



## Rethinking Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Development in Nigeria: An Advocacy for the Buttom-Top Paradigm

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### Abstract

Giving Nigeria's huge natural resource base for which it earned over US \$ 300 billion (From crude oil alone) in the last three decades, as well as the promising options available in agriculture and solid minerals, Nigeria indeed should have no business with being poor. Moreso, its 148 million people (47% of the West-African Sub-Region' Population) are known to be very hardworking, innovative and resilient. All major economic and social indicators however paint Nigeria in the picture of one of the world's greatest paradoxes – unimaginable poverty amidst so much. Nigeria is today embarrassingly considered the 25 poorest nations on earth with 70% of its population (As against 15% in 1960), classified as poor and 54.4% vegetating below the bread line of a dollar per day. Life expectancy is barely 50 years (Below those of Egypt, Ghana, Kenya and South-Africa). The government (Federal, State and Local) in the last three decades has reeled out a plethora of policies and programmes aimed at consigning poverty (at least in its alarming dimensions) to history. Though systematic and comprehensive impact evaluation of these efforts is not available, the worsened poverty incidence, depth and severity are evidence that the policies failed. Using secondary data from dependable sources, this paper employs a desk analysis to show that a great deal of poverty policies and programmes in Nigeria tend to undermine the critical input of its primary beneficiaries or targets at the policy formulation and implementation stages, and so they continue to fail.

The consequent failure of these efforts to successfully combat poverty, have tended to deepen its manifestations, overwhelm the best of structures, confound policy formulators and frustrate policy implementers. Hence, the unrivalled need for a dispassionate rethink of the traditional but “lame” Top-Down approach. The paper therefore recommends that the primary beneficiaries of poverty reduction initiatives should not just be involved in the bid to tackle their poverty challenge, but should actively participate at all stages of the policy cycle, with the government and professionals playing a catalyzing role. Similarly, since women and children bear a significant portion of Nigeria's poverty burden, poverty policies and programmes should not just be inclusive it should be significantly gender sensitive and particularly pro-women. The paper also recommends that poverty reduction should be institutionalized, thereby removing it from the list of the “charities” of government. It should be enshrined in very carefully thought out and strategic frameworks, among a host of others.

**Key words:** Poverty reduction; Sustainable development; Top-Down approach; Buttom-Top approach; Policy formulation; Policy implementation

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### INTRODUCTION

With a population of 148 million people, Nigeria is the populous country in Africa and accounts for 47% of West Africa's population. Its population is made up of about 200 ethnic groups, 500 indigenous languages, and two major religions – Christianity and Islam. The largest

ethnic groups are the Hausa-Fulani in the North, the Igbo in the Southeast, and the Yoruba in the Southwest. Nigeria is also the second largest economy in Sub Sahara Africa and accounts for 41% of the region's GDP (World Bank Report, 2009).

Nigeria no doubt ranks among the most endowed nations on earth. It is spread over nearly a million square kilometers of very rich soil that bears great potentials for all forms of agriculture, as well as massive oil and gas reserves that accords her an enviable position in the comity of nations. Endowed with such enormous human and material resources, Nigeria possesses all it takes (in potential) to be one of the most prosperous nations in Africa, and indeed the world. Very embarrassing social indicators however paint Nigeria in the image of one of the world's greatest contradictions. Hence, the World Bank (1996) describes Nigeria as a paradox. This position continues to be confirmed by events and official statistics in the country. Particularly worrisome is the fact that the country earned over US \$ 300 billion from petroleum during the last three decades of the twentieth century. But rather than record remarkable progress in national social economic development, Nigeria as Obadan (2006), observes retrogressed to become one of the 25 poorest countries in the world, at the threshold of the twenty first century. Two in every three Nigerians (66%) lived below the extreme poverty line of US \$ 1 per day. (Nigerian Health Review, 2006). This indeed, is in sharp contrast to the early 1970s when Nigeria as Obadan (2006) recaps, was "among the richest 50" in the world.

Nigeria's steady nose-dive into the horrifying depths of poverty with its attendant consequences makes the issue of sustainable poverty eradication very imperative. This paper therefore assesses Nigeria's poverty challenge with a critical appraisal/review in chapter two, of what the government has been doing in response to this challenge.

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## 1. CONCEPTUAL UNDERPINNINGS

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### 1.1 Poverty

Poverty no doubt is a foremost issue in the socio-political discusses of most third world countries as well as it is an issue of global concern. This notwithstanding, a concise definition of poverty remains quite problematic as its shapes and shades have assumed very dynamic dimensions, over the years. Hence, Nnoyelu (2005) is of the opinion that the term has become deeper and broader, in recent times. This notwithstanding Omotola (2008) insists that poverty is by all standards a condition of deprivation that impedes human development.

As clear and straightforward as this position may seem, it is important to note that the answer to the question of what poverty is, needs to be prefaced by the fact that poverty has economic, social and environmental dimensions. The question of what poverty is indeed is a

complex one because there are numerous ways of defining and measuring poverty.

