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Regimes and Poverty Alleviation Programmes In Nigeria Since 1980s

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Abstract

In postcolonial Nigeria, poverty alleviation is a thematic issue in governance that has received attention in varied forms. This paper thus examines how party politics and governance drive the forms of poverty alleviation plans in postcolonial Nigeria. The narratives questioned the multidimensional interests that defined poverty alleviation policies. Ultimately, the paper explains the perspective of inequality in poverty policy implementation. It articulated the developmental interventions structured and institutionalised within the Nigerian state. This paper historicises the complicated realities in the dissemination of poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria. It positions the practice of alleviating poverty as a political process influenced by interests and disinterests of stakeholders. In other words, the paper emphasised the trajectories in which the implementation of poverty alleviation became politicised. The sub-sections focused on features of poverty, state-driven poverty alleviation, 1989-1998, citizen-desired poverty alleviation and state intervention 1989-1998, state-driven poverty alleviation 1999-2007 and paradoxes of poverty alleviation 1999-2007. Based on the historical method, the analysis interrogated the content and contexts in newspaper accounts as well as relevant books and journals.

Introduction

In Third World countries, poverty is a recurring developmental problem. The level of poverty is indicative of a global phenomenon which has attracted various forms of interventions. Since the 1980s, Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was a conditioned reality in the Third World, of which poverty alleviation was mainstreamed in the development agenda as a way of reducing the effect of urban and rural survival in Africa. In Nigeria, poverty alleviation programmes occurred in different forms to cushion the state of being poor. This paper engages deeper insights into the meanings and justifications underlying poverty alleviation in Nigeria and its interface with party politics. This paper historicises how poverty is governed in Nigeria from the era of structural adjustment till contemporary democratic regimes. Since independence and even before, poverty has been identified as the bane of Nigerian state. Scholars have used various methods to explain poverty in Africa. However, this work unravels the realities of poverty in the governance and democratic structure of Nigeria since the SAP era of the 1980s. The following questions guide the analysis in this work:

1. What are the dynamics of poverty alleviation in Nigeria from 1989 to 1998?
2. What are the dynamics of poverty alleviation in Nigeria from 1999 to 2007?

From the immediate postcolonial era, Western Region government engaged in holistic development programmes. For example, there were indigenous banks such as Agbonmagbe (Wema) Bank, Cocoa House for Agriculture, Wemabod Estates for housing, but poverty was not the focus of these institutions, they were development driven, yet access to their services was limited to a privileged few. Between the end of the civil war and the botched Third Republic, the Nigerian state had different developmental programs such as Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) in 1977, Green Revolution in 1980, River Basin Development Authorities massive wheat production in 1989 among others. In spite of these development institutions, poverty persists as a recurring problem. On the other hand, the politics of poverty alleviation in this work are analysed along two classifications:

- * state-driven poverty alleviation
- * citizen-desired poverty alleviation

Features of Poverty

Poverty is inseparable from politics in Africa. It is intertwined with developmental agenda set out in political parties on the verge of electioneering campaigns. Most states in Africa, use their political parties as a mobilisation

platform to promise eradication of poverty. To an extent, poverty is a political object used to attain victory and often the democratic ideals becomes absent as policy either made or mar the existence of poverty. In South Africa for example, the era of anti-apartheid struggle the alleviation of poverty was embedded in the agitations of opposition political party. Thus, the African National Congress (ANC) used its manifesto tagged Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) to campaign for poverty alleviation among the poor blacks (African National Congress, 1994: 4). Invariably, poverty was associated with apartheid, by which political emancipation was the option.

