



Governance and Poverty Reduction in Nigeria

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Abstract

The legitimacy of any government begins with taking into account the basic needs of its citizens in terms of food, clothing, shelter, health and human dignity. Without an appropriate governance structure, nations, most especially in developing countries, will not be able to provide the above needs to their people, or a momentum towards rapid poverty reduction. The paper has therefore examined how governance, as exemplified by policies and programmes, has been able to reduce poverty in Nigeria. To achieve this, the study used a qualitative approach to analyze issues using secondary data in journal publications, textbooks and newspapers. The study found that corruption, poor leadership, unemployment and nonchalant attitudes to work, among other factors, have constrained the successes of the various poverty reduction programmes in Nigeria. Therefore, it was recommended that corruption should be abhorred in its entirety, people in governance positions should ensure the growth and development of their societies through sound policies/programmes, and that youth should be empowered through skills acquisition and human resources development so that they can be gainfully employed.

Keywords: Governance, Poverty, Corruption, Basic needs, Policies

Introduction

The legitimacy of any government begins with taking into account the basic needs of its citizens in terms of food, clothing, shelter, education, health, security and human dignity. Thus, governance, as exemplified by policies, programmes and projects, becomes a major issue in the discourse on development or poverty reduction. This is because, without an appropriate governance structure, nations, most especially in developing countries, will not be able to either sustain economic growth or a momentum towards rapid poverty reduction (Ghaus-Pasha, 2005). This has been the conclusion of a number of studies trying to figure out why, despite resource allocation and good policies and programmes, broad improvements in human welfare have not occurred and illness in the nation remains elusive (Ghaus-Pasha, 2005; Akpa, 2011; Angel, 201; Oravee, 2015).

Governance has to do with the institutional environment in which citizens interact among themselves and with government agencies and officials to better their lots. The

capacity of this institutional environment is important for development because it helps determine the impact achieved by economic policies and programmes adopted by the government. The issue of governance and poverty reduction is therefore intricately linked because if government is abused, or exercised in a weak or improper way, those with the least power (the poor) are likely to suffer most.

The Nigerian state has been retrogressing both politically and socio-economically in the recent past, despite its abundant resources (Edoh, 2003). As a result, malnutrition, high child mortality, lack of access to basic education, homelessness, and various types of social indignity have been dominant features of the decline of human development standards. Yet, the nation has the potential to overcome those indignities if only public revenue were used responsibly; resources developed productively for satisfying human needs, and not excessive human wants. Edoh (2003) observes that it is something of a paradox that a country recognized as one of the richest in Africa, and indeed the whole world, finds itself in this rather inglorious, unfortunate situation. Available data from the Federal Office of Statistics (1996) indicates that poverty in Nigeria (1980-1996) is pathetic, as about 67.1 million Nigerians, representing 65.8 percent of the population, are poor, using income and expenditure measures.

In terms of access to social and economic services, it has been a serious problem for the people as the poverty rate increased from 28.1 percent in 1980, for instance, to 70.6 percent in 2007 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2008). The UNDP report (2009) estimated the Human Poverty Index (HPI) value for Nigeria as 36.2 percent, ranking 114 out of 135 countries measured. Thus, in attempt to reduce the scourge of poverty in the nation, successive governments have initiated and implemented various poverty reduction programmes at one time or the other, some of which are; Operation Feed the Nation (OFN, 1976); Green Revolution (1980); Better Life for Rural Women; Peoples Bank; Federal Mass Transit Programme etc (Akighir, 2011). The presence of these programmes has not helped matters as the country has continued to suffer from the ‘Paradox of plenty’ which contracts the nation’s immense wealth (Aluko, 1975). The paper has therefore looked at government efforts over the years to redress poverty in Nigeria.

Methodology

The methodology for the study is essentially a secondary source of data. Existing information in textbooks, newspapers and journals, et cetera, were relied on. The paper used descriptive analysis to examine how governance has influenced poverty reduction in Nigeria. To realize the objective of this paper and for ease of analysis, the study is thematically divided into the following five parts. The first highlights the introduction, the second discusses major concepts of the study. The third part looks at past efforts by the government to reduce poverty in Nigeria, the fourth deals with the nexus between governance and poverty reduction in Nigeria, and thereafter draws conclusions and recommendations in the fifth part of the work.