Money, Wilkinson (2000) cautions, is obviously a part of it but those who live in poverty also keenly feel the lack of equality of opportunity and the lack of the respect of others; these of cause are issues beyond the mere lack of money. There is therefore an attempt at fashioning a distinction between subsistence or absolute poverty and relative poverty. The former refers to the lack of basic requirement to sustain a physically healthy existence i.e. sufficient food and shelter to make possible the physically efficient functioning of the body. Poverty may therefore be analyzed in terms of lack of resources to maintain the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged or approved in society (Townsend, 1979; Giddens, 1993). Poverty has also been viewed along lines like, impact, spread, time and duration (Orjiako, 2003). These are therefore cyclical poverty which though wide spread, is reasonable, collective poverty that affects a broad spectrum of society. Here, poverty is like the permanent image of the host society and case poverty which is also close to the collective poverty at least in duration but refers specifically to individual situation of extreme want in the midst of plenty, extreme poverty to indigence or destitution is usually specified as the inability to satisfy even minimum food needs. It is the later that adequately captures Nigeria's poverty situation.

### 1.2 Poverty Reduction

Nigeria's gory poverty indices underpin the need for government and all stakeholders to vigorously but effectively tackle the challenge of poverty, if not for the sake of the present, then for those of posterity.

A sound anti-poverty strategy therefore in the views of Nnoyelu (2005) will not ordinarily work towards increasing the people's income but, would address other issues as well, that constitute poverty. He further contends, poverty eradication, embraces the efforts of government at all levels; Non-governmental organizations, individuals and corporate bodies in the bid to consign poverty at least in its alarming dimensions to history. It may therefore be safe to conceptualise poverty eradication as the bulk of policies and strategies pursued by government, in active partnership with civil society, the organized private sector and other stakeholders towards the systematic tackling of poverty. While it may be true that poverty eradication strategies and interventions are most time country specific, its ultimate goal is to help the common man and woman (the society) improve their livelihood and welfare while simultaneously participating in decision making and addressing the issues of exclusion which is an indispensable dimension of poverty, especially in the third world.

### 1.3 Development

In an attempt at defining development, Rodney (1972) contends that the concept entails a nation's ability to tap

and harness its natural resources for the improvement of its citizen's quality of life. Development is therefore conceptualised at the levels of the individual, social group and society (Iornumbe, 2005, p. 29).

Similarly, a number of scholars argue that development must take into account the qualitative improvement in employment, social justice and equality. It is his opinion that the state of development of a society can be ascertained by asking, what has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to equality and social justice? Development is therefore viewed principally from the perspectives of how well the collective resources of a nation are translated into better life for its citizenry.

Implicit in every use of the term however, is the notion that some countries and regions of the world are extremely poor whereas others are very prosperous. The discussion of development is often tied with basic questions like; why are poor countries poor and rich countries rich, why do poor countries lag behind rich countries in the development of their standards of living? How can poor countries become more prosperous? How can poor countries catch up with the rich countries? In this sense an important dimension of the concept of "development" refers to economic growth or more precisely growth of national income per capita Szirman (1999). He further argues that economic growth could take place without any economic development. An example is provided by those oil exporting countries, which experienced sharp increases in national income but saw hardly any changes in their economic structure.

The argument is that it is relevant and important to view development, more as a holistic package. Hence, Myrdal (1971), Seers (1979), and Sen (1999), have noted that, development is unavoidably a normative concept involving basic choices and values. Our normative assumptions should therefore be made explicit. Secondly, though the formulations vary greatly, in practice most writers on development come up with a set of similar developmental goals including poverty reduction, increased economic welfare, improved health and education and increased political and social freedom. Development can be defined as a movement in the direction of these goals. Third, an increase both in productivity and production per head of population in poor countries is an essential ingredient of every definition of development. This is even more the case in interpretations of the concept that are critical of the narrow economic approach to development. Economic growth always remains one of the critical conditions for long term development and tremendous advances have been made in measuring it in a standardized fashion. Finally, the fact that these are modernization ideals or development goals do not mean that all societies ought to develop in the same manner or that they ought to conform to some common standards (Szirmai, 1999, p. 7).

## 1.4 Sustainable Development

Though sustainable development is one of the most discussed concepts in contemporary development debate with specific emphasis on poverty eradication, a clear cut conceptualization remain particularly problematic this (amongst others) is because its earliest connotation or usage was restricted to its ecological dimensions, with emphasis on the physical environment. The Brundtland Report (1987) defines sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". Onah and Vincent (2005) in an x-ray of the above definition, identifies the non-depreciation of the natural capital stock as explicit in the definition of sustainable development. Be that as it may, it is clear in the Brundtlands conceptualization of sustainable development that the core issue for consideration in sustainable development is the persistence and continuity of development. It underscores the need to factor in, the wellbeing of succeeding generations in the development plans. It also lays very strong burdens on the equitable management and judicious use of resources in a bid to achieve the goals of development.

Implicit in this view therefore is the fact that policy and action (institutions) are major vehicles for the realization of sustainable development. Such policies are made with posterity adequately factored in. Hence, Ndubisi (2002) while considering conditions for sustainable development focuses on institutions of government, and contends that the government of the day must necessarily come up with policies and legislations that address the issue of poverty today and not forgetting the future. But Onah and Vincent (2005) drawing inspiration from Brookfield (1991, p. 32) went beyond policy and institutions when they said "the overall success of sustainable development is consequent upon a strong civil society". This position underscores the need to incorporate the knowledge of the local people in to the process of development as they are principal stakeholders. The consummate goal of sustainable development therefore "... is the lasting improvement in the quality of life and not just short-term improvements that disappear rapidly at the end of the project circle" (Ulluwishewa, 1993, p. 20).