Money politics from Nigeria's First Republic (1960-1966) accounted for the pungent and precarious interests and disinterests in tackling poverty. Party politics of the Nigerian state has accounted for power and accumulation of wealth. A commentary of the 1980s supported this perception of poverty as captured in the words of Askia Lai Olorode that:

The struggle for power in 1983 between political parties or alliance of political parties as serious consideration need be given to how best to detach our economy from the shackle of imperialism in which it has become strongly entrenched and subservient bearing in mind that our destiny's in our hands to make or mar (Nigerian Tribune April 14, 1982),

The 1997 Human Development Report introduced poverty as denial of opportunities and choices most basic to human development, to lead a long, healthy, creative life and a decent standard of living. In three words, poverty is taken as inadequacy, scarcity and lack. In this context, I take on Copenhagen Declaration of 1995 on poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon existing in the forms of hunger, ill health, lack of access to education, inaccessibility to productive resources, homelessness, social exclusion, high mortality and lack of restriction to participate in governance (Odey and Agba, 2010).

By the historical trajectories of city formations and urban life in colonial Africa, poverty remains futuristic and its existence at the end of the twentieth century was imminent considering the forces of international capitalism. Therefore, the futuristic experiences of poverty in Africa and specifically in Nigeria can be understood in the words of Coquery Vidrovitch as stated that:

Nevertheless, from now on the turbulence of uncontrolled or little controlled urban growth is destined in Sub-Saharan Africa as elsewhere to become the principal generator of upheavals. Whether we like it or not, it is in the cities that people, work, and systems at organization are now concentrated, that economic and cultural institutions

develop, and that political power is established. It is there that the decisive social dynamics of the future will come to play. (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1988; 313)

The complex nature of poverty is dynamic, which makes the encounters different across societies. Hence, Overseas Development Institute (ODI) working Paper 299 created a perspective for policy direction through the title – *Poverty and Poverty Reduction in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Overview of Key Issues* (Handley, Higgins, Sharma, Bird and Cammack, 2009). The paper foregrounds the notion of poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa and the phenomenal effects of SAP. Generally, the attempts at poverty reduction by African governments were induced by international capitalism and through the Bretton Woods institutions. The working paper identified features in governance and state systems that worked to reduce poverty and otherwise. And externally, the role of aids from international initiatives are emphasised. Much as poverty reduction was emphasised in the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) it becomes difficult to perceive poverty as general, rather it is peculiar to existence at the grassroots.

Poverty could be described as making and unmaking of state policies. In the joint authored work of Seekings and Nattrass in South Africa, poverty practice was entangled in the politics and policy of the state (2015). From the transition to democratic rule in 1994, the

double standard in poverty practice implied the way public policies reduced and resurged poverty to an extent that in the immediate twenty-first century labour status reflected a low paid formal sector and a bombarded information sector with highly populated working poor. Given this, their perspective portrayed social democracy as contentious in the path of development. Therefore, poverty in African states is grappling to fit in to the practice of democracy which is rarely devoid of neo-liberalism, but also in internal political economy wrangling had its minimal impact.

Globalisation is a factor in the manipulation of poverty in Africa, often, in the global and particularly in Nigeria, problems of disease, hunger, military coup and bad governance are inherent. Hence, the argument is that governance and politics of poverty has been manipulated to the extent of inefficiency. To gain foreign sympathy and aid for Africa, globalisation has defined poverty through international media. Thus, the international societies have taken the poverty burden as a means of practicing relief and aid. The reception of relief and aid to Africa in itself has been taken for granted in governance. Administrative managements of infrastructures and as welfare regard the social capital from and as the only means of funding developmental projects.

Economic globalisation determined the trend of President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration. At the threshold of democratic administration in 1999, debt burden pushed

Nigeria's governance to follow the ideologies of Bretton Woods institutions. Therefore, the prescriptions of International Monetary Funds (IMF) conditions complicated the burden of poverty. The economic governance of the era was shaped by the conditions for loans from World Bank and other private lenders such as Paris Club. Poverty deepened because Obasanjo chose to uphold global visibility, by ensuring that domestic policies favoured that the toast of international investors. Invariably, economic globalisation as a factor in Nigeria's poverty meant that state policies adopted liberalism and free market, thus, the need to reconstruct poverty alleviation to soothe the effect of a laissez faire.

