. This suggests the need for a strategy of growth with equity for poverty reduction.

In sum, within the framework of the National Development Plans, the implicit thinking was that a positive relationship existed between growth in the GDP and increased welfare for the general citizenry. And so, the approach to poverty alleviation as expressed in the fundamental objectives of the development plans did not involve policies and programs, which directly targeted the poor. The poor were implicitly expected to benefit from the “trickle-down effects of the overall process of development. But this has not been the case. And so growth must be accompanied by a deliberate policy of targeted interventions.

3.2 Directorate of Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure: The establishment of the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) was not only a radical departure from the previous programs, but also recognized the complementaries associated with basic needs such as food, shelter, potable water etc. DFRRI had tremendous impact on the rural areas. For instance, between the time of inception in 1987 and 1993, DFRRI has completed over 278,526 km of roads and over 5,000 rural communities benefitted from the its rural electrification program (see CBN Annual Reports).

This integrated approach to rural development, no doubt provided for the necessary basic infrastructures that can stimulate the growth of agro-allied small-scale enterprises in rural areas. Furthermore, DFRRI impacted positively on food production. For instance, there was steady and significant rise in agricultural output as shown by the index of agricultural production between 1986 and 1993 (CBN, 1998). However, DFRRI could not achieve many of its objectives due to many factors, which include lack of standard for project harmonization and effective mechanisms for coordination among the three tiers of government and between DFRRI and the levels of government. Hence, with time DFRRI could not sustain the tempo with which it started and it ended up not living up to expectation and became defunct (National Planning Commission 1994).

3.3 The National Directorate of Employment (NDE) was the main organ for employment creation during this period. The objectives of NDE include: to design and implement programmes, to combat mass unemployment and articulate policies aimed at developing work programmes with labour intensive potentials. Given that poverty manifests itself in the form of unemployment and underemployment, the schemes/programmes of NDE could be said to have poverty alleviation focus. For instance the directorate has four main programs that not only
creates jobs but also enhances the productivity and income earning potentials of the youths and other beneficiaries.

These programs include: the Vocational Skills Development Program (DSV), the Special Public Works Program (SPW), the Small Scale Enterprises Program (SSE) and the Agricultural Employment Program.

Available evidence shows that NDE achieved remarkable progress in respect of its various programs. Some of these include:

- The training of over 766,783 persons (including the disabled) in the National Open Apprenticeship scheme between 1987 and 1996.
- Those who have benefited from the resettlement scheme were over 106,354 at the end of 1996.
- The school on wheel scheme has engaged 15,317 unemployed youth as at the end of 1994.
- The special public works program has jobs for over 154,910 persons between 1987 and 1996 (see central bank annual reports 1992-1996).

Besides, NDE as one of the institutions that survived the SAP era has continued to articulate development policies and programs with labour intensive potentials aimed at solving the unemployment problems in the country. However, the directorate has not been adequately funded. Thus it has not been possible for NDE to cope with the needs of the ever increasing number of job applicants in the country.

3.4 The Better Life Program (BLP) was set up to enhance the quality of life of rural women, among other objectives. Poverty in Nigeria is a rural phenomenon and the rural women are worst hit by the dreadful malady of poverty. This is due to lack of basic skills and education necessary for gainful employment. The targeting of women in the fight against poverty will no doubt reduce significantly aggregate level of poverty in the country. The better life program, therefore, tried to harness the potentials of rural women and thereby impacted positively on their economic activities and incomes. The BLP improved the quality of life of many women through the distribution of various inputs, granting of easy credits, and the establishment of various education/enlightenment programs. Based on available evidence, Ogwumike (1988) concluded that the BLP made tremendous impact with regard to poverty alleviation. In specific terms, the achievement of BLP include the following: formation of 11,373 women cooperatives by 1993; the establishment of 3,513 processing mills as well as the distribution of farms inputs such as fertilizer to women who ordinarily would not have had access to such inputs though they carry out the bulk of agricultural activities. However, the success of the program was short-lived. The program was not only hijacked by position-seeking individuals, but the resources set for the program were diverted and used for personal enrichment.
Similarly, in the health, education and housing sectors, there are several poverty reducing programs which were implemented. For example, the Primary Health Care Scheme and the Guinea Worm Eradication Program. Although the guinea worm eradication program recorded a tremendous success, the effectiveness of the primary health care program was grossly reduced due to inadequate funding, lack of equipment, essential drugs and trained manpower (Egware 1997).

3.7 Other several programs such as National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA), the Agricultural Development Programs (ADP), and the Strategic Grain Reserve Programs (SGRP) have one way or the other impacted positively on the agricultural sector and by implication reduced poverty.

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3.8: The National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP)

Introduction early in 2001, NAPEP is the current program which focuses on the provision of "strategies for the eradication of absolute poverty in Nigeria" (FRN 2001:3) NAPEP is complemented by the National Poverty Eradication Council (NAPEC) which is to coordinate the poverty-reduction related activities of all the relevant ministries, Parastatals and Agencies. It has the mandate to ensure that the wide range of activities is centrally planned, coordinated and complement one another so that the objective of policy continuity and sustainability are achieved.