Conceptual Definitions

Governance

Governance is concerned with how power is exercised in the management of a country's socio-economic and political resources. This involves processes, activities, events, and happenings in the society that can enhance (or impede) service delivery. Ademolekun (2002) defines governance as the political power to manage a nation's engender growth, development, improvement and social welfare of the citizenry.

The discussion on the concept of governance has given rise to twin terminologies as bad governance and good governance. While bad governance is argued to be the bane of corruption, misappropriation, underdevelopment, societal problems, and lack of respect for fundamental human rights, good governance, the focus of this study has always been linked to democratic governance exemplified by the absence of the above parameters of bad governance. Good governance requires respect for principles of accountability and transparency in administration, free flow of information, decentralization of power structure and decision making. It is the exercise of political power to promote the public good or welfare of the people (Babawale, 2003). Good governance, therefore, entails the effective process of leading the society with the capacity of those concerned to deliver services in terms of policy formulation and implementation, all geared towards improving the living conditions of the ordinary people.

Features of Good Governance

Participation: Participation is where citizens are engaged in formulating, implementing and evaluating policies that affect them (Simbine, 2004). The need for participation exists for the citizenry to contribute to governance, to help regulate individual conduct in the society and provide for the good of the people (Madhav, 2007).

- **Transparency:** Transparency means that leaders allow for public scrutiny of what they do while in public office. The citizens are allowed to attend public meetings and are free to obtain information on what happens in public offices; who makes what decisions, and what steps towards accountability.
- **Responsiveness:** This means that policy decisions respond to popular needs and expectations; it is the fundamental interest and ultimate purpose that defines the actions of government to represent the needs of the people (Ojo, 2009). It ensures that public institutions serve all stakeholders within a reasonable time frame.
- **Effectiveness and Efficiency:** This is when an institution makes the best use of resources at its disposal. It covers the sustainable use of natural resources of the environment.
- **Accountability:** Is the responsibility to account for stewardship to the authority and the people; this conforms to who has powers and responsibilities that are delegated. Accountability can be enforced with transparency, the rule of law and constitutionality.

- **Rule of Law:** Is the legal framework enforced impartially to protect human rights, particularly the minorities? An incorruptible law enforcement agency is the prerequisite for good governance (Sharma, 2006).
- **Consensus Oriented:** This is where the interest of people in the society varies, and good governance requires that these interests be harmonized. The society must reach a broad base consensus on the best interests of the whole community and how it can be achieved.
- **Equity and Inclusive:** Means that all citizens in the society are treated equally to have a stake in governance, so as not to feel excluded from the society. It entails equality before the law, and equality to realize individual capacities without regard to one's race, gender, or ethnic background. Religion or whatever.

Poverty

Based on its multi-dimensional nature, poverty is usually perceived using different criteria. This accounts for the numerous attempts in defining the concepts; each definition tries to capture the perception of the author or poor as to what the term is. To Okorodudu (2000), poverty is the state of being poor, acute scarcity and perpetual lack of requirements for a healthy life. This encompasses a low level of health and education, poor access to clean water and sanitation, inadequate physical infrastructure, lack of will and sufficient capacity and opportunity to better one's life. Poverty is an enemy of mankind; it humiliates and dehumanizes its victims.

Narayan et al. (2003) captured the definition from the point of view of the poor in different countries in the following perspectives; "poverty is humiliation, the sense of being dependent, and of being forced to accept rudeness, insults, and indifference when we seek help. Another such view of the poor is that expressed by a poor man in Kenya in 1997, as reported by Narayan et al. (2000), thus:

Don't ask me what poverty is because you have met it outside my house.
 Look at the house and count the number of holes. Look at my utensils and the clothes that I am wearing. Look at everything and write what you see. What you see is poverty.