State-Driven Poverty Alleviation, 1989-1998

Economic crisis of the 1980s plunged Nigeria into a reconstruction process tagged structural adjustment. Overdependence on oil and the crisis in Nigeria challenged the living standard of Nigerians. Much as oil revenue spiralled, economic mismanagement caused development crisis that widened the poverty gap. And the genesis of this can be traced to the international oil market glut caused by excessive oil supply and thereafter, the collapses of world market price (Olorunfemi, 1987).

Oil shocks and crashes in 1986 deepened and warranted SAP induced changes in Nigerian economy. The impact was aggravated in the industrial sector because the inability to meet

foreign exchange needs. Therefore, reduction in production increased importation. Factories suspended operations and subsequently downsized, of which retrenchment made up about 50 percent (Bangura, 1988).

By 1988, the national debt profile had risen to N2.2 billion (Osaghae, 1998). Between 1986 and 1993, General Ibrahim Babangida's administration organised poverty alleviation as palliatives to the socioeconomic disruption triggered structural adjustment. The SAP in Babangida's terms had the following: the second-tier foreign exchange; removal of petroleum subsidy and trade liberalisation (Obi, 2004). The SAP was aimed at stabilising the economy, by using naira devaluation as a policy instrument to promote exports rather than imports. Babangida said and admitted losses in SAP in 1989 budget speech when he observed that:

Some of the hardships were unintended especially the overvalued naira exchange rate which has resulted in generalized increase in prices because of high import content of installed manufacturing production capacity. He was disappointed that despite efforts to step down unemployment, the problem remains a thorn in flesh and observed that the ultimate solution was through increased investment in appropriate industries and

enterprises (Business Times, January 2, 1988).

Due to the negative effects of SAP that the government had foreseen, the need for the adoption of human policy to reduce the effect simultaneously became expedient. Thus, there was the call for enhancement of NDE, DFFRI and People's Bank. Much as SAP was political, it was intended to counter the period of depression which had subsisted over the years, that is before 1980s. But in spite of this, for example, industrial growth rarely yielded the desired result. The problems of industrial production were not solved by SAP. The desired economic recovery yielded almost none as it remained stagnant. Thus, poverty alleviation in the politics of the state occurred in various forms. The military government of Babangida believed that SAP will reduce poverty through the creation of industry and new technology. This projection led to the establishment of Industrial Development Coordination Committee (IDCC). The functions of IDCC are as follows:

- to regulate foreign investment and ensure local content use in manufacturing;
- establish Industrial Centres to make SME solve operational problems;
- technical advice and installation of machines and;
- training of artisans in machine handling, market counselling, feasibility reports.

Also for efficient utility of raw materials, the Raw Materials Research and Development Council (RMRDC) was instituted. To cushion the effects of SAP, the industrial development focus led to establishment of development banks and a finance initiative in the role of National Economic Reconstruction Fund (NERFUND) under decree 2 of 1989. (Nigerian Tribune, August 26, 1989)

Popular agitation for more inclusive poverty alleviation programme began at the verge of protests during the SAP era. Pressure and interest groups such as Road Transport Employers Association of Nigeria (RTEAN), National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW), Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Nigerian Merchant Navy and Water Transportation Senior Staff Association, National Association of Nigerian Students, Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) among others (Roberts, 1988).

Between 1993 and 1998, poverty reduction rarely made sense in governance because the economy was fraught with corruption fostered as well as embezzlement that was sustained by a dictatorial political space. Hence, the understanding of poverty reduction by government was focused on Debt Conversion Programme (DCP). The enormity of debt was such that it did not tantamount to what policy approach to efficiently tackle poverty. Relatively, the state system undertook DCP as an alternative model. In 1996 the number of debt converted to investment

spanned through various sectors (Chevallard, 2001). By implication the debts were cancelled reflect investment given inform of grants.