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## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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For analytical purposes, we find it expedient to carry out this study within a theoretical base. Considering the desperate efforts by the governments of most transitional states to "buy" legitimacy and popular support in the pursuit of poverty reduction policies and programmes that most times are designed and implemented without the active or even passive support of the primary targets of such poverty interventions, we see the unequalled relevance of employing the participatory approach in analyzing Nigeria's poverty circumstance; Moreso that such Top-Down approach has

tended to deepen poverty in its most horrifying dimensions in Nigeria. The participatory approach is necessitated by the void left by a retreating state as a consequence of neo-liberal reforms. Since the 1970s, many different participatory approaches to research, policy making, and planning have been put forward (Human Development and Capability Association, 2006). However, the 1990s saw participation being advocated on a larger scale, being moved beyond the boundaries of projects or grassroots interventions to other spheres of social, economic and political life. Participation came then to be seen as a tool towards important policy objectives such as “empowerment” and “good governance” while maintaining at least in theory, a role as an end in its self (Laderchi, 2001). This paradigm to participation is the brain child of scholars like; Ferriho, 1980; Burkey, 1993; Chambers, 1997; Freir, 1997; Sen, 1999; Cornwall, 2000; Denis, 2000; De beer and Swanepod, 2001, etc.. The term participation has been defined in many differing ways and has been seen as a product or outcome, a process and as an intervention. In the views of Laderchi (2001), it is useful to make a distinction between mobilisation (Getting people to do what professionals think best) and involvement (Having people actively decide what they think is best with the role of professionals is to contribute expertise and resources to enable this). The critical question of who decides priorities and actions is therefore critical to the theory and practice of participation. This paradigm embraces empowerment models that stress the ability of people to take control over their lives and the need to provide them with the skill, knowledge and confidence to take collective action. It underlies recent dimensions as Participatory Rapid Appraisals (PRA), Participatory Learning Approaches (PLA) and Participatory Action Research (PAR). The best known participatory approach in the current development scene however, is the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA); it was elaborated in the late 1980s in India and Kenya. According to Chambers (1997, p. 102), “PRA is a growing family of approaches and methods to enable local people to share, enhance and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions, and to plan, act, monitor and evaluate”.

Participatory methods aim at changing the role of the outsider. Instead of being a lecturer who transfers technology, the outsider is perceived as a facilitator who encourages and enables local people to express their own reality. It is basically therefore a bottom-up approach carried out through from needs identification to implementation; in that, priorities and actions are also decided by the people rather than outside professionals. Hence, Cornwall (2000) conceptualizes participation as a means of social transformation in which the poor defines their own needs and acquire the skills and confidence to empower themselves and by these improve their situation. Following this, action and priorities are defined by local people in partnership with professionals.

The import of the participatory approach to poverty eradication in Nigeria is in the approach’ ability to address

and involve the poor/marginalized in the planning and actual implementation of policies. This would ensure their support for the programme, and hence, sustainability. Second, it encourages the formation of partnerships and rapport between professionals, planners and the local people. Third, it encourages the transfer of skills from professionals to the local people. Fourth, it foster’s learning on every side. Furthermore, Alkire (2002) lists the potential instrumental benefits of applying the participatory approach: it can lower implementation costs; it generates greater technical success due to access to local information; it supports sustainability as communities continue the improvements after the cessation of external funding; it encourages empowerment and self-determination as participants set their own objectives; and it is sensitive to local cultural values because people influence the initiatives at all stages.

The above notwithstanding, scholars like: Pattanaik, 1998; Cleaver, 2001; Cooke and Kothari, 2001; and Mohan, 2001, have criticized the participatory approach on some grounds, though agreeing to its utility as a turn-around paradigm in poverty eradication. They contend that equal representation is as important as participation. So, if all segments of a community are not adequately represented, participation is as good as absent. Another critique made of the approach is that it proposes local solutions to global problems, thus not tackling structural inequalities. Such issue has been addressed to the capability approach by Gore (2000), who called this process as the partial globalization of development policy. Furthermore Sen’s writings have been criticised for focussing mostly on the immediate causes of poverty and neglecting the underlying social processes (Pattanaik, 1998). Meanwhile, other critiques of participatory methods have argued that their localized and problem solving application captures merely the manifestation of poverty and “ignores the structural and material constraints of globalized capitalism” (Mohan, 2001, p. 156). As Cooke and Kothari (2001) highlight, participatory methods’ emphasis on the micro level of intervention can obscure, and indeed sustain, broader macro level inequalities and injustices.

The participatory approach therefore finds relevance in the fact that it is not just contextual, it emphasises poor people’s creativity and ability to investigate and analyse their own realities (Chambers, 1994). So they try not just to understand reality at the local level, but they do so through the local people’s own analysis.

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### **3. THE INCIDENCE, DEPTH AND SEVERITY OF POVERTY IN NIGERIA**

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Nigeria is blessed with mineral resources and rich in crude oil. Ironically, the citizens are hungry and poor in the abundance of plenty. The UNDP has classified the country



as the 141st poorest nation, on human development index. In its report, Nigeria is considered one of the 20th poorest countries in the world with 70 percent of the population classified as poor and 54.4 percent living in absolute poverty (UNDP-HDI, 2006). In 1960 however, the poverty level in the country was about 15 percent and by 1980 it reached 28.1 percent. In 1985, the poverty level was 46.3 but it dropped to 42.7 percent in 1992. Nonetheless, with the termination of the democratic processes by the military government, the poverty level rose to 43.6 percent in 1995. A year after, about 65 percent of the population were below poverty line, i.e., about 67.1 million Nigerians.

