



**POVERTY AND THE STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL IN NIGERIA: REDEFINING
OF POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMMES AFTER
THE #ENDSARS PROTESTS**

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Abstract

The phenomenon of poverty has become a widespread collective problem despite all the different poverty alleviation policies and programmes by governments to curtail the impacts of poverty on Nigerians. Since it is estimated that over 95 million Nigerians still live in poverty, with at least five million becoming poorer than ever since 2015, this study examines poverty and the struggle for survival in Nigeria with the view to redefining poverty alleviation programmes after the #ENDSARS PROTEST. The descriptive method of analysis was employed to review some selected poverty alleviation policies and programmes of past administrations, their pitfalls and then underscores the new efforts launched to curtail poverty spread by the government. Among the findings, the paper revealed that the level of poverty and the struggle for survival in Nigeria as an oil producing nation is heart-breaking and unacceptable. In addition, the paper showed that the different poverty alleviation policies and programmes failed to change the narratives of the poor due to corruption and the adoption of top-bottom rather bottom-top approach in implementation. Sequel to this, the paper concluded that the current government policies and programmes on poverty would spur innovations, entrepreneurship, infrastructural development and improved welfare of Nigerians. Based on this, the paper recommended the Nigeria's economy should be diversified to boost socio-economic development thereby creating jobs which is a key factor in alleviating poverty. Again, the wages and allowances of the political class, particularly, members of the National Assembly should be slashed to enable government have funds to increase wages and allowances for low-and middle-income earners as overall productivity will be increased and poverty reduced

Keywords: Poverty; Poverty Alleviation Programmes; #Endsars protests; National Youth Investment Fund; N-power

Introduction

Nigeria is rich in land, human and natural resources, and in fact, one of the most resource-endowed nations in the world. Nevertheless her citizens are among the poorest in the world. Poverty holds sway in the midst of plenty, a situation, described by Oshewolo (2010) as a 'bewildering paradox'. Put differently, a rich country inhabited by poor people is a contradiction. Certainly, despite all arguments, it is indefensible that poverty, unequal access to resources, large youth populations with limited access to education and jobs are daily triggering uprising, banditry, kidnapping, and of recent, unknown gunmen in the country. Based on this ugly trend, Nigeria, according to Oshewolo (2010), has been described as poor among the

committee of nations. Even on the continent of Africa, using selected world development indicators, he asserts that Nigeria is poorly ranked. Disappointing as it is, successive reports of Nigeria's Human Development Index (HDI) corroborate that the country's poverty has worsened in ranking and that more Nigerians have really crossed the poverty threshold. In the words of one of the reports: Overall most Nigerians felt poorer in 1995 than in 1992 and the incidence of individual poverty had increased while the population of the absolute poor had also increased from about 35 million in 1992 to about 44 million by 1995. Corroborating this declaration, Nigeria's human development index declined from about 0.322 in 1990 to 0.246 in 1993. At a point, Nigeria was once ranked 158th of the 159 countries surveyed in 2005 (CIA, 2009).

At present, regardless of the various reports of poverty alleviation programmes adopted by various governments in Nigeria, poverty is still one of the most serious problems in Nigeria. Recent estimates indicate that about 1.5 billion people in the world live below the poverty line, earning less than US\$1 per day. Similarly, out of the 1.5 billion people, Africa contributes about 250million, which is about 17% of the world's total poor population. In Nigeria, almost everyone is complaining about the trying times because the economy is slowed down by many difficulties. On the basis of the general economic crisis, and the recent global economic downturn, Nigeria is unable to raise the standard of living of its citizens to an appreciable height. Thus poverty, in both absolute and relative terms, constitutes one of the most serious problems confronting Nigeria.

From the foregoing, it is no wonder that about 70% of the populations are explicitly classified as poor with over 65% still living in absolute poverty in Nigeria. In their different contributions to the effect of poverty, Commins(2004), Jencks(1992),and Porter & Washington(1979) hold that it humiliates and dehumanizes its victim; leads to loss of self-confidence, self-actualization, self-fulfillment, lack of good orientation and abandonment of cultural values and heritage such that people are ashamed of their cultural and racial identity. Poverty is visible in principles and moralities because it allows shallow intellectualism to triumph, and people do everything to achieve their self-centered goals (Abimuku, 2006). Summarizing these assertions, Abiola and Olaopa (2008) declare that there is hunger, ignorance, malnutrition, disease, unemployment, poor access to credit facilities, and low life expectancy as well as a general level of human hopelessness. By implication, the scourge of poverty in Nigeria is an undeniable reality.