Upon consideration of the Joda Panel and Abdullahi Committee Report, fourteen (14) core poverty alleviation Ministries were identified as follows.

a) Agriculture and Rural Development
b) Education
c) Water Resources
d) Industry
e) Power and Steel
f) Employment, Labour and Productivity
g) Women Affairs and Youth Development
h) Health
i) Works and Housing
j) Environment
k) Solid Mineral Development
l) Science and Technology
m) Finance and
n) National Planning Commission

Similarly, thirty-seven (37) core poverty alleviation institutions, agencies and programs were identified. The poverty reduction-related activities of the relevant institutions under NAPEP have been classified into four, namely:

i. **Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES)**, which deals with capacity acquisition, mandatory attachment, productivity improvement, credit delivery, technology development and enterprises promotion.

ii. **Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDDS)** which deals with the provision of potable and irrigation water, transport (rural and urban), rural energy and power support;

iii. **Social Welfare Service Scheme (SOWESS)** which deals with special education, primary healthcare services, establishment and maintenance of recreational centers, public awareness facilities, youth and student hostel development, environmental protection facilities, food security provisions, micro and macro credits delivery, rural telecommunications facilities of mass transit, and maintenance culture; and
iv. **Natural Resources Development Conservation Scheme (NRDCS)** which deals with the harnessing of the agricultural, water, solid mineral resources, conservation of land and space (beaches, reclaimed land, etc) particularly for the convenient and effective utilization by small-scale operators and the immediate community.

In effect, the current poverty eradication program of the country is centered on youth empowerment, rural infrastructure development, provision of social welfare services and natural resources development and conservation.

Details about these are provided in the blueprint for the schemes under the National Poverty Eradication program (as revised in June 2001). In the attempt to overcome the inadequacies of previous programs, the NAPEP blueprint has the following features ((Aliu 2001):

- It adopts the participatory bottom-up approach in program implementation and monitoring;
- It provides for rational framework which lays emphasis on appropriate and sustainable institutional arrangement;
- It provides for pro-active and affirmative actions deliberately targeted at women, youths, farmers and the disabled;
- It provides for inter-ministerial and inter-agency cooperation.
- It provides for the participation of all registered political parties, traditional rulers, and the communities
- It provides for technology acquisition and development particularly for agriculture and industry;
- It provides for capacity building for existing skills acquisition and training centers;
- It provides for the provision of agricultural and industrial extension services to rural areas;
- It provides for institutional development for marketing of agricultural and industrial products; and
- It provides for integrated schemes for youth empowerment, development of infrastructure, provision of social welfare services and exploitation of natural resources.

### 4. REASONS FOR FAILURE OF POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMMES

Not only has the failure to insure the successful implementation of the various programme and policies made the incidence of poverty to loom large, the phenomenon has continued to spread and deepen. And very many factors have tended to compound the poverty situation, among which are: slow economic growth, economic mismanagement, infrastructural deficiencies, weak political commitment to poverty alleviation programme and measures, and a host of macroeconomic and sectoral problems such as inflation, rising unemployment, exchange rate
(i) Poor macroeconomic and monetary policies resulting in low economic growth rate and continuous downwards slide in the value of naira from 1986;

(ii) Dwindling performance of the manufacturing sector, which has the capacity to employ about 20 million people, but currently employs only about 1.5 million.

(iii) Poor management of the nation’s resources, coupled with large-scale fraud and corruption, most of which has been siphoned out of the country in hard currency, and

(iv) Poor execution of Government Programmes and projects especially those aimed at the provision of social welfare services and those aimed at the provision of economic infrastructure.

(v) Lack of targeting mechanisms for the poor and the fact that most of the programmes do not focus directly on the poor.

(vi) Political and policy instability have resulted in frequent policy changes and inconsistent implementation which in turn have prevented continuous progress.

(vii) Inadequate coordination of the various programmes has resulted in each institution carrying out its own activities with resultant duplication of effort and inefficient use of limited resources. Overlapping functions ultimately led to institutional rivalry and conflicts.

(viii) Severe budgetary, management and governance problems have afflicted most of the programmes, resulting in facilities not being completed, broken down and abandoned, unstaffed and equipped.

(ix) Lack of accountability and transparency thereby making the programmes to serve as conduit pipes for draining national resources.

(x) Overextended scope of activities of most institution, resulting in resources being spread too thinly on too many activities. Examples are DFRRI and Better Life Programme which covered almost every sector and overlapped with many other existing programmes.

(xii) Inappropriate programme design reflecting lack of involvement of beneficiaries in the formulation and implementation of programmes. Consequently, beneficiaries were not motivated to identify themselves sufficiently with the successful implementation of the programmes.

(xiii) Absence of target setting for Ministries, Agencies and programmes.
In terms of policy thrust, the policies of government should reflect the needs and aspirations of the citizenry. The policies should be pro-poor (Igbuzor 2005). Research should be conducted to determine the potentials, capabilities, interests, wants and environmental demands of the poor. Textbook models of poverty alleviation predicated on western life styles, values and interests should not be co-opted line, hook and sinker without consideration for the peculiarities of the poor masses in Nigeria.

In order to overcome the problem of poverty in Nigeria the war against corruption should be intensified. One way to achieve this is through the amendment of the laws establishing the various anti-corruption agencies the independent corrupt practices commission ICPC, and the Economic and Financial crime Commission EFCC, to free them from executive interference. In addition special courts called financial-crimes Tribunal should also be established to fast track the prosecution of corrupt government officials.

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5. Concluding Remarks

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REFERENCES


FRN (1975): Third National Development Plan Lagos Nigeria


Table 1: Nigerian Poverty Profile 1980/1996

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