In the 1999 and 2000 UN Development Report, Nigeria had degenerated further as 87 percent of the population were below poverty line and rated 154 on the world's marginal poverty index out of 172 countries. (Ekpu, 2004). Consequently, Ugoh and Ukpere (2009) argue that Nigeria has fallen short of nationhood aspirations at independence. This is Moreso because few African countries like Botswana and Mauritius have achieved a high growth rate. These countries belonged to those that were poorer than Nigeria at independence. With the much vaunted status parity in 2004, Nigeria's GDP per capita stood at paltry \$ 1000 as against South Africa's \$ 11,000, Kenya's \$ 1100, Angola's \$ 2100 and Cuba's \$ 3000 (Idowu, 2005, p. 15). Presently, Nigeria is a shadow of its promise in 1960 when it ranked higher than a number of today's leading nations in all major development indices. In the same picture of gloom, over 5 million Nigerian youths are estimated to be unemployed. In fact, in the heat of the ongoing economic depression, many workers were retrenched in both the public and private sectors and in the absence of any national security system to cater for jobless persons, people resort to crime.

Similarly, over 7 million primary school age children are out of school. More pathetic is the disclosure that 201 out of 1000 Nigerian children stand the risk of dying before the age of 5. Women, of course are not spared of the unsettling development as 800 out of 100,000 of their folks are estimated to lose their life during child birth. The rising incidence of prostitution is an index of the escalating poverty level in the land. Also, compounding the shock is that an estimated 4.4 million Nigerians are living with HIV/AIDS (Daily Independent, 2008).

#### 4. DETERMINANTS/CAUSES OF POVERTY IN NIGERIA

*"Once we recognise that poverty exists, then we ... know that it must have a cause or (causes); and if we can identify the cause of poverty, then that should give us a basis to develop a policy response to it"* (Alcock, 1997, p. 36).

What causes poverty unlike the definition of poverty which continues to conjure up different meanings for

different people (hence a consensus on the definition remains elusive), general concurrence among scholars and development practitioners regarding the factors that determine and sustain poverty has been more closely approximated (Burki, 1990, p. 5). Some of these factors are thought to be general, in that they can serve to create or intensify privation across all sectors of the economy and across different population groups. Others are thought to be more specific or localised, and their effects may be more apparent in particular population groups or in populations associated with specific sectors of the economy. Furthermore, some of these factors or causes of poverty can be grouped into categories based on the channels through which they affect poverty levels. For example, they may originate from political or environmental issues or they may be economic or social in nature. In most cases however, poverty is likely to be the result of several mutually reinforcing factors that together define its scope and pervasiveness.

This is particularly true in the case of Nigeria. Any attempt at figuring policy responses to specific causes of poverty without addressing its vast array of reinforcing factors will make failure inevitable. It is therefore expedient to briefly touch on some of these factors, while core/direct ones will be handled much later.

##### 4.1 Unequal Economic and Political Relations

Unequal and unjust economic and political relations between underdeveloped countries and advanced countries negatively impact the poverty situation of the underdeveloped countries. Unequal trade, external debt and other factors slant economic and political benefits from international transactions heavily in favour of the advanced world, thus leading to deprivation and impoverishment in Nigeria. The experience has been that, large amount of Nigeria's natural resources is captured and brought under the control of the developed world through a variety of instruments, which include unjust property rules, unfair terms of trade, collusion with despots and undemocratic governments, and economic conditions imposed through development assistance. Many of these resources are extracted and controlled by unaccountable multinational corporations and are used to feed the environmentally unsustainable life style patterns of the wealthy minority. The implication for poverty is enormous; it leaves Nigeria so impoverished that its best hands are lured by the same developed nations that have impoverished her and thereby aggravating the depth and severity of poverty.

In the case of external debts, Nigeria borrowed US \$ 19 billion over the period, and repaid US \$ 49 billion in the interest and principal by 2004. Yet in the same year Nigeria still owed the group of creditors in Paris club US \$ 32 billion. In 2006 Nigeria paid US \$ 12.8 billion in two installments to the Paris club so that US \$ 18 billion debt could be written off. It is estimated the share of the

UK in the US \$ 12.8 billion pay off to the Paris club is equal to 20 years of development assistance provided by the United Kingdom to the whole of Africa. This massive transfer of the nations earnings and the debt overhang and servicing over the years have no doubt robbed Nigeria of vitally needed resources to address education, health, agriculture, rural development, infrastructure and indeed, all-round development. This trend exacerbated poverty, insecurity, social and political conflicts and all its attendant vices (Nigeria Health Review, 2006, p. 243).

#### **4.2 The Neo-Liberal Policies of the Nigerian State**

The Neo-liberal economic policies of the Nigerian state (the structural adjustment programme, privatisation, and deregulation, trade liberalisation, rolling back the state, and mass retrenchment of employee in the public sector) have, had and continue to have severe consequences for poverty in Nigeria. Studies of privatisation show that if (privatisation) limits access of the poor to health care, some of whom in self-reports then adopt the strategy of simply “waiting to die” (Iyayi & Agbaragu, 2005). Deregulation of prices and liberalisation of trade among other things often intensify poverty among vulnerable segments of the population, creating further health risks in the process. The massive retrenchment of public sector employees also create morale problems and other situations that deepen poverty and further scares its solutions beyond the immediate reach of the government.