Sustaining the position of Abiola and Olaopa (2008), Okpe and Abu (2009) intelligently observe that Nigeria has witnessed a monumental increase in the level of poverty. This seems to explain the *raison d'être* why ten years after, precisely in 2018, 86.9 million Nigerians were said to be living in extreme poverty (World Poverty Clock, 2019). From this data, Nigeria is said to have the highest rate of extreme poverty in the world. According to Iheonu & Urama (2019), it is disturbing that data from the Global Consumption and Income Project (GCIP, 2019) showed that the rate of poverty overtime has been significantly high in Nigeria. Two years later, 40 percent of Nigerians (83 million people) were found to be living below the poverty line, while another 25 percent (53 million) were vulnerable. For Olayinka(2019), over 93 million Nigerians still live in poverty, with at least three million sliding into extreme poverty. Thus, with the threats of the second wave of Covid-19 lurking around, the projected 53 million vulnerable people who survived the first wave are most likely to become poorer than ever.

It is paradoxical to state that the poverty level in Nigeria contradicts the country's immense wealth. Among other things, the country is enormously endowed with human, agricultural, gas and large untapped solid mineral resources. Put differently, poverty remains a plague that destabilizes development since it is deep-rooted and pervasive. Ordinarily, Nigeria should have been ranked among the richest countries of the world and

thus, should have no business whatsoever being associated with extreme poverty. It is in this vein that the former World Bank President, Mr. Paul Wolfowitz's lamentation about poverty in Nigeria is particularly worrisome. According to him, the country earned over US \$350 billion from one resource (petroleum) during the last four decades of the twentieth century, but rather than record remarkable progress in national socio-economic development, Nigeria has retrogressed to become one of the poorest countries at the threshold of twenty-first century whereas she was among the richest 50 in the early 1970. Earlier, Olusegun Obasanjo, former president, described the various statistical reports on poverty in Nigeria as alarming (The Punch, Monday, August 23 1999). Further, the erstwhile president described the various reports in the public domain on the level of poverty in Nigeria as embarrassing. To him, it was an irony of fate that Nigeria which was ranked one of the 48 richest countries of the world in 1979 had by 1998 become one of the 25 poorest nations. Despite all real and imaginary efforts to improve the living standards of Nigerians, Nigeria's position as headquarters of poverty in the world is depressing.

It is amazing to note that various poverty alleviation strategies have been adopted by successive governments in Nigeria, but their level of social impact leaves much to be desired. It is really unfortunate that scholars have collectively agreed that the different poverty alleviation policies and programmes have failed to attain the objectives for which they were established (Ovwasa, 2000). It is on this premise that this paper examines the factors that have weakened the efforts and the strategies of government to fight the poverty scourge.

1.2 Statement of the problem

From the foregoing, the incidence of poverty with its distinguishing characteristics in Nigeria is complex, multifaceted and multidimensional with manifestations in all ramifications. As a threat and challenge to humanity, its influence is having a firm grip on the socio-economic, political, environmental and every sphere of human subsistence as if it were human with hands. However, it is regrettable that in spite of all measures, both real and imaginary, to curtail its surge, poverty has remained massive, pervasive and chronic, engulfing over 65% of Nigerians, and pushing them to live below the poverty line, that is, earning less than US\$1 per day. Currently, it is estimated that over 95 million Nigerians still live in poverty, with at least five million becoming poorer than ever. This is against all promises to improve the living conditions of Nigerians; millions of people still wallow in abject poverty- a cankerworm against growth and development. Regrettably, majority of people have neither shelter over their heads or good health care; lack qualitative or limited access to or total lack of education; go to bed with empty stomach (Okunola, 2019). As a result, malnutrition, illiteracy, poor living standards, prostitution and upsurge of criminal activities among youths have become endemic in Nigeria. Since the different poverty alleviation programmes embarked upon by successive government to alleviate poverty have failed to change the narratives of poor in Nigeria, it is estimated that 86 million Nigerians still wear the poverty garment to the dismay of international collaborators who have contributed immensely to improve the conditions of life and living in the country. Nevertheless, the project to alleviate poverty and improve the standards of living amongst Nigerians has increasingly become a necessity, particularly with the CHANGE MANTRA which ushered in the present government to power six years ago. At this juncture, one may, therefore, ask:-

- i) What is the generalized concept of poverty?
- ii) What are the problems associated with the previous policies and programmes on poverty alleviation in Nigeria?
- iii) How is President Buhari poverty alleviation different, including its implementation and effectiveness, mostly after the #EndSARS protest nationwide?