The role of IMF in dictating economic trends marred the possibility of poverty reduction planning. Yet efforts to have an independent economy devoid of foreign influence proved abortive, even though the measures actually failed to create an autonomous economy and the challenge of debt entanglement, the state driven style of poverty alleviation remained as continuum. The office of the First Lady was used as an outlet to exercise and practice poverty alleviation through the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) in 1997.

Citizen-Desired Poverty Alleviation and State Intervention 1989-1998

The working class were the most affected by SAP. There was mass retrenchment, stagnation of wages which of course affected consumption. The consumer behaviour of entrenched workers definitely affected sales. And social facilities rarely functioned as such because there was no funding to upgrade operations. To tackle the challenges from SAP, the citizen-driven poverty alleviation led to the display of the following livelihood attributes:

- engagement in informal income generating activities;
- use of private vehicle as commercial taxi cars

- female civil servants engage in petty trading activities
- engagement in vocational training to become an artisan on a part-time basis
- working as shop attendants in supermarket
- involvement in subsistence farming to support household consumption.

By this, the citizenry, though by hard means created survival models which were not determined by statehood. The survival instinct reflected in the enumerated above began as protests canvassed against the removal of subsidy on petroleum products. Therefore, the government plan for state-based poverty alleviation had less meaning to the citizens, because the economic hardships in the removal of subsidy complicated livelihood.

Babangida's state-based poverty alleviation captured the economic hardships and it became a gendered intervention. Based on international calls for developmental agenda, the role of the state in poverty alleviation empowered the office of the First Lady to embark on strategies to ameliorate or cushion the effects of SAP. From 1986, the state-based poverty alleviation led to the appropriation of funds for projects in the Directorate for Better Life Programme (BLP) that was introduced in 1987. The BLP was operational and adapted to rural women. The objective of the programme was aimed at intensifying developmental programmes for women. Through the office of the First Lady, there were awareness about

women because of its human based approach to development. The BLP were represented in all the states of the federation in accordance to the federal system. The interventions span through education, agriculture and health, but basically more emphasis on rural development. The strategies of BLP included the following:

1. Raising the consciousness of women about their rights and responsibilities in the areas of economic, political and social development.
2. Mobilising women for a better understanding and resolution of their problems through collective action
3. Educating women on simple hygiene, improved nutrition, family planning, childcare, care of husband and environmental sanitation.
4. Mobilising women to seek leadership roles in all spheres of national life and to improve their educational status through literacy programmes.
5. Enlightening women on opportunities and facilities available to them in their local government areas
6. Providing avenues for the acquisition of skills (and their development), credit facilities, and the establishment of cottage industries.
7. Providing opportunities for technological development, recreational facilities etc.

The impact of SAP was multifaceted in all sectors. The citizen's protest was based on factual realities. In May 1988, a journalist Osazuwa Osaji was detained for a week by the state security service because of the cartoon he drew disparaging the government programme. The cartoon, published in *National Concord* explained the collaboration between the military government and the anti-development IMF measures (Osaghae, 2001). While the government determined its own terms to tackle poverty, there were oppositions from critics in the form of counter-reactions against SAP-oriented policies.

State-Driven Poverty Alleviation 1999-2007

Generally, state-driven poverty alleviation programmes rarely works nor was legitimately accepted during Babangida's regime but during Obasanjo's administration it was the most suitable intervention to salvage the economy. Poverty was conspicuous in all ramifications and was more pervasive in the health, education, demographic balance, economy and so on. In spite of improved revenue from oil, the level of wealth was rarely commensurate. For this reason, that is, as at 1999, there was a general outlook to fix the economy. The politics of poverty alleviation in the governance of Obasanjo appeared thus as an:

...attempt to grapple economic problems, he launched an economic rescue programme designated to halve poverty and achieve 6-10%

annual growth within four years. Moving away from the state-centered strategy of the 1970s, he ruled that the private sector was to lead growth, with government providing an enabling environment. Specific goals were to create five million jobs; foster agriculture, small enterprises, house building re-introduction of universal basic education expansion of rural electrification and water supplies (Illife, 2001: 202).

