GOVERNANCE AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN NIGERIA: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECT

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Abstract
Nigeria is rich in land, people, oil and natural gas and other resources needed to bring about her development. Inspite of these abundant resources, majority of the people are still wallowing in poverty. The problem of governance readily comes to mind as Nigeria needs not remain at the present level of under development, at this stage of her national life. Therefore, lack of good governance has continued to be a missing link in Nigeria's development efforts. Nigeria has all it takes to guarantee a bright future, if more of its wealth are channeled to the development of its people and to the productive use of its land and other resources. This paper examines the concepts of governance and poverty as well as efforts at poverty alleviation in Nigeria. The paper recommends the involvement of non-governmental organizations to complement the efforts of government. It also recommends the participation of the people themselves in the activities that can pull them out of poverty.

Introduction
In Nigeria, poverty has become a scourge which requires a good and purposeful government policy and structure to address. Ahluwalia (1973), has argued that the fact of poverty is not new, rather, what is new is the growing idea that economic growth by itself may not be able to solve or even alleviate the problem. Poverty, therefore, remains one of the intractable problems that mankind is facing today. And it has continued to pose one of the greatest challenges to leadership in Nigeria.

According to Bello-Imam (1997), the dynamics of Nigeria's history has imposed on it, a-succession of leaders who rule in such a way that sharply showed good governance on the missing-link in Nigeria's development efforts. To this end, poverty needs a multi-dimensional approach if governance is to be clearly appreciated in Nigeria. This paper examines governance and poverty, as well as efforts and prospects of poverty alleviation in Nigeria.

Concepts of Governance, Poverty and Poverty Alleviation
Governance according to Onwioduokit (1999) connotes the manner in which government governs the territory and the people it jurisdically controls. However, to Landell-Mills and Sergeldim (1991), governance is the exercise of political power to move a nation's affairs. It encompasses the state's institutional and structural arrangement, decision-making processes, and implementation capacity and the relationship between government officials and the public. It therefore, means that governance consists of a nation's system of politics and its inter connection of public administration and law. Governance therefore, plays an important role in guaranteeing the well being of the people and the state.

However, the Bretton Woods Institutions cited in lyoha and Idada (2007:610), have reduced good governance in the developing countries to efficient restructuring and management of state paraphernalia in such a manner that they are better positioned to ensure economic stability at the macro level and thereby guarantee their ability to service their loans and indebtedness to their numerous creditors in the developed world. This perception of good governance does not meet the expectations of majority of the Nigerian populace who advocate a government that can salvage the welfare of the citizenry in the society and remove them from the firm grip of poverty.

It is therefore, mostly appropriate to conceive good governance as a logical flow in the ability of state leadership to manage efficiently and effectively the resources and institutions of the state in such a manner that anarchy and chaos are absent in the political system; unwavering penchant for rule of law and constitutionalism; and pursuance of policies and programmes, that would guarantee political and economic stability such that the needs and desires of the citizenry are actualized (lyoha and Idada, 2007:612).

Olusanya (2000), has argued that the institution of government can be seen as a work in progress that can constantly be improved upon. There is no perfect system but there is no doubt that weak, ineffective, corrupt or oppressive government holds back development and prolongs inequality and poverty.

On the whole, we need a government for human development that is a government that is firmly rooted in the fundamental principles of human development, poverty eradication, environmental protection and regeneration, gender equality and sustainable livelihood.
Poverty and Poverty Alleviation

According to Ajakaiye and Olomola (1999:3), Poverty is a living condition in which an entity is faced with economic, social, political, cultural and environmental deprivation. It is a state of involuntary deprivation to which a person, household, community or nation can be subjected to. Oladuni (1999:17), defines poverty in terms of insufficient income for securing the basic necessities of life such as food, potable water clothing and shelter.

Poverty alleviation in the Nigerian context, according to Odigwe (2002:14), refers to efforts aimed as reducing the magnitude of poverty defined in terms of the proportion of the population living below the poverty line. It can also be regarded as all efforts at promoting rural development, social development, infrastructural development, and equitable resource distribution which used to be described as accelerated development programmes, integrated rural development programme and the like.

Efforts at Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria

It needs to be said that the most important goal of development in any country is to reduce poverty in all its ramifications. This goal appears to be difficult to accomplish in sub-Saharan Africa (including Nigeria). The question that needs to be asked is to what extent can governance help to reduce poverty in the society? The quality of governance remains an important determinant of a country's economic development. The quality of governmental actions, for instance, in the provision of public goods, can help alleviate poverty. World Bank (1992^, sees governance in the sense of an efficient and accountable management of the public sector and a predictable and transparent policy framework. Good governance can guarantee sound economic policies and this can lead to economic development.

Maduewesi (2005:144), is of the view that poverty in Nigeria has been a long standing issue, and that its reality manifests in the worsening incidence and severity over the years, despite the enormous human and material resources and economic development potential the country is blessed with. She argued further that in less than a decade, Nigeria slipped from a middle income status nation to a low income category and is currently regarded as one of the poorest countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. To Maduewesi, with 34 million Nigerians representing 70 percent of households officially recognized as poor and 40 percent as core poor, the extent of Nigeria's poverty strikes one, as one walks the streets of the nation. P'

According to the Multiple Indicator Cluster Analysis Survey published by the Federal Office of Statistics (FOS) in 1996, "only one in every ten (10) can be described as "non-poor", the other 90 percent as either core poor" or "moderately poor". Hence, by all standards, the overwhelming percentage of Nigerians are poor, a situation which makes poverty reduction programming even more complex and difficult”.