In view of this, the general objective of this paper is to assess of some selected poverty alleviation programmes of past administrations, their pitfalls and critically evaluate the present day government policies and programmes on poverty alleviation such as N-POWER, N-TECH, N-AGRO, FINTECH, YES, NYIF, FARMERMONI, TRADERMONI, MARKETMONI, ETP, DYN amongst others, particularly after # EndSARS protests all over the country. Finally, this paper recommends appropriate procedures to undertake in order to ensure the felt success of the policies and programmes of the poverty alleviation are sustainable.

2. Methodology

Given the background of the study, the descriptive analysis was adopted to examine the secondary data gathered from journals, reports, the internet and other secondary sources. The choice of this technique of analysis was informed by the nature of the data collected and the objective of the research coupled with the fact that the study critically involves investigating, reviewing and analyzing previous programmes and policies of government and prospects of understanding the current poverty alleviation strategies and achieving a remarkable reduction in poverty profile, particularly after the #EndSARS protests.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Progressive Social Theory

Individuals are not viewed as the source of poverty in the Progressive Social Theory. Rather, advocates of the theory fault economic, political and social distortions as well as discrimination, which limit opportunities and resources to create wealth as the basis of poverty in our midst. In other words, the theory ascribes poverty to economic, social and political structures that make the poor go down in spite of how dedicated they may have been.

The 19th century social theorists observe the relentless assault on the individuals and underscore how social and economic systems prevailed and created situations of poverty in the midst of plenty. According to Bradshaw (2006), the theorists analyze how the economic system of private enterprise held back mass of the unemployed as an intentional policy to keep wages low. As a result of the dysfunctional social and economic systems, people may work hard and have acceptable attitudes, but still be in the poverty trap. Related to how poverty trap seems to dominate the affairs of the majority of people Nigerians is the issue of discrimination based on personal attributes such as ethnicity, and religion which limit opportunities in spite of personal capabilities of people.

Aside this, government policies and actions rather than improve better conditions of living intensify poverty. For example, in the pursuit of improving the standards of living of Nigerians through the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), its poor implementation impoverished the citizens. Undoubtedly, the massive devaluation of the country's currency(Naira), high inflation, factory closures, privatization, and commercialization contributed in no small measure to the high level of poverty situation in Nigeria (Danaan, 2016). Going by this, it is obvious that the insensitivity of government to empowering the poor has contributed immensely to the level of poverty in the country. Concurring, Omoyibo(2013) affirms that there is strong correlation between the character of governance and the degree of poverty in Nigeria. What is more, it is in this light that Onyishi and Ezeibe (2014) further explain that:

In Nigeria, after the attainment of flag independence, ubiquitous state involvement in the emergent national economy took on even greater dimension. The incipient oil-economy provided further impetus as the resources available to the public multiplied almost geometrically. State power and

positions were now increasingly seen as the most viable and rapid avenues for acquisition of private capitals. Thus, state positions offered greater attraction to Nigerians, as experience had shown that they became the surest means to riches, affluence and prestige in the Nigerian society. To this extent, state power became wealth and wealth an efficacious pathway to power (Onyishi and Ezeibe, 2014, p. 2)

From the foregoing, it is evident that with the country's economy being undiversified and, largely dependent on crude oil revenue, the circumstances surrounding poverty has worsened since crude oil, the major source of foreign exchange is slowly but surely getting exhausted. As a result, the inadequate provision of social and economic infrastructure by government has also led to the decline of the standard of living and exacerbated poverty in Nigeria. Nigeria has great potential for massive job creation, expansion of markets and industrialization given her human and natural resources but remains limited by structural distortions and lack of the will to bring about progressive change on the part of successive governments. But the failure to invest in certain critical sectors such as the power sector has resulted in high cost of production and high prices of locally manufactured goods rising beyond the purchase of ordinary Nigerian; with low patronage, most of the manufacturing sectors have collapsed thereby increasing the poverty index. In addition, the misplacement of priorities by governments at all levels manifesting in wasteful expenditure rather than investment that has direct bearing on the standard of living, has aggravated poverty in Nigeria.