#### **4.3 Income – Inequality**

Income inequality suggests differentials in the earnings of different groups within the economy. Such earnings may come from labour incomes or property incomes, or both. The most pronounced inequalities are reflected in the differences between the income of the highest and the lowest paid group in an economy. With an alarming Gini Index of 50.6, Nigeria has one of the worst income inequalities in the world. The richest 10% of the population is in charge of 55.7% of the nations income while the poorest ten has access to just 1.6% of the nations income. The ratio of the share of national income of the richest 10% is thus 24.9%. At the same time, the poorest 20% of the population has access to 4.4% of the Nigeria’s national income while the richest 28% of the population keeps 40.8% of the national income, giving at ratio 12.8.

Income inequality especially such pronounced ones as those of Nigeria have great implications for poverty. It obviously deepens its severity as well as it makes poverty and its eradication very complicated. With the bulk of the nation’s income going into the pocket of the rich who are the make policies for the nation, the tendency is for them not to feel the scourge of poverty the way 70% of the Nigeria population who in live in poverty, will feel and hence would not make policies that a pro-poor in nature. This has no doubt, aggravated poverty in Nigeria.

#### **4.4 Unemployment**

The employment situation in Nigeria has been precarious for a long time now. Beginning with the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme in the mid-1980s, unemployment and job insecurity have been on the rise in Nigeria. Massive job losses occurred in 1985-1993 and the 1999-2006 periods witnessed huge losses in both public and private sectors of the economy. By 2006, measures were perfected for the lay-off of about 160,000 employees in the public sector. The banking sector reform of 2007-2008 and the present one 2009-2011 has made no fewer than 40,000 Nigerians (by a conservative estimate) jobless. The textile industry has been particularly affected by job insecurity and unemployment because of a number of factors, chief among which is consistency in our economic policies. It has enabled textiles and fabrics from other countries to be dumped in Nigeria markets. With the resultant contraction of the economy, it has become difficult to absorb the hundreds of thousands of graduates from Nigeria tertiary institutions. Unemployment anywhere in the world has great implications for poverty. It affects the ability of people to access the minimum living standards. It affects access to health care, and it has implications for the quality and level of education one can get or give his family. It has implications for self esteem, self actualisation and ill-health.

### **5. POVERTY TARGETED POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES**

The challenge of poverty today is perhaps the most disturbing issue for most developing nations, all over the world. Nigeria’s poverty situation is however peculiar because the country is so endowed that it earned over US \$ 300 billion from just one among its natural resources (petroleum) in the last three decades of the twentieth century. Yet, over 54% of her citizens live below the absolute poverty lines of \$ 1 per day. The tackling of her endemic poverty therefore has remained the key concern of successive administrations in Nigeria. Though how effective and effectual this strides have been, is a different issue entirely, the core concern of this subsection is an analytical chronicle of these efforts. It is in the views of Eboh (2003) that two principal driving forces underlie the surge of poverty targeted programmes and initiatives especially since the 1980s. He explains that Successive Nigerian governments have used targeted poverty programmes to gain legitimacy on assumption of power. Explicit targeting of the poor is also a means to overcome the failures of trickle-down assumptions of traditional development approaches in reducing poverty. Successive anti-poverty programmes and projects include multi-/inter-sectoral, integrated or sectoral Targeted/sector programmes to alleviate poverty have been implemented in agriculture, health, education/vocational skills, finance

and commerce, housing and transport sectors through informal, small and medium-scale enterprises. Some of the programmes targeted specific social groups such as women and children while others targeted designated or poor-areas. Some of them include: the National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) 1972, Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) in 1979, the Green Revolution in 1981. The Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) was established in 1975. Initially the enclave projects were undertaken in the North of Nigeria – Funtua – 1974, Gusau – 1974, Ilorin – 1974, Lafia – 1977, Anyigba – 1977, Bida – 1979. A network of eleven River Basin Development Authorities (RBDAs) were established in 1976 to enhance water resource development, irrigation, rural infrastructural. The Health Sector had programmes like: The Guinea Worm Eradication Programme in 1988, the Expanded Programme on Immunisation (EPI), Kick Back Polio and several Primary Health Care (PHC) projects coordinated by the National Primary Health Care Development Agency (NPHCDA). The Educational Sector had policies like: The Universal Primary Education (UPE), the Universal Primary Education (UBE) and the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) among a host of others. Multi/Inter-Sectoral Programmes include: The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986, the Directorate for Food Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DIFRRI) in 1986, the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) in 1986, Peoples Bank of Nigeria (PBN) in 1990, Better Life for Rural Women in 1987, the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) in 2001, among a host of others. Though systematic and comprehensive impact evaluation of government anti-poverty programmes on poverty in Nigeria is not available, the worsened poverty incidence, depth and severity are evidences that past efforts have failed. Several interacting factors are responsible for this situation. The poverty alleviation institutional landscape is fraught with duplicity and proliferation of programmes and implementing agencies (sometimes with overlapping responsibilities and even conflicting mandates) leading to waste, poor coordination and unhealthy rivalries (World Bank, 1996; UNDP, 1998; NAPEP, 2001; Eboh, 2003). Poor linkages exist between the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) and the Community-Based Poverty Reduction Projects (CBPRP) coordinated by the National Planning Commission, between NAPEP and the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), between NAPEP and the various poverty alleviation programmes of the state governments. While NAPEP was designed to facilitate, coordinate and monitor poverty alleviation programmes throughout the country and not as an implementation agency, it actually did undertake direct implementation or policy functions already carried out by pre-existing government institutions and agencies.