In the past three decades, the different tiers of government in Nigeria have made some efforts to reduce poverty and raise the living standard of the rural poor. In doing this, government has embarked on several projects and programmes, aimed at improving productivity in the rural sector. A significant proportion of public investment had been channelled through the Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs), Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Family Economic Advanced Programme (FEAP) and recently, the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), aimed at promoting youth empowerment, capacity enhancement, community enlightenment and sensitization, social welfare services, rural infrastructure development and natural resources development and conservation. These and others, are the efforts of government aimed at reducing poverty in Nigeria.

Unfortunately, poverty has not been significantly reduced as the rural sector where the poor live, has remained largely backward and obviously unresponsive to all these efforts. According to Okumadewa (1999), cited by Ogundipe (1999:58), economic growth alone is not sufficient for poverty reduction, growth must be accomplished with equity promoted by participation. Participation of the poor themselves in the activities that would "push" or "pull" them out of poverty is key to global poverty reduction.

The prevalence of poverty has serious negative effects on society both of individual and national levels. To Flori (1999:52), the lack of access to resources by individuals lead to a state of powerlessness, helplessness and despair, and inability to subsist and protect oneself against economic shocks, social, economic, cultural and political discrimination and marginalisation. This pitiable condition leads to desperation and helplessness, if the society is not responsive to the plight of the poor. This could in turn produce violence, high rate of robbery, theft, thuggery and other deviant behaviours. It needs to be said that social and political cohesion at the national level can be lost if the poor loses faith in governance thereby generating disrespect and lack of regard and confidence. This situation can also degenerate into docile followership, ineptitude and political apathy and under such conditions, national goals and objectives as well...
Prospects of Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria

The concern for poverty and the need for its alleviation as a way of improving the standard of living especially of the rural people, have necessitated the establishment of various institutions and programmes. The institutions and schemes set up for the reduction of poverty include National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), National Primary Health Care Scheme, National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Better Life/Family Support/Child Care Trust, Universal Basic Education (UBE), etc. These agencies, programmes or schemes were put in place to break the vicious circle of poverty nationally but most especially in the rural sector. However, these efforts have not yielded the desired results of alleviating poverty in Nigeria since the issue is not only economic but also social and political. There are, however, several obstacles to the effective implementation of the programmes. Some of these obstacles are due to the fact that the programmes were either not well designed, formulated, implemented in a coordinated manner or unduly politicized.

Besides, most of them have relied solely on government subvention for their operations resulting in financial predicament in periods of decline in government revenue, discontinuity and other bureaucratic delays. Also, lack of commitment on the part of the executors of the various programmes has constituted some problems. Similarly, some aspects of public spending, even though conceived with good intention, have not been adequately and judiciously targeted at fighting poverty, in Nigeria. Inadequate supply and poor maintenance of rural infrastructure, including rural roads, electrification, water supply, education and its sustainability have also not been of help in the effort to adequately reduce poverty. Discontinuity of projects and programmes of rural development has continued to be a major problem in Nigeria.

However, there is room for improvement through purposeful economic empowerment for the benefit of all especially the rural people. This paper is of the view that development programmes aimed at the poor's direct involvement in income generation, social activities, self-development and empowerment will help to alleviate poverty in our society. Poverty alleviation needs resources and capacity to adapt programmes to diverse and uncertain conditions alongside a strong performance orientation, supported by the demand pull of the poor themselves. Governments may possess enormous resources but when they have no strong political will to execute decisions, the resources will always go down the drains.

It is on this basis that it is here advocated that there is a strong merit for the careful consideration of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) as an alternative development model that can complement the efforts of the tiers of government in Nigeria. They appear to be very active as agents of change and are often responsive to the needs and problems of the communities where they operate. They are likely to have interests and skills to adapt development projects and programmes to local conditions. In view of their small size and proximity to beneficiaries, they are obviously more likely to be more accountable than most government agencies.

Concluding Remarks

Available evidence has shown that poverty has been a serious problem confronting the Nigerian nation for several decades. Many developing nations are in the same situation and the causes of poverty are deep-rooted in the social, political and economic environment prevalent in such countries. Lack of empowerment of the poor and the low growth rate of the economies, play critical roles in worsening poverty situation. Nigeria, like every other country in the world, show concern for reduction and eradication of poverty. This can be understood from the various efforts being made through the introduction of various projects, programmes and schemes, aimed at alleviating poverty in the country. However, lack of strong political will on the part of various governments in Nigeria, has hindered the successful implementation of laudable programmes aimed at alleviating poverty in Nigeria. It is also the position of this paper that participation of the poor themselves in the activities that would push or pull them out of poverty is the key to poverty alleviation in Nigeria. The politicians should not be given room to hijack the poverty alleviation programmes of the government from the targeted rural people.
**Recommendations**

Considering the endemic nature of poverty in Nigeria and the inability of governments to effectively reduce it, the following recommendations are put forward.

1. The involvement of Non-Governmental Organizations to complement the efforts of government in the alleviation of poverty in Nigeria. The Non-Governmental Organizations are more likely to have the capacity, interests, skills and resources to adapt development programmes to focal conditions in Nigeria.

2. The poor themselves should be allowed to participate in the activities that would pull them out of poverty rather than allowing the politicians to hijack the various alleviation programmes.

3. The Nigerian government should develop strong political will to actually tackle the problem of poverty instead of engaging in mere window-dressing.

**References**