4. Conceptual Underpinnings

4.1. What is Poverty?

There is no definite definition or agreement on a standard definition of poverty despite its universality. In other words, a concise and universally accepted definition of poverty is elusive largely because it affects many aspects of the human conditions, including physical, moral and psychological. As a result, different criteria have, therefore, been used to conceptualize poverty. Poverty has variously been defined by scholars. In Nigeria, it is all-encompassing in spite of the country's seeming abundance of human and natural resources. This explains why Akintola and Yusuf (2001) assert that the absence of the well being of individuals which includes adequate food, shelter, portable water, Healthcare, education and employment opportunities are some of these basic determinants of poverty. Earlier, Yusuf (2000) views poverty as more than an economic condition seeing that it is also a situation in which an individual is unable for the reason of social, political and psychological incapacitation, to provide himself and his family the barest basic necessities of life. Sustaining this point of view, some scholars, mostly Ajakaiye and Adeyeye (2000), distinguish poverty as a function of education, health, child mortality and other demographic variables. In other words, the absence of the well being of individuals which include adequate food, shelter, portable water, Healthcare, education and employment opportunities are some of the basic determinants of poverty (Akintola and Yusuf, 2001). Succinctly put, poverty is characterized by inadequate access to basic human needs (food and non – food) to the sustenance of socially acceptable minimum standard of living in a given society. Substantiating, Yusuf (2000) maintains that the horror of poverty has enveloped all aspects of an individual's life leading to the subordination to higher social and economic classes, utter insecurity in the face of changing circumstances, including of course, the erosion of human dignity and self respect psychologically. In all these definitions, poverty is simply a state of being in which individuals and groups lack basic necessities of life and are less privileged than other members of the society.

Lending credence to these perspectives advanced, Odumosu (1999) declares that in a least developed country such as Nigeria, a poor man suffers from poor nutrition, he is vulnerable to diseases; his life span

is short; he lives in huts where squalor perpetually surrounds him; he is illiterate both in letter and skill; he does not get his meals regularly, but when he does, he is haunted with the fear of where his next meal will come from; he is clad in rags, if at all; he walks without a pair of shoes; lack of hygiene, minimal food, or contagious diseases have inflicted some scars on his body; he lives mostly in villages-remote and inaccessible to the rest of the world-or slums or shanty towns; the water he drinks is neither safe nor clean; he is either unemployed or underemployed; but when he employed he is overworked and underpaid.

Writing on the concept of poverty which has become chameleonic over the years, Bhalla and Lapeyre (2016) likened it to the idea of social exclusion as an up-and-coming phenomenon in both developed and developing contexts. It is in this vein that Room (2016) examines the existence of poverty in the European community, and even in the most advanced societies of the world and concluded to the utmost surprise of many scholars that poverty exists therein. In a related development, Bradshaw and Main (2016) investigated how the well-being of children is affected by indices of poverty. From their standpoint, it is obvious that the welfare of children depends not necessarily on taking balanced diets, but also on consumption of non-food goods and services, such as clothing, housing, education and health care. From the foregoing, Beegle, Christiaensen, Dabalen, & Gaddis (2016) and Grootaert (1995) conclude that poverty is clearly an important subject of dissertation not only in Nigeria, but also in the African continent.

Fundamentally, poverty can be observed in four ways, namely, lack of access to basic needs/goods; lack of or impaired access to productive resources; outcome of inefficient use of common resources; and finally, exclusive mechanisms. According to Streeten and Burki(1978), basic goods include nutrition, shelter/housing, water, and healthcare, access to productive resources including education, working skills and tools and political and civil rights to participate in decisions concerning socio-economic conditions. Explaining further, the first three of the aforementioned can be understood as basic needs/goods necessary for survival as they include impaired access to productive resources (agricultural land, physical capital and financial assets) which leads to absolute low income, unemployment, undernourishment and so forth. What is more, inadequate endowment of human capital is without a doubt a key foundation of poverty.

As observed, poverty is massive and multi-dimensional. Gore (2002) explains the concept of all-pervasive poverty. According to him, poverty is all-pervasive, where the majority of the population lives at or below income levels sufficient to meet their basic needs, and the available resources, even when equally distributed, are barely sufficient to meet the basic needs of the population. Since poverty has multiplier effects that halts access to resources, retards health status, reduces life expectancy, security, education and relationships, it is therefore a risk factor in coping with human challenges (Pearson (2015).