In practice, the bid to alleviate poverty was encapsulated and tied to the governance of international capital. Obasanjo's government even though understood the poverty concerns of the Nigerian State, but could not actualize government intervention without the financial supports of Bretton Woods institutions, that is the IMF (Oladejo, 2017). The exogenous pressure on Obasanjo's government advanced for the removal of subsidy on petrol prices and the floating of the Naira. Of course, to avoid the inefficiency of poverty measures in the SAP era, the government was pessimistic but at least, it acceded to trade liberalisation. This concession to trade liberalisation and privatisation prompted IMF to give \$1 billion stand-by loan to enhance the process of debt re-scheduling negotiations with creditors in January 2000 (*This Day*, August 1, 1999; *Weekly Trust* January 7, 2000).

By the privatisation policy, Obasanjo was optimistic that the problem of unemployment was solvable. Consequent upon his assumption of office, precisely in July, 1999 Obasanjo set up a National Council on Privatisation (NCP) but did not privatise the oil industry. The urge to do this was based on the plan to revitalise moribund public enterprises.

Initially, Olusegun Obasanjo refused to accept the removal of subsidy on petrol products as dictated by IMF, but eventually acceded. This decision presented an opportunity for the citizens to contest and criticise the liberalisation procedure. The Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) under the headship of Adams Oshiomole confronted the government to rethink the implication of subsidy removal. With increase in petrol pump price from 26 Naira to 30 Naira, the nation was in disarray as the perspective of citizen-driven poverty alleviation emerged. This prompted a general strike on June 8, 2000 (Illife, 2001).

Thus, the question of poverty remained in a state of confusion because of the monotonous nature of the economy being dependent on oil revenues made a specific policy perspective inefficient, yet state and citizen perspective of poverty alleviation continued to interplay. Olusegun Obasanjo, the Nigerian President, announced his perspective of poverty alleviation based on the campaign promises made on the platform of Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) (Atojoko, 2000). In the implementation of Poverty Alleviation

Programme (PAP), a sum of N10 billion was allocated to offer microcredit to semi-skilled and unskilled Nigerians. However, the bid to absolve the national debt burden, pushed the frontiers of policy to holistically embed in PAP a new form of implementation in the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP). The poverty alleviation programmes during Obasanjo's administration were driven by neo-liberal ideologies that canvassed for free markets. According to Stallings, developing economies were streamlined by IMF and World Bank to engage micro-economic policies and trade liberalisation. (Stallings, 1995)

Paradoxes of Poverty Alleviation 1999-2007

The challenges of privatisation and the need to cut off debts underlay poverty policies. At the Federal Executive Council Meeting of 4 January 2000, the National Poverty Eradication Council (NAPEC) was established to coordinate the tackling poverty (Business Times, June 18, 2001). NAPEP was established by Obasanjo's government with four schemes:

- Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES)
- Rural Infrastructures Department (RIDS)
- Social Welfare Service Scheme (SOWESS)
- Natural Resource Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS)

While Obasanjo tried to tackle poverty, it stuck its policies to IMF conditions such as the

removal of SAP-devaluation, trade liberalisation, subsidy, withdrawal and foreign exchange auction. In spite of this, the poverty alleviation was regarded as a ruse as it was observed in a commentary that:

I have gone through that economic blueprint and I don't see anything in it. There is nothing new in it. And there is nothing that says what you want to do, you would be able to do it. But talking about poverty alleviation programme, that's a more serious effect at combating pervasive poverty in the land that the question of poverty, is more fundamental in the approach to poverty alleviation programme. (Olutola, 2000:15)

Party politics played its role in the administration of poverty programmes. In the web of democratic politics, Lagos State was restricted from implementing its programme because the Federal government and Lagos were administered by different political parties (*The Punch*, August 1, 2005). The funds were meant for local government, and yet party politics of Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) and Alliance for Democracy (AD) interplayed, it was the belief of the PDP members that holding onto the funds will make PDP win Lagos in 2007 elections. Yet to tackle poverty, the Governor of Lagos State felt the creation of LCDA will reduce poverty (*The Punch*, August 1, 2005). Also, in Ogun State for instance, NAPEP was hijacked

by the PDP party officials in 1999. (*The Punch*, July 5, 2001) Therefore party politics influenced the dissemination and implementation of poverty alleviation policies.