The above reflect just descriptions of a few of the various perceptions of poverty, at least from the poor. Poverty has been broadly classified into two: relative and absolute poverty (Narayan, 2003). Relative poverty exists if an individual's income allows him to consume less (quantity and quality) relative to another individual. Similarly, one community (national or international) can be said to be poor relative to another if the per capita income/consumption of the former is less than that of the latter. Relative poverty is only problematic if the level of resources available to individuals (or communities) fails to provide the goods and services necessary to lead to a life worthy of human dignity.

On the other hand, absolute poverty refers to a lack of a minimum requirement in terms of the consumption of both private and public goods (Narayan, 2003). People in absolute poverty do not have the resources to meet their basic needs, including access to clean water, food, shelter, medicine and schooling. Because they are not getting sufficient calories, there are high infant mortality rates, and the life expectancies of these people are low. The literacy rate is also low, making it hard to find work. People in absolute poverty also suffer from diseases and parasites that could easily be cured, but no one can afford the medicine.

Past efforts by Government to reduce poverty in Nigeria

Poverty reduction is concerned with improving the living standards/conditions of people who are extremely poor by the government, or non-governmental organizations through different policies, programmes or projects. Several policies and programmes have been formulated and executed over the years to reduce poverty in Nigeria, and a few of these are reviewed.

The Nigerian Agricultural Cooperative Bank, which started operations on March 6, 1973, was established by Degree No. 19 of December 1972. It had responsibility for providing credit for the production, processing and marketing of agricultural produce. Its target groups included individual farmers, cooperative organizations, limited liability companies, states and the federal government. Before its merger with the Peoples Bank of Nigeria (PBN) in 2001, the bank had extended credit to 318,000 people to the tune of about N5.8 billion (Ezekile, 2003), to cushion their financial powerlessness.

The statute of the bank (PBN), which restricted it from taking deposits from the public, was a hindrance to its success. It had other problems, including its inability to charge market interest rates, high cost of credit administration, a huge portfolio of non-performing loans, funds trapped in distressed and liquidated banks, etc. A critical review of the activities of the bank, however, shows that its credit facilities had political and nepotistic undertones. These hindered it from reducing poverty in Nigeria, as most of the targeted people were not able to benefit from the credit facilities of the bank.

The National Directorate of Employment (NDE), established by Decree number 24 of October 19, 1986, commenced operations in January 1987 with the primary role of promoting skill acquisition, self-employment and labour-intensive work schemes. It was also concerned with the collection and maintenance of a data bank on unemployment and vacancies in the country, and the designing of employment programmes such as school leaver apprentice schemes, labour-based work programmes, and resettlement of trained beneficiaries. The NDE had trained more than 2 million unemployed Nigerians, provided business training for not less than 400,000 people, vocational training in up to 90 different trades, assistance to more than 40,000 unemployed people to set up their businesses, and had also organized labour-based groups through which 160,000 people benefited (Ezekiel,

2003). This, to an extent, was able to cushion the sufferings of some Nigerians. But on the whole, it did not salvage the plight of people as a result of the factors discussed below.

The NDE suffered from inadequate funding from the federal government. Its predicament was worsened by the fact that it had overstretched itself by engaging in skills acquisition, granting of loans, procuring and selling agricultural inputs. It also had a problem in recovering its loans. There was also the problem of duplication of efforts with the statutory roles of the Federal Ministry of Labour and Productivity in the area of compilation of statistics on the unemployed in the country, and claims to maintain a data bank of these, as well as matching applicants with vacancies. Above all, the agency failed to reduce poverty in the nation because political and tribal considerations, according to Oravee (2016), were emphasized in the selection of candidates for the programme.

The Family Economic Advancement Program (FEAP) was established to provide credit for agricultural production and processing, cottage and small-scale industries through cooperative societies, and to establish enterprises and pilot projects at the village level as a means of providing employment. Before it was wound up in 2000, FEAP financed 20,382 projects with a total credit of 3.33 billion; trained about 2000 loan beneficiaries in cooperative laws, principles and practice and basic marketing skills.