4.2 Poverty alleviation

In reaction to the unbearable poverty predicament in Nigeria, different programmes have been established and intensified by successive administrations in Nigeria through reforms, interventions and sustainable development goals to improve the living standards of the citizenry. Despite the fact that poverty alleviation programmes are means through which government aspire to overhaul and rebuild the economy, it remains a paradox why a larger section of her population in all the six geo-political zones still languishes in poverty in spite of the country's immense human and natural resources (Aigbokhan, 1998).

Poverty alleviation would have been much easier if the poor were equally rich, but with less income. But in reality, the poor, aside from being poor have short life spans, lack basic education, lack freedom and human dignity; they are landless and as well denied the most basic choices and opportunities of human development (Okunola, 2019).It is in understanding the plight of the poor, their miseries and humiliation

that the King of Nepal, Birendra Vic Bikram's lengthy characterization of them makes sense to all and sundry and very apt for this discourse. According to him and cited by Lema (1998):

A poor man in a least developed country and his number runs into millions - suffers from poor nutrition. He is vulnerable to diseases. His average life span is short. He lives in huts where squalor perpetually surrounds him. He is illiterate both in letter and skills. He does not get his meal regularly, but when he does, he is haunted with the fear of where his next will come from....Lack of hygiene, minimal food or contagious diseases have inflicted some scars on his body, He lives most in villages remote and inaccessible to the rest of the world or in slumps or shanty towns. The water he drinks is neither safe nor clean. He is either unemployed or underemployed. When he is employed, he is overworked and underpaid. He suffers from apathy and ignominy. From birth to death, he remains a destitute. Usually, he dies an infant, but if he does survive, death and want haunt him till the end. Flood, famine, drought and other natural disasters continually plague him. If he is a villager, he may be landless; if he is a town dweller, he rarely has a roof over his head.... He cannot buy books for his children, nor pay fees for the school, when he falls ill, he cannot pay fees to a doctor nor can he buy the medicines for himself ... He can neither read nor afford to buy a newspaper. A radio transistor is a luxury to him ... Indeed for him time has not changed since the Dark Ages. And as though afflictions were not enough it is he (and this is the greatest irony of ail) who gives birth to the greatest number of children, thus spreading and multiplying misery to a dark universe of destitution. When death comes to him finally, he seems to be happier than those he left behind him."

From Bikram's lengthy description of the poor, it is obvious, according to Ajadike(2003), that they are least qualified to be the guarantors, protectors and sustainable managers of the environment.

It is really unfortunate that despite the different poverty alleviation programmes approved by successive governments in Nigeria, more Nigerians are getting caught up by the web of poverty daily; more Nigerians in millions still live in extreme poverty. Supporting this, Mohammed (2000) asserts that most of the programmes and policies targeted at improving the conditions of the poor did not succeed in addressing the vexed poverty question which perhaps explains why the present government has either modified or had them scrapped to ensure that at least five million Nigerians who would have become extreme poorer than ever, particularly between November 2018 till date are improved upon. Prior to this appalling state of poverty, several poverty reduction policies and programmes have been adopted to alleviate poverty and improve the living conditions of Nigerians. Some of these policies and programmes were on certain sectors, but their overarching goal was poverty reduction (Oshewolo, 2010).

However, many reasons have been given for the abysmal performance of poverty alleviation initiatives in Nigeria. In reality, the different poverty alleviation policies and programmes failed to change the narratives of the poor due to corruption, high level of inequality in income distribution, low literacy rate and poor skill acquisition, political instability, poor leadership and above all, the adoption of top-bottom rather bottom-top approach in implementation (Aigbokhan, 2008; Arisi-Nwugballa et al., 2016; Dauda, 2017; Elumilade, Asaolu, & Adereti, 2006). Admittedly, Arisi-Nwugballa et al. (2016) contended that that poverty alleviation initiatives were geared towards providing financial credit and grants to drive the development of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) thereby leading to job creation and capacity utilization. In as much as it is agreed that some of these interventions enhanced the incomes of the target beneficiaries engaged in MSMEs, but they could not be sustained due to obstacles such as the high cost of running businesses, infrastructural decay and competition caused by the proliferation of cheaper imported substitutes.

4.3 Review of some selected past Strategies

At this juncture, it is most appropriate to review of some selected past strategies of poverty alleviation in Nigeria since they have yielded very little fruits. According to Garba (2006), the policies and programmes were mostly not designed to alleviate poverty as they lacked clearly defined policy frameworks with proper guidelines for poverty alleviation. Sustaining his submission, Garba (2006) maintained that the policies and programmes of poverty alleviation suffered from political instability, interference, policy, and macroeconomic dislocations, and above all, lacked continuity, and are riddled with corruption, political deception, outright kleptomania, and distasteful looting.