For instance, its employment creation and skill acquisition schemes run parallel to similar programmes of the (NDE). Of the greatest implication perhaps is that poverty targeted policies and programmes tend to be largely top-bottom – designed as government programmes for the people rather than programmes designed, implemented, monitored and evaluated by the people themselves with government as the catalyzing medium. There is also a lack of policy and programme coherence and coordination among the three tiers of government – federal, state and local governments (NAPEP, 2002). Anti-poverty targeting programmes are readily politicized for patronage as experienced under the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) implemented between 1999-2001 which was marred by poor, inefficient targeting and distorted implementation leading to high incidence of unintended beneficiaries, corruption and rent-seeking practices that crowded out the intended beneficiaries. According to the UNDP (1998), those who capture the benefits from the various government anti-poverty programmes are not the poor, but the rich and powerful. An assessment of government programmes related to poverty and community-based organizations and initiatives indicate that virtually all the government programmes lack mechanisms for effective pro-poor targeting (World Bank, 1996). The situation is aggravated by inadequate national statistical and data systems and the absence of an explicit rallying poverty reduction framework to galvanise policies and programmes at the three tiers of government in tandem with private sector and civil society.

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## 6. KEY CHALLENGES TO POVERTY ERADICATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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### 6.1 Policy Inconsistency

The myriad of policies directed against poverty in Nigeria, should leave anyone puzzled as to why the menace (poverty) still exists with us in all its alarming dimensions. Policy inconsistency has featured prominently in most x-rays of the problems of poverty eradication and sustainable development in Nigeria. A great deal of the policies and programmes of government targeted at poverty, are most times mutually antagonistic rather than mutually complimentary and reinforcing.

A popular example was the conflict which existed between government's domestic food production policy and its cheap food import policy. The later was so antagonistic of the former that it (the former) was rendered ineffective (Achimugu, 2007). One of the fundamental factors that make policy inconsistency so pronounced in poverty eradication and sustainable development is the failure of most policy maker to adopt a systems approach to policy formulation. In a systems approach,



the entire spectrum of poverty eradication and sustainable development would be viewed globally in a consistent and mutually reinforcing manner whenever poverty and its attendant consequences are viewed and attended to in isolation, the probability of being inconsistent with other policies cannot, but be high (Idachaba, 2003). A good example is the government's pursuit of a better

economy by removing subsidy on petroleum product, usually deepening poverty and the misery of the common Nigerian, who would have to pay more to transport goods, pay more to run generators (which is the most common source of power supply in Nigeria), pay more for goods and services (since overhead cost will increase astronomically) etc..

**Table 1**  
**Trends in Petrol Price Increment in Nigeria 1989-2005**

Date	Price per litre	Regime	Increase
Jan.1, 1989	42 kobo for commercial vehicle and 60 kobo for private vehicle	Gen. Ibrahim Babangida	43.0%
Dec. 19, 1989	60 kobo for all	Gen. Ibrahim Babangida	43.0%
March 6, 1991	70 kobo	Gen. Ibrahim Babangida	16.6%
Nov. 8, 1993	N5.00	Chief Ernest Shonekan	614.0%
Nov. 22, 1993	N3.25	Gen. Sani Abacha	
Oct. 2, 1994	N15.00	Gen. Sani Abacha	
Oct. 4, 1994	N11.00	Gen. Sani Abacha	361.5%
Dec. 1, 1998	N25.00	Gen. A. Abubakar	127.0%
Jan. 6, 1999	N20.00	Gen. A. Abubakar	
June 1, 2000	N30.00	Chief Olusegun Obasanjo	50%
June 8, 2000	N25.00	Chief Olusegun Obasanjo	
June 13, 2000	N22.00	Chief Olusegun Obasanjo	
Jan. 1, 2002	N26.00	Chief Olusegun Obasanjo	18.2%
June 20, 2003	N40.00	Chief Olusegun Obasanjo	53.0%
July 9, 2003	N34.00	Chief Olusegun Obasanjo	
Oct. 1, 2003	N38.50 & N42	Chief Olusegun Obasanjo	
May 29, 2004	N49.90	Chief Olusegun Obasanjo	
Jan., 2005	N50.50	Chief Olusegun Obasanjo	
Aug. 2005	N65	Chief Olusegun Obasanjo	

Source: Gani Fawehinmi (2006).

Imagine the attempt at inflicting further pain on Nigerians who already have enough to lament about, in the pretence of growing the economy. It is even more nauseating to note that this anti-poverty campaign in disguise is pursued side-by-side the governments NEEDS strategy for poverty eradication despite the clear note of inconsistency. The effect of this faulty paradigm is that while one policy attempts to address the challenge of poverty the other subverts such efforts and complicates it.

### 6.2 Political Instability

Nigeria like most nations on the African continent has had more than its fair share of political instability especially as it has to do with changes in government. While changes in government may be healthy for any polity, a frequent and unwarranted change in policies and programmes could jeopardise sustainable development especially as it has to do with poverty. So many programmes/policies in Nigeria are not followed-through until it begins to yield dividends. It is common place that poverty eradication programmes are jettison immediately the administration that initiated them is no more. This was the case with Operation Feed the Nation, Green Revolution, Better Life for Rural Women, Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) and they are already clear indications that President Umaru Musa Yar'adua's seven point agenda has a very slim chance of survival in the administration of President Goodluck Jonathan. Such political/policy instability could deal deadly blows to efforts at poverty eradication as well as it could suffocate its outcomes

thereby truncating sustainability. Nigeria is a sad victim and example of what gloom and misery, political/policy instability holds for those who patronize it.