The organization (FEAP) had problems of no supervision and monitoring of the loans and projects by the participating banks, provision of sub-standard equipment and delays in the fabrication, and poor loan recovery. Its assets and liabilities were handed over to the National Poverty Eradication Programme is an offshoot of the defunct poverty alleviation programme, which was phased out in 2001 as a result of structural inefficiency. It (NAPEP) consists of four schemes, namely: Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES), Rural Infrastructural Development Scheme (RIDS), Social Welfare Service Scheme (SOWESS) and National Resources Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS). A critical assessment of the performance of NAPEP also leaves much to be desired. Available evidence shows that the rural people still remain poor. For example, the British Broadcasting Corporation World News Programme on ten years of democracy in Nigeria, (01 May, 2009), observed that the level of poverty which stood at 34 million population in 1999 when Nigeria returned to democratic rule had risen to 74 million population within ten years of democratic rule (Yakubu & Aderonmu, 2010).

The Nexus between Governance and Poverty Reduction

Governance (good governance) plays an important role in the advancement of socio-political and economic development. It promotes accountability, efficiency and effectiveness, transparency and the rule of law. Good governance can also allow for sound and efficient management of human resources for equitable and sustainable development (Sharma, 2006). He further states that, when citizens' rights are institutionalized under good governance, the poor exercise social and political choices and build relationships with

others by holding their leaders accountable. This put them (the poor) in a vantage position to improve their social and economic conditions. Meanwhile, economically empowered citizens are resources for good governance as they tend to strengthen it with vigour.

According to the former United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan (1998), good governance is perhaps the single most important factor in eradicating poverty and promoting development. It enhances human development and is the pilot around which other development activities revolve. It also promotes development by generating and defending a broad commitment to the public welfare. However, governance in the nation has been characterized by all kinds of anomalies ranging from social injustice, political killings and assassinations, corruption, unemployment, inadequate drinking water and roads etc. as rightly observed by Suberu (1996), a fundamental feature of governance in the nation is the deep and profound distrust of Nigerians for their leaders. This is not surprising given the frequent abortion and frustration of people's hopes by successive Nigerian administrations. If the principles of governance, encapsulated in representative democracy, are worthwhile in other countries, their practice in Nigeria, according to Ajayi and Ojo (2014), is faulty and fraudulent, as no one represents or protects the interests of others. Individuals in governance whether in described as representatives of the people. Therefore, dedication towards the actualization of poverty reduction policies and programmes is dashed.

Corruption in governance remains the biggest barrier to ending extreme poverty and stands in the way of progress in the development of all areas mentioned here: preventing funds from reaching healthcare and education, limiting individuals' activities to access job and social benefits, corroding systems of laws and stopping aid working effectively in the poorest parts of the world (Adebayo, 2013). The damage of the scourge to the economy and the fabric of the society is seen in the schools that are not built, the hospitals without medicine, the roads that are not passable and the failure of our citizens to be inspired (Usman, 2013). Presently in Nigeria, the greatest challenge to corruption is impunity by the governors and the governed alike. Because of its sheer scale and level, corruption is no longer secret; it is celebrated (Alemika, 2012), as perpetrators of the vice are hailed rather than being scorned and snubbed by the people.

Associated with the above failures of governance in Nigeria is the method of appointment of leaders in government projects and programmes. According to Gbereubia (2014), the appointments of leaders in most poverty reduction projects/programmes are based on tribalism or ethnic sentiments. The implication is that those appointed cannot adequately manage those institutions to achieve set objectives. The appointments are detriment on merit; they are also seen to be loyal to their tribes rather than the nation as a whole in the implementation of policies and programmes meant for national development.

The absence of good governance described above is therefore responsible for the accelerating scourge of poverty in Nigeria. Recent estimates indicate that about 1.5 billion people live below the poverty line of less than one dollar per day in the whole world. Out of the 1.5 billion people, Africa contributes about 250 million, which is about 17 percent of the world's total poor population (UNDP, 2015).