(a) The Better Life Programme (BLP):

This was one of the most popular poverty alleviation programs introduced by the Babangida regime in 1987 to improve and ameliorate socio-economic, political and cultural status of rural women in order to maximize capacity utilization of their resources for rural, local and national development. Better Life Programme was introduced by the Babangida regime in 1987 to improve and ameliorate socio-economic, political and cultural status of rural women in order to maximize capacity utilization of their resources for rural, local and national development. As a poverty alleviation strategy, Better Life Programme formed the theme of 1991 Annual Conference of Nigerian Geographical Association in which 91 scholars presented researched papers on its conceptualization, implementation, merits and shortcomings. BLP was a bold attempt to modernize the rural environment through the provision of infrastructural facilities, or to earn income through the extraction of natural resources. After a critical analysis of the objectives of the programme, Phil-Eze (1991) regretted that it was silent on the issue of environmental degradation and control. It was bizarre that such a programme designed to sensitize women to aspire to leadership positions up to national level, demand equal share of the nations resources and maximize their production capacities, should not want them to worry about the conditions of the environment. In the BLP, rural women constituted a production force in agricultural sector, and pooled their resources to champion development projects.

Thirty four years after BLP was introduced, rural women are no better off today than they were prior to its introduction. The improper sitting of cottage infrastructural facilities and over-exploitation of agricultural potentials of every available land leading to land degradation were its greatest undoing. Besides, in terms of the programme implementation, urban women and women on the upper class of the society hijacked access to the benefits of the programme so that the poor were not only marginalized but their poverty became elevated through environmental deterioration.

(b) The National Housing Fund, (NHF):

The Babangida regime established the National Housing Fund, (NHF) by Decree 3 of 1992 as a poverty alleviation strategy. It came as governments' response to the increasing difficulty by of majority of Nigerians to build own houses. The strategy was designed to grant loans to workers, which would save them the mental agony of sourcing for money, and possibly minimize their physical assault on the environment in their search for local building materials. At a glance, the policy appeared very attractive since it was seen, according to Phil-Eze (2000) as one that could provide adequate and decent housing to the Nigerian workers in addition to protecting the environment in concept. However, the implementation was laced with bureaucratic bottlenecks and as a result, the realization of the objectives of the strategy by the Nigerian workers were very easier said than done. While the plan lasted, 2.5% of workers' monthly incomes were deducted at source for years without benefiting from the scheme. Needless to state that the increasing cost of imported building materials, inflicted more poverty on workers by deductions. As it

were, greater movement towards local sourcing of raw materials to provide housing inputs, the natural environment became subjected to increased degradation as sand excavation, rock quarrying even on marginal lands and deforestation were, in the assessment of Phil-Eze (1995) the dominant environmental degradation factors associated with the provision of housing. Accordingly, it was shown that infrastructural development such as housing contributes 45.68% of deforestation in Nigeria's rainforest belt, while natural resources exploitation accounts for 31.89%. If the NHF scheme was properly packaged and executed, it would have ensured sustainable environment, rather it exacerbated environmental degradation.

(c) Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP):

Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) was another attractive packaged strategy targeted at the poor in the Nigerian society to ameliorate their poverty stricken lives aside from the Better Life Programme. The programme was launched by President Olusegun Obasanjo in January 2000 as a Stop-gap designed to tackle the problem of unemployment especially among youths in Nigeria. The specific objective of the programme was to set in motion effective economic empowerment of the people in urban, sub-urban and rural communities. The programme was to last between January and September 2000. Participants who were mostly expected to be unemployed graduates were to collect a monthly stipend of N3, 500. But as observed with the Better Life Programme, PAP failed to realize its objectives because the programme was hijacked by politicians and recruitment of beneficiaries was therefore predominantly based on loyalty to the ruling party i.e. the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Funds meant for the programme were also grossly mismanaged as stipends of participants were embezzled in some states and were not regularly paid in most other states of the Federation. Admitted, the Federal government had very good intention for her citizens by establishing and financing the PAP, but the programme never realized its intended objectives given that the target group, the poor in our society, were hardly reached due to the fact that the programme existed at the state and local government levels but lacked the pertinent linkages with the traditional and community leaders to effectively penetrate the grassroots. In other words, the top-bottom approach, rather than bottom-top plan was adopted in its implementation. In essence, the poor and rural communities, in the contribution of Okoli(1999) only participated when it was convenient, stayed away when it was not. By this singular action, poverty continued unabated and plunged more people into poverty. This is what informed the scrapping of PAP and replaced by National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) still at the incubating stage.