Social welfare programmes were based on politics of geopolitical interest. In 2001 when NAPEP was introduced, officials of PDP perpetrated the following:

* In Ekiti State: Senator Gbenga Aluko threatened to sue his own party, the PDP in the state, over an alleged fraudulent 10 percent deduction from the N3,500 monthly stipend from PAP beneficiaries

* PDP Vice Chairman (southwest) Chief Olu Bakare blamed the delay in payment of stipends as due to inflation of beneficiaries list. However, for the protest in Lagos, he planned it on the attempt to thwart the effort of Alliance for Democracy AD to gain popular support from PDP (*The Punch*, September 29, 2000).

A second poverty strategy was the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS)(Adegbenle, 2019). In spite of the pervasive internal problem of values attributable to corrupt practices, NAPEP and NEEDS were quite humanistic as it became a popularly accepted option and an affirmation of democracy as being for development. However, its implementation rarely enhanced production or manufacturing as it placed Nigeria at the level of a peripheral economy. Emblematic of the scheme was the introduction of the popular tricycle transport model known as "Keke NAPEP" (Adegbenle,

2019). It is apparent that this mainly succeeded in increasing urban population concentration, because its massive importation from India made able bodied men work as transporters, thus diminishing the values of holistic development that could sustain rural development.

In the context of state-based poverty alleviation, as explained in the introduction, the surge of Keke NAPEP in the Nigerian economy meant that Nigerians were not necessarily programmed to be productive rather, it was a short-sighted panacea to poverty as planned by the elites. In the words of Omoyibo and Agbonzeke, the top centred approach or state driven idea of poverty alleviation meant that:

...government evolved programmes on poverty that were imposed from the top. These policies does not entail handouts in which what the poor get is less than what those who implemented the policies keep to themselves from the sum earmarked. Many of these projects serve as conduit for ripping off the country in the name of the poor (Omoyibo and Agbonzeke, 2010:286).

Non-diversification of Nigerian economy created a frictional system as state driven poverty alleviation rarely solved the social malaise. It is indubitable that the forces of the oil market dictate the outlook of government

income and expenditure. This is particularly evident in the governance of poverty by Obasanjo's administration because oil income influenced spending and profligacy at the sub-national level. Arbitrariness in general governance led Obasanjo to develop Poverty Reduction Strategy in his second term in office. The agenda was to develop an economic model for poverty under the reform titled National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). As Nnebe noted, poverty is conceived in the working of NEEDS to rectify recurrent problems since the 1970s, and that is in spite of the huge oil earnings of about \$300 billion (Nnebe, 2006). From 2003, the political economy of poverty from the realm of governance mapped the historical trajectories of public spending and non-caution to avoid waste as a concern of the three priority strategies in NEEDS, the third emphasised poverty reduction through health, education and other social services. NEEDS, also involved the privatisation and minimal government involvement in the economy, except for the provision of essential services. This reflected in the 2004 budget when government expenditure focused on job creation and poverty reduction (Obasanjo, 2005).

The state driven efforts towards poverty alleviation materialised to an international understanding. In 2005, the international community aimed at reducing the plight of the poor with UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG). The aim was to increase debt-relief measurement which had been jointly an

initiative of World Bank-IMF for Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) in 1996. The HIPC was to make multilateral organisations reduce poor countries debt (*Financial Standard*, May 22, 2006). Nigeria was shut out of HIPC because it was believed that its revenue was sufficient to provide adequate welfare. Also, the revelation supported by IMF working paper estimated Nigeria was earning about \$200 billion from crude oil (*Financial Standard*, May 22, 2006). This geared Olusegun Obasanjo to design a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) to qualify Nigeria for Official Development Assistance (ODA) (*The Punch*, September 26, 2002).

