

**Implications of Economic Empowerment Programmes on
Poverty Alleviation in Kwara State Central Senatorial
District**

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Abstract

To state that poverty is endemic in Nigeria especially among the majority of the citizenry is to state the obvious. Sequel to this obvious development, therefore, governments at all levels as well as leaders in decision-making positions have embarked on poverty alleviation/reduction programmes. This is even more pronounced in this particular democratic dispensation which has witnessed unprecedented promotion of poverty, reduction schemes such as employment generation programmes, empowerment schemes and social capital enhancement programmes etc by both the government and its officials. The objective of this study is to highlight the trend of the many poverty reduction programmes launched by the government and its officials in Kwara State Central Senatorial District since 1999. The study, using qualitative and quantitative research methods such as oral interviews and statistical data, also critically examines the impact of these programmes on the society and the generality of its members. The study found out that the poverty reduction programmes, most often than not, are not miss targeted at the chronic poor. In this vein, the study recommends that partisan politics should not be the yardstick of launching and implementing the various poverty programmes if effective results are to be attained in that direction.

Introduction

It is a known fact that there is no simple worldwide standard of measuring poverty as there is no single definition of it. However, it is generally accepted that greater percentage of the people of the world are stricken. This case is even more pronounced in Africa where people are regularly hungry and even become malnourished.

In this vein, the causes and consequences of poverty have been of interest to many including scholars and the government. It has been found out that the major causes of poverty include.

- i. Inadequate access to employment opportunities.
- ii. Inadequate physical assess, such as land and capital, and minimal access by the poor to credit even on a small scale.
- iii. Inadequate access to markets where the poor can sell goods and services.
- iv. Destruction of natural resources, leading to environmental degradation and reduced productivity.
- v. Lack of participation, failure to draw the poor into the design of developmental programmes (see Charles 2005:35-36)

In a general perspective, the condition of poverty entrenches moneylessness and powerlessness to those affected. The former is not only the insufficiency of the cash but it is also the inadequacy of resources of all types to satisfy basic human needs like food, shelter, education etc. Powerlessness on the other hand is the suppression of those afflicted by poverty by the people in authority.

Not unmindful of the fact that a lot of attention has been paid to these poverty issues through different government policies and public forums, this paper critically evaluates the response of the Nigeria government to the subject at hand using Kwara State Central Senatorial District as its situation analysis. The paper probes the effectiveness of the many publicised poverty alleviation and economic empowerment programmes initiated and executed by the government and its officials.

Down the Lane: Poverty Alleviation Projects in Nigeria

Almost all regimes in Nigeria have embarked on one poverty alleviation programme or the other. All their programmes are generally targeted towards the goal of intervention positively on poverty -whether to eradicate it completely or reduce it to the minimum. So far, the programmes were executed through the following projects:

- Green Revolution
- Operation Feed the Nigeria
- River Basin Development Authorities
- Directorate of Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI)
- National Directorate of Employment (NDE)
- Better Life Programme
- Family Economic Advancement Programme
- Peoples Bank
- Community Banks

These programmes, whether executed during civilian or military regimes, were characterized by a lot of fanfare in which a proportional half of the amount of their projects are sunk. The effects of the programmes on the ordinary citizens of the country are yet to be positively felt. In any case, most of the programmes are usually abandoned halfway to their gestation and maturity.

Similarly in 2001, the Nigerian Federal Government initiated another programme known as the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), which is a part of the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals, (MDGs). The NEEDS document aims at empowering poverty-stricken Nigerians through job creation, opportunities for employment, wealth creation and the promotion of private enterprise (National Planning Commission 2004).

Methodology

Interviews of different respondents were done so as to get a broad knowledge of the research issues raised. The poor were mostly targeted for the interviews and those who benefited in the last one year poverty alleviation programmes were singled out for discussion. Their perceptions of the whole process of poverty alleviation programmes were asked and so were their experiences as beneficiaries on the way the programmes impacted on their lives. The beneficiaries are specifically those who

enjoyed the poverty alleviation and empowerment projects of different government officials executed in their respective constituencies viz: the Secretary to the State Government, Commissioners, Special Advisers to the Governor, Special Assistants, Chairman of Local Governments and Councilors.

The area under this study was Kwara State Central Senatorial District. This was chosen because relatively to other senatorial districts in the state, it witnessed the launching and execution of the many poverty alleviation programmes especially in recent years.

Evaluation of Poverty Alleviation Programme in Kwara State Central Senatorial District

Poverty alleviation in our area of study and indeed the whole state is a public policy. Since the inception of the Fourth Republic and especially the past seven years, the government has made it a policy to alleviate poverty among the teeming poor populace.