(d) The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS)

It is worthy to mention the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) described as a medium term strategy. The implementation of NEEDS rests on four major strategies. First, it aims at reforming government and institutions by fighting corruption, ensuring transparency and promoting rule of law and strict enforcement of contracts. Another strategy is to grow the private sector as the engine of growth and wealth creation, employment generation and poverty reduction. Third, it seeks to implement a social charter with emphasis on people's welfare, health, education, employment, poverty reduction, empowerment, security, and participation. The fourth key strategy is value reorientation (see Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004:4; Omotola, 2008; Chukwuemeka, 2009). NEEDS is a national framework of action, which has its equivalent at the state and local government levels as State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (SEEDS) and Local Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (LEEDS) respectively. The implementation also stresses collaboration and coordination between the federal and state governments, donor agencies, the private sector, civil society, NGOs and other stakeholders. As a home-grown strategy, NEEDS was described as the Nigerian version of the MDGs(Action aid Nigeria, 2009).

(e) The Seven-Point Agenda

The Seven-Point Agenda started as a proposal for development under the leadership of late President Umar Musa Yar'Adua (2007). The agenda was the policy thrust of the administration. The main objectives and principles of the agenda include improving the general wellbeing of Nigerians and making the country become one of the biggest economies in the world by the year 2020. Out of the seven point Agenda, the seventh area focuses on poverty alleviation and wealth creation which is the focus on this paper. While the Seven-Point Agenda covered broad spectrum of various development challenges facing the country, particularly poverty alleviation, it was widely criticized by development experts. According to Garba (2016), all the poverty alleviation initiatives in Nigeria since independence have yielded very little fruit. He claims that the programs were mostly not designed to alleviate poverty; they lacked clearly defined policy framework with proper guidelines for poverty alleviation; they suffer from political instability, interference, policy and macroeconomic dislocations; and are riddled with corruption, political deception, outright kleptomania and distasteful looting. It must also be stated that lack of continuity and shift in approach trailed poverty alleviation programs in Nigeria.

According to Mustapha (2014), they suffer from political instability, interference, policy and macroeconomic dislocations; and are riddled with corruption, political deception, outright kleptomania and distasteful looting. Sustaining his submission, Garba (2016) asserts the programme lack of continuity and shift in approach towards alleviating the teeming poor population in Nigeria. Each subsequent administration came with a different idea or no idea at all. According to Mustapha (2014), poverty reduction programs became more 'regime specific' because there was hardly any continuity with those initiated by previous governments. The challenges above have made government's policies to be largely unproductive. Nevertheless, as laudable as these programs appear, poverty still remains endemic and pervasive in Nigeria. What then are the challenges?

(f) Buhari's Poverty Alleviation, Job Creation Programmes

In some quarters, it is upheld that President Muhammadu Buhari's several initiatives targeted at jobs for the youths and alleviating poverty among women and vulnerable groups remain the best in the history of the country. According to Lai Mohammed, the minister of information, Buhari government has remained committed to creating jobs for the teeming youths and alleviating poverty. In his words:

No government in the history of this country has ever methodically and seriously put in place measures aimed at addressing poverty alleviation and creating jobs for youths like this Administration.

Buttressing further, the minister identified the N75 billion National Youth Investment Fund (NYIF) initiated by the government aimed at providing opportunities for the youths. The Fund is part and parcel of the N2.3 trillion Economic Sustainability Plan created to cushion the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on most vulnerable Micro Small Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) across the country. Further, the minister stated the Fund, approved by the Federal Executive Council (FEC) on July 22, 2020, targets young people between ages 18-35 years and is expected to last for a period of three years (2020-2023). At present, no fewer than one million Nigerians have applied for the N75 billion NYIF since the portal opened on October 12, 2020.

Besides, the minister also listed MSMEs Survival Fund as part of the administration's initiative at jobs sustainability. He said the Fund is a cluster of grants to support MSMEs to meet their payroll obligations

and safeguard MSMEs jobs from the shock of COVID-19 pandemic. Highlights of the MSME Survival Fund, according to the minister included Payroll Support for businesses in health, education, hospitality and food production sectors targeted at 500,000 beneficiaries. One-Off payment to support self-employed individuals like mechanics and drivers, hair dressers, Keke Napep and Okada riders, plumbers, electricians with a one-time payment of N30,000 for 333,000 beneficiaries.