### 6.3 Corruption

That Nigeria's poverty situation is directly linked to corruption in and its manifestations is no more news. In fact, Aluko (2002) argues that the situation in today is now so bad that, corruption now appears to have become a permanent feature of the Nigeria polity; he insists it is now a norm and no longer an aberration. The young ones are born into it, grow up in it, live with it and possibly die in it. The aged are not left out as they are re-socialised and begins to conform to it. Succeeding generations now see it as part and parcel of the social order and not mature system. Poverty and corruption are mutually reinforcing. Corruption has and continues to play a vital role in Nigeria's descent into the horrifying depths of poverty. Some observers of the pervasiveness of corruption in African countries have suggested that it should be treated as a disease (Adreski, 2003) that affects the African condition. While this has been rightly criticised for the racist undertones of the observation, there is no doubt that corruption as symptomatic of the level of anomie that characterizes a society can be treated as a major determinant of poverty (Nigeria Health Review, 2005). Corruption no doubt deprives the economy of vitally needed funds. It has been estimated that Nigeria lost about 225 billion pounds to corruption over the period. Nigeria's debt management office indicated that the country



wasted US \$ 300 billion during the same period. This looses no doubt had and still has great implication for the aggravating of poverty.

#### **6.4 Insecurity (Internal)**

No meaningful development including (poverty eradication) can be gainfully pursued in a society where people are scampering for safety for safety and are unsure of the next moment. Poverty eradication in Nigeria has at different time been crippled by ethnic crisis, religious upheavals, boundary disputes, battles for political supremacy and regional control of resources (the case of the Niger-River Delta Region of Nigeria). Here, the extraction activities of global oil and gas companies spurred a series of violent military expedition and repression of the local communities by the federal government resulting in death and mass rape of women (Nigeria Health Review, 2005, p. 259). It is important to note that the dislocation of social life and inter- as well as intra-community conflicts in these areas also occasioned by the political strategies of the Nigerian state and the global oil companies have resulted in mass destruction of livelihoods and death for a large number of people. The implication for poverty eradication is very serious. The people now resort to violence (militancy), a clear indication that they no longer trust the structure of government and its ability to represent their interest. Consequently, even the governments good intentions geared toward poverty eradication do not enjoy their support and co-operation.

The spate of crisis within the country has also resulted in a large number of people being displaced. This high events stretch initial poverty problems beyond what current poverty eradication interventions where designed to accommodate, making these intervention ineffective.

Only recently, the federal government had to send a detachment of the armed forces and anti-riot police (MOPOL) to Plateau State (North Central Nigeria) to bring a complicated internal wrest, under control and remain to maintain law and order. It is also worthy of mention that a similar but a probably more organised detachment (the Joint Task Force JTF) has remained in the Niger-Delta region for some time now. Needless to say that government spends a fortune in the equipping and maintenance of these detachments. Same resources that would have been ploughed into poverty eradication are spent on internal security thereby shrinking the intervention capacity base and duration of poverty eradication/sustainable development interventions in Nigeria.

#### **6.5 The Top-Down Approach**

According to the UNDP (1998), one at the most handicapping factors in the achievements of poverty eradication is that, programmes designed to achieve it, miss those for whom they were designed. They exclude the most vulnerable, the poorest, the rural dwellers, the unemployed, women and children, etc..

Most poverty eradication programmes in Nigeria is characterized by what Maduagwu (2001) describes as a master and servant relationship where government claims to know and understand what poverty is, who the poor are and what they need in other to eradicate their poverty even though they (politics) are effectively excluded from poverty by their forceful grabbing of the collective wealth of the nation. It is doubtful whether anyone else understand poverty better than the poor, hence, efforts at alleviating poverty that rides on the back of a machinery that excludes them (the poor) may be at best equipped to merely paper the cracks' without actually solving the poverty puzzle. It is the sick that knows exactly where it hurts, any therapy that undermines his vital impute may be fatally presumptuous. Nigeria in all its past and present poverty eradication programmes is yet to show good knowledge of this simple but most effective logic. NAPEP has significantly tried to shy-away from the traditional top-down approach to poverty eradication initiatives but a critical look at its set-up reveals that the top-down approach is used at the most vital aspect of the programme (i.e. at the design stage) while the bottom-up approach is patronised at the implementation stage where a broad array of stakeholders are involved. Commendable as this may look, the ideas to be so implemented is not those of the people but of the rich minority, who hold the reins of power and dictate to the majority who are victims of their irresponsible, and their irresponsive governance. The exclusion of the poor and most vulnerable from the design and implementation of poverty eradication initiatives no doubt have dealt very debilitating blows to government poverty eradication and sustainable development efforts.

#### **6.6 Gender Insensitivity**

Statistics from reputable global institutions like the World Bank, Department for International Development (UK) and local sources like the Central Bank of Nigeria as well as the Federal Office of Statistics support the notion that the female gender continues to be the most vulnerable to poverty and marginalisation in comparison to their counterparts. Nnoyelu (2005) is of the opinion they (women) are often the poorest in most communities. Among the barriers that reinforce their poverty situation are: relative lack of mobility, lack of access to credit facilities or the extra time taken up with responsibility to children as well as a weak or no representation at all levels of governance in Nigeria. All the above and even more not here stated underscores the importance of gender sensitivity to poverty eradication initiatives. Unfortunately, most poverty eradication efforts are design without specific inputs that caters for the peculiarities of women. Besides, even the implementation stages of poverty interventions tactically leave the female gender out of the main stream as most people involved in the implementation are men. Even the better life for rural women President Ibrahim Babangida's regime and the family advancement

programme of the Sani Abacha regime which professed women as the focal point of their intervention, were majorly designed and implemented by men.