The state government, walking in the footsteps of the federal government, launched its own version of NEEDS known as Kwara State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (KWASEEDS). This has a number of lofty objectives that include poverty eradication through many schemes. These include the Green and Clean Scheme, the Widow/Single Mother-Scheme, Youth Empowerment Scheme, Motor-Cycle Micro Credit Scheme Globacom Call Centres Scheme etc. (Kwara State Government of Nigeria). In realizing the objectives of these programmes, the government and its officials have embarked on vigorous implementation of the programmes throughout the study area.

So far, from the evidence available, the poverty alleviation programme of the government and its officials launched through several projects in several forums have been highly politicized. The programmes are stated and launched through different projects in the most sincere language. But unfortunately too much fanfare robs the programmes of their sincerity. This is because large and unnecessary crowd is gathered at the occasion of the launching of the programmes that in the first place have no business doing with the projects. It was found out that, more often than not, the crowd is hired.

In addition, the ways through which the programmes are launched and implemented shows that they are not planned to be products of development. If we agree with Usman (2009), policies are just like investments, they have periods of gestation. But Nigerian policy implementors are usually in a haste to see results of policies maturing in matter of weeks and months. This is even aggravated by the fact that the targeted poor beneficiaries of the programmes are most of the times not considered because there are no accurate data and means for their identification. Thus, most the poverty alleviation programmes primarily have loyal party members as beneficiaries since they will be the ones present at the launching of the poverty projects. Even in rare situations where the poor benefit, they are normally mis-targeted. For example poor widows who are beneficiaries of some of the projects use

to get cash donations of between two thousand and twenty thousand naira. They are expected to start business ventures with the donations in order to make them self-reliant. Unfortunately, however, these sums of money are too meager for any meaningful and sustainable business venture.

The table below gives a summary of the description of the items, normally given out during poverty reduction projects, the targeted beneficiaries and the end results of the initiatives:

S/NO.	ITEMS OF EMPOWERMENT	TARGET GROUPS	OBSTACLES TO JUDICIOUS USE	CONSEQUENCES
1.	Cash donations (N2,000-10,000)	Widows	Too meager for a realistic business venue	Money spent on food
2.	Barbing Clippers	1 Male Youths	Most beneficiaries are not trained	Items are sold
3.	Hairdressing dryers	Female Youths	Most beneficiaries are not trained	Items are sold
4.	Sewing machines	Women	Most of beneficiaries are unskilled	Items are sold ;
5.	MTN/GLO/ZAIN packs	Male and female Youths	Patronage not available	Packs are converted to personal use
6.	Pepper grinding machines	Women	Patronage not available	Items are sold
7.	SSCE Registration fees	Secondary School Students	No commensurate learning facilities	Failure in the examination
8.	Fertilizers	Male adults	Most beneficiaries are not farmers	Items are sold
9.	Motorcycles	Male youths	Most beneficiaries are unskilled drivers with no knowledge of traffic rules	Beneficiaries become accident victims and items are sold or damaged

A critical evaluation of the reasons behind such poverty alleviation projects reveals that they are government programmes that are not officially coordinated. They are institutionalized according to the dictates of government office-holders. The projects are executed in such a way that they serve as mediums through which

government officials gain cheap popularity and /or legitimacy. The execution of the projects lack proper coordination and too much pomp and pageantry are put in place.

The above scenario, have negative consequences on good governance. It shows that government officials fail in the performance of their duties. That the public offices they hold are only being used to dispense favours to party loyalists who are not in need. Expectedly, the result of this is that government officials generate disrespect and lose the confidence of the people they represent.

Policy Recommendations

Poverty Alleviation Programmes, executed through different projects, should be subsumed under a well-coordinated and planned government agency. The agency should act as the over-seer of the general management of the projects from its inception to execution. It should also act as the policy formular for imbued with the identification of the poor, keeping their track records and monitoring the progress of projects they benefit from.

Elaborate and expensive fanfare should be avoided when launching and executing poverty alleviation programmes on the one hand, wasteful spending are normally expended. And on the other hand the programmes are normally hijacked by politicians preventing the targeted poor from participating in the programmes and losing out in benefit.

Many of the poverty alleviation programmes are targeted at people who are required to possess skills in one occupation or the other. In most instances the beneficiaries of these programmes are the unskilled. To improve on this, there should be an increasing participation of target groups in training programmes to ensure that the skills they might have acquired will become useful to them to stay on course of the benefited programmes.

It is high time now that public policy agendas are pursued by the citizenry. Interest or pressure groups should become actors in poverty alleviation programmes. This will keep the government and its official on their toes and will spur them to good governance.

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