Similarly, the federal government, in its Formalization Support programme, is expected to register 250,000 new businesses with the Corporate Affairs Commission at no cost to Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). In addition, an additional 100,000 MSMEs are expected to benefit N50, 000 grants to boost their enterprises. Further, the creation of the Guaranteed Off take Stimulus Scheme is also aimed to stimulate direct local production in the 36 states and the FCT. In the same vein, products from MSMEs involved will enjoy off-taker guarantees from the federal government. In elucidating the poverty alleviation programmes of the government, Mohammed declared that the youths were also targeted in other initiatives such as N-POWER which had engaged 500,000 beneficiaries with 400,000 more expected. According to Mohammed (2021), 10,000 youths had been trained and benefitted under N-TECH and N-AGRO respectively. Similarly, the creation of FINTECH by the federal government is to enable the growth of businesses that use technology to enhance or automate financial services and processes. Besides, over two million farmers and traders; mostly youths had been empowered under FARMERMONI, TRADERMONI and MARKETMONI.

Digital Youth Nigeria is also initiated to implement skill acquisition programmes for poverty alleviation and employment generation. According to Mohammed, over 100,000 youths across the country benefitted from Mobile Service Repair Training with financial and technical assistance. Sustaining his position, he averred that over 500,000 youths have also benefitted from the Graduate Internship Scheme which provided short-term employment for graduates. 1000 farmers from each of the 774 LGAs in the country were empowered and guided under the Youth Entrepreneurship Support programme (YES). He said Entrepreneurship Training Programme ensures MSMEs are equipped with skills and access to credit while Digital Youth Nigeria focuses on positioning youth for revenue jobs opportunities tapping into the global tech market. What is more, the federal government has proposed the provision for 300,000 homes to be built by young Architects and Engineers as well as the installation of a 5 million Solar Home System to be installed by youth owned businesses. All these are blueprints of the Buhari administration are in response to meeting the five-point demands of the #EndSARS protests.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has attempted to demonstrate that poverty is pouncing on Nigerians with the speed and fierceness of a hungry lion due to corruption. Without a doubt, it is embarrassing that the Nigerian society is irresponsibly being destroyed by poverty in the midst of plenty. However, the #ENDSARS protests have redefined a new face for poverty alleviation through their five-point demand. Based on this, this paper proffers the following recommendations to checkmate the menace of poverty through the new face of poverty alleviation policies and programmes in Nigeria

1. Since the success of a country's economy is tied to the success of the education as the competitive level of education is directly linked to developing the economy competitively. People can be moved out of poverty through attaining quality education as it improves economic efficiency of the country by expanding labour force value and efficiency. With this, poverty will be greatly reduced.

2. It has been established by scholars that the prevalence and widening poverty gap in Nigeria is as a result of politics and poor execution of policies and therefore suggested that planners should ensure that their plans receive popular acceptance through effective participation by the poor, through Participation Poverty Assessment Approach.
3. In the bid to achieve the noble objective of poverty alleviation programmes, there should be punishment for corrupt public office holders who have continuously diverted funds meant for Nigerians for personal use, resulting to poverty. The fight against corruption requires direct, clear and forceful support of the highest political authority because it will lead to an immediate reduction in level of poverty.
4. Furthermore, the immunity clause in the constitution generates conflict of values, as certain political leaders based on 'life situation' are immune from the corruption law. The failure to create virtuous citizens because of the catchphrase: do what I say and not what I do. There must be a rephrase: do what I do so that the level of poverty will be curtailed. Therefore, there is need to amend section 35 of the Nigeria's constitution, which houses that wicked and senseless immunity clause.
5. There is a vital need for the economy which is oil revenue dependent to be diversified so as to create opportunities for Nigerians and ensure stability of the economy. Diversifying the Nigerian economy through tourism has the potentials to diversify and improve the socio-economic development of Nigeria thereby embarking on poverty alleviation with multiplier effects. In a nutshell, the diversification of Nigeria's economy through tourism development will boost the socio-economic development of the country by creating jobs which is a key factor in poverty alleviation policies and programmes.
6. There should be a redistribution of income if poverty alleviation will make sense. The significance of redistribution of income cannot be over emphasized. This simply means, a reduction in wages and allowances for high-income earners (the political class, particularly, members of the National Assembly), and increase in wages and allowances for low- and middle-income earners as overall productivity will be boosted thereby increasing demand, increasing employment and reducing poverty.

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