The above position's implication for poverty eradication finds credence in the fact that poverty in Nigeria is a gender largely issue more so that women are poorer than their male counterparts. Hence, any attempt at addressing poverty in Nigeria that excludes the female gender (at both the formulation and implementation stages) is designed to fail. The failure of successive poverty eradication in Nigeria has therefore a gender-bias explanation.

## 7. BENEFICIARY PARTICIPATION AND POVERTY REDUCTION IN NIGERIA

Traditional poverty reduction interventions identify problems and design responses to them, from the stand point of perceived as against felt needs. Hence it is the government that most often than not, decide how best the poverty challenges of a Nation or Community should be tackled. This paradigm also known as the Top-Down approach is pursued in the assumption that the primary targets of poverty interventions have little or no skill, knowledge or capacity to contribute to turn around process. This highly centralized poverty reduction ideology breeds what Maduagwu (2001) describes as a master servant relationship between the government, its agencies and the targets of poverty reduction in most transitional states.

A great deal of poverty policies and programmes in Nigeria tend to perpetually poverty reduction targets at the policy formulation, implementation stages or even both. The failure of these policies and programmes to combat poverty have deepened its manifestations, overwhelmed the very best of structures, confounded policy formulators, left implementers frustrated and hence the unequalled need for a rethink of the "lame" top-down approach.

The participation of primary stakeholders in poverty reduction goes beyond merely involving the targets of poverty reduction, within the ranks of such interventions. Cornwall (2000) argues that it is a process that affords the beneficiaries to define their own needs, acquire skills and the needed confidence to tackle poverty. So actions and priorities are defined by the local people or beneficiaries in partnership with professionals and the government.

The import of this perspective is that such interventions will be open to local culture and knowledge and so the likelihood of beneficiary apathy which is the bane of most government initiated programmes in Nigeria would have been attended to. Similarly, this paradigm to poverty reduction would greatly lower cost as well as it ensures sustainability even after the cessation of external support Alkaire (2002).

## 8. SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

Nigeria's poverty situation is every inch paradoxical; Alarming lack amidst great human and material resources. This scenario is further worsened by the inability of her huge array of poverty reduction policies and institutions to engender the much needed turn around. This paper in a bid to understand the critical missing link between policy intent and outcomes, finds vital explanation in the inability of the traditional top-down approach embraced by policy formulators and implementers in Nigeria. It therefore explores a more pragmatic and inclusive paradigm premised on the active participation of the targets of poverty reduction endeavours. This paradigm the paper finds out has the capacity to lower implementation cost, handle stakeholder apathy, empower the targets of poverty reduction to set actions and priorities as well as its support sustainability.

## 9. RECOMMENDATIONS

Having assessed the challenges that confront opportunities available for poverty eradication and sustainable development in Nigeria, the following recommendations are canvassed as paradigms, that the government, policy formulators, donor agencies and all stakeholders must vigorously pursue in the quest to eradicate poverty and position the nation on the paths of sustainable development.

First, poverty eradication and sustainable development initiatives should adopt the Bottom-Top approach not just at the implementation stages but at all stages of poverty eradication endeavours. This would ensure the incorporation of the much needed element of local knowledge and support for the programme. Besides, most programmes that target poverty eradication and sustainable development in Nigeria are designed and pursued for political reasons and so, the idea of what should be done, when and how is monopolised by a government that is far and removed from the everyday realities of poverty. In an attempt to pacify the people, the government most times involves them at the implementation stages of a programme they know little or nothing about. This faulty paradigm continually supplants poverty eradication initiatives in Nigeria. The government should therefore make the Bottom-Top approach and indeed people-participation (at all stages of poverty eradication programmes) a critical criterion for all poverty eradication and sustainable development initiatives in Nigeria.

Second, poverty eradication in Nigeria has an almost steady tradition of being ad-hoc so; most times its dividends (if any) are short lived, grossly limited and unsustainable. If the fight against poverty must be steady, broad based and sustainable, the need for institutionalizing poverty eradication cannot be over emphasized. It should be enshrined in our constitution and pursued via the

instrumentality of other supportive laws and regulations in Nigeria. Poverty eradication and indeed sustainable development should be removed from the list of “charities” of government. It should become a duty for which the people can hold government to accountability even seeking redress in the event of a default. This would make poverty eradication a matter of compulsion and not mere discretion.

Third, as has been already stated, women suffer disproportionately from the burden of poverty and are systematically excluded from access to essential assets. Therefore, if the government were to improve the status of women by creating more special economic opportunities (for example by broadening women-access to vocational training, readily available credits and special markets) for them it would be addressing a priority area of poverty.

Fourth, there is an urgent need for policy makers and other actors to have a comprehensive understanding of who is poor and where they are. This contextual knowledge must be coupled with an understanding of poverty dynamics, if policy is to be effective in tackling poverty and creating an enabling environment for pro-poor and broad-based growth. This means that they must be accurate data and analysis at the national and sub-national level that explains why people are poor (poverty drivers), what keeps them in poverty (poverty maintainers) and what kind of policies and interventions might support movement out of poverty (poverty interrupters). Moreover the administrative capacity at the state and local government levels needs to be enhanced. This is especially because the burden of Nigeria’s poverty lies more at the local level (rural). Hence, a great deal of government’s anti-poverty strategies is implemented at this level. A lack of administrative capacity therefore would continually frustrate the efficient and effective implementation of poverty eradication endeavours.

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