Statistical data from the Federal Office of Statistics (1996), in Nigeria, indicate that by 1960, poverty covered about 15 percent of the nation's population, and by 1980 it grew to 28 percent. By 1992, the extent of poverty was about 46 percent and then dropped to 43 percent by 1995. By 1996, poverty incidence in Nigeria was estimated to be about 66 percent in a total population of about 110 million people. It is worrisome that despite its abundant resources, Nigeria is among the 20 poorest countries in the world, with poverty incidence of over 70 percent (Chaji, 2008). The World Bank Report (2015) also indicates that Nigeria ranked third in the Global Poverty Index for 2014. Nigeria also constitutes 7 percent of globally extreme poor countries (Okorochoa, 2015). The National Bureau of Statistics put the number of abject poor Nigerians at 110 million. Also, out of the 77.93 million strong labour force in the country, 55.206 million are unemployed, 1.05 million are underemployed, and 3.14 million are unemployed. The Nigerian nation tops the list of food-importing nations with an annual bill of N1.3 trillion growing at the rate of 11 percent (Gani, 2015). This is ironic considering the country's vast human and material resources.

Infant mortality rate is still very high, as the report indicates that 59,000 women die during or after childbirth annually, the second highest after India (Chaji, 2008). Similarly, the UNICEF report indicates that 1.7 million children under five year's children are malnourished in Nigeria, accounting for a tenth of the global total. Also, nearly a thousand children die of malnutrition-related causes every day, a total of 361,000 each year (Muanya, 2015).

The economic realm is also negatively affected by the poverty situation. Although the country was declared the fastest-growing economy in Africa in 2013, there was a discrepancy between the growth and development. The 2014 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development (2015) index report indicates that Nigeria is ranked 153 out of 210 countries in the world. This portends that good governance has eluded the people, as only a few people were able to sustain themselves properly. In the words of Chaji (2008), only a few Nigerians can testify that governance (1999-2015) had a direct positive impact on their lives. Among the very few are the politicians themselves, their families and cronies, business moguls and consultants who have connections with politicians and academics given appointments to hold public offices and those who get tokens as defenders and promoters of politicians and public office holders. The Nigerian people who do not have connections with politicians continue to live in poverty, hardship and an uncertain future. Chaji (2008) further stated:

Lack of good governance also manifests in the insecurity brought about by ethno-religious crises and militia violence in the country. For instance, apart from the Nigerian Delta militias, the Boko Haram insurgency is attributed to a lack of good governance and marginalization of the masses by the government. The activities of these groups have no doubt rendered Nigeria poorer in human and material resources.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Nigeria is blessed with abundant human and material resources that can proper her poverty reduction strides. However, through a combination of factors described in the study, the nation's fortunes have become squandered or siphoned at the detriment of the masses. Therefore, the less privileged have continued to live in squalor and dehumanizing conditions. In order to obliterate, or at least reduce, poverty to the barest minimum in Nigeria, the paper has made the following recommendations.

First and foremost, proactive efforts must be made by those in governance positions to empower youth through skills acquisition and human resources development so that they can be gainfully employed in a productive venture. The government should prosecute persons who are found to be thwarting government projects and programmes meant to better the lives of the masses. The National Orientation Agency (NOA) should embark on vigorous education and value-orientation and re-orientation aimed at repositioning governance and the citizenry at large.

Government should also provide productive assets such as credit loans, physical infrastructure and appropriate technology, etc, for the growth and expansion of rural industries. Education must be turned into a major acceleration process in the reduction of poverty. In that regard, our curriculum should be more tilted towards vocational and technical education. Effective leadership should be encouraged and ensured in the provision of physical infrastructure, improved social environment and proper handling of available resources for poverty reduction. People in governance must know that they owe posterity explanations for their current acts. They should see themselves as servants of the people and not the other way round. As such, they should contribute to the growth and development of their societies through sound policies/programmes and projects. Above all, corruption-fighting institutions should therefore be strengthened and given the necessary support to bring to book ailing officials and the masses.

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