The IMF found the activities of NEEDS as sufficient to get Nigeria off smaller debts from the London Club. Based on Obasanjo's PRSP plans, international organisations were allowed to offer assistance such as Oxfam, UNDP and so on. However, the NEEDS did not conceptualise poverty from the perspective of the citizens as Illife noted:

Obasanjo was willing to sacrifice immediate popular welfare - cheaper cement or cheaper petrol - to what he believed to be interests of Nigeria's long-term development. But that did not simply mean supporting the rich against the poor; it meant attempting to extricate Nigerian capitalism from the purely commercial, comprador role to which left wing critics had

long believed it was condemned by the country's place in the world economy (Illife, 2005; 274).

The level of poverty rarely changed because it was obvious as at 2005 that economic reforms did not work for the poor, rather the policy of privatisation actually enriched few Nigerians as there were public dissatisfaction with the outcome of NEEDS. In 2002, Mike Obadan posits that poverty alleviation needs a "bottom-up approach" because:

It is the people who know best what they need and where national resources can do the most good, it is imperative to involve the intended beneficiaries in poverty reduction programmes and activities in the identification, selection to implementation of projects.

Also he said:

Efforts should be made by the governments, periodically, to find out through surveys the people's development priorities. Once this is done, the ensuing plans and programmes will become legitimate and binding as the priorities of the people and not those of a handful technocrats and elite (*Nigerian Tribune*, March 19, 2002).

The recurrence of poverty resonated in the Afrobarometer Opinion survey in 2005 which showed that there were only minimum changes, as jobs were still scarce. In spite of this thought, in 2008, the World Bank revealed a contrasting estimate that unemployment had reduced (*Newswatch*, June 21, 2004). The state sponsored poverty alleviation practically failed because corruption ceased to abate and fiscal profligacy persist.

Conclusion

State-driven development plans featured prominently in Nigeria's governance since the 1980s. Concentration of power with the federal government portrays a bourgeois society, where the people lack a coherent front or platform to change governing directions. Most of the poverty alleviation programmes lacked direct impact to sustain, but rather, the implementation of these programmes had been a forum for politicisation which questioned and tainted its developmental relevance.

The milieus of poverty portend spatial dimension and policy implementation is ineffective as national planning fails to map the needs of specific demographics. Neglect of population as well as corruption has caused imbalance between economic and population growth. Population variables lack in national planning for poverty as the databases are available but fragmented. The contemporary democratic ideals undermine local governance which affected specific grassroots needs.

Intertwining politics and poverty has been and further complicates the quest for development. Instead, the specificity entails a definition of what a peculiar community, town or city consider urgent developmental needs. Relatively, the governance of the Nigerian state rarely possesses the grasp of policy to tackle the challenges of poverty. It lacks focus in spite of democratic governance. Therefore, the nexus in poverty eradication and democratic governance is an unending problematic.

Notes

Commentaries and reports in newspapers were used in contextual analysis. The newspapers consulted were *Financial Standard* May 22, 2006; *The Punch* September 26, 2002; *Nigerian Tribune*, March 19, 2002; *Newswatch* June 21, 2004 p. 19; *Nigerian Tribune* April 14, 1982; *Business Times* January 2, 1989; *Nigerian Tribune* August 26, 1989; *Business Times* June 18, 2001; *Nigerian Tribune* July 20, 2000; *The Punch* August 1, 2005; *The Punch* August 1, 2005; *The Punch* July 5, 2001; *The Punch* Editorial Friday September 29, 2000; *This Day*, August 1, 1999; *Weekly Trust* January 7, 2000; *Newswatch* vol. 32, No. 65, 2000.

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