POVERTY REDUCTION IN NIGERIA: THE WAY FORWARD

BY

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1. INTRODUCTION

The description of Nigeria as a paradox by the World Bank (1996) has continued to be confirmed by events and official statistics in the country. The paradox is that the poverty level in Nigeria contradicts the country’s immense wealth. Among other things, the country is enormously endowed with human, agricultural, petroleum, gas, and large untapped solid mineral resources. Particularly worrisome is that the country earned over US$300 billion from one resource – petroleum – during the last three decades of the twentieth century. But rather than record remarkable progress in national socio-economic development, Nigeria retrogressed to become one of the 25 poorest countries at the threshold of twenty-first century whereas she was among the richest 50 in the early-1970s.

Official statistics show that in 1980 the national (average) poverty incidence was 28.1 per cent of the population. The distribution of the incidence across the states of the federation showed a maximum of 49.5 per cent recorded for Plateau (and Nassarawa which was excised from Plateau). This meant that every state had a poverty incidence below 50 per cent. By 1985, the national (average) poverty incidence had risen to 46.3 per cent, with the maximum of 68.9 per cent recorded in Bauchi (and Gombe which was carved out of Bauchi). As at 1996, the national average stood at 65.6 per cent with Sokoto, Kebbi and Zamfara (all

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old Sokoto State) recording the highest incidence of 83.6 per cent; followed by Bauchi and Gombe with 83.5 per cent. As at 2000, the incidence of poverty was believed to have risen to 70 per cent at the national level.

The increasing incidence of poverty, both within and among locations, was in spite of various resources and efforts exerted on poverty-related programmes and schemes in the country, thus suggesting that the programmes and schemes were ineffective and ineffectual. In the light of the present government’s deep concern for the widespread and scourging poverty, this paper reviews previous and current initiatives at poverty alleviation/reduction in Nigeria, and examines some pertinent issues on the way forward. Accordingly, Section 2 overviews some poverty alleviation policies and programmes prior to the advent of the present administration while Section 3 presents highlights of current poverty reduction efforts. Section 4 addresses some pertinent issues on the way forward. Section 5 concludes the paper.

II. OVERVIEW OF PREVIOUS POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMMES AND POLICIES

II.1 Poverty Alleviation and National Development Plans

Until the inauguration of a Poverty Alleviation Programme Development Committee (PAPDC) by the Nigerian government in 1994, all efforts at poverty alleviation were essentially ad-hoc. It was generally the case that poverty alleviation programmes and strategies were not crystallised and consolidated within the nation’s overall development objectives. This view is borne out of a
perusal of the various National Development Plans over 1962-85 period, and
National Rolling Plans from 1990. The particular significance of the National
Development/Rolling Plans hinges on the fact that they provided/provide much of
the framework for the pursuit of development objectives since the attainment of
political independence in 1960.

It can be observed from the Plan documents that “the primary goal of
economic planning in Nigeria is the attainment of rapid increase in the nation’s
productive capacity with a view to improving the living standards of the people”.
This statement suggests some concern with poverty reduction which entails
improved standard of living. However, poverty alleviation objectives were
tangential and not explicit objectives of all the plans. The poverty-related
objectives during 1962-85 included:

(a) increase in per capita income;
(b) more even distribution of income;
(c) reduction in the level of unemployment; and
(d) increase in the supply of high level manpower.

In a related vein, the First National Rolling Plan had, among other things, the
objectives of:

* Creating ample employment opportunities as a means of
  containing the unemployment problem; and
* enhancing the level of socio-political awareness of the people and
  further strengthening the base for a market-oriented economy and
  mitigating the adverse impact of the economic down-turn on the
  most affected groups.
Although not direct statements of concern with poverty alleviation, the foregoing have implications for poverty. For example, if there is an increase in per capita income, simultaneously with more even distribution of income, such would lead to poverty reduction. Reduction in the level of unemployment is conceivably a necessary condition for realization of increased income per capita. The closest direct statement of concern with poverty is contained in the Third Plan (FRN, 1975:29):

…development is not just a matter of growth in per capita income. It is possible to record a high growth rate in per capita income while the masses of the people continue to be in abject poverty and lacking in the basic necessities of life, particularly in a situation as in Nigeria today, where the momentum of growth derives from a sector whose direct impact on the bulk of the population is small. An important objective of the plan, therefore, is to spread the benefits of economic development so the Nigerian would experience a marked improvement in his standard of living.

Nonetheless, in the same vein as concern with poverty alleviation was a derived and not a direct objective, the strategies in the plan were not lucidly direct and explicitly specific.

Generally, the priorities and strategies enunciated in virtually all the Plans under reference show that agricultural production was always accorded the highest priority (FRN) (1990:17); FRN (1981:37); FRN (1970:35) – although, the Third Plan emphasized the mutual development of agriculture and industry for balanced growth (FRN,1975:30). Even in the structural adjustment programme document, agriculture was considered one of the critical sectors whose
rehabilitation would be crucial to the success of the programme (FRN, 1986:8). A concomitance of agricultural development, or its apanage, is rural development. Against the background that the poor are preponderantly located in rural areas, and are mainly engaged in agriculture, the accord of highest priority to agriculture in the plan documents would suggest favourable disposition towards poverty alleviation.

From the foregoing, two distinct approaches to poverty alleviation could be said to have featured prominently in Nigeria’s national development plans and planning. These are the economic growth strategy that presumes the trickling down of the benefits of growth to the poor, and the strategy of rural/agricultural development. Indeed, rural development could be viewed as having been central to Nigeria’s poverty alleviation strategies. And the center-piece of the rural development policy has been agricultural development, complemented by social and economic infrastructure. For a long time now, the growth performance of the country has not been satisfactory, with negative growth in the first half of the 1980s and very low growths since 1992 (an average of 2.5 per cent from 1992-1999). Even in periods of economic growth, Nigerians did not experience considerable or commensurate poverty reduction. In 1985-1992, there was a slight increase in GDP and per capita income, and there was a slight drop in aggregate poverty headcount level (from 46.3 to 42.7 per cent), but inequality worsened and the core-poor did not share in the growth as the depth and severity of poverty did not improve significantly. This suggests the need for a strategy of growth with equity for poverty reduction.

In sum, within the framework of the National Development Plans, the implicit thinking was that a positive relationship existed growth in the GDP and
increased welfare for the general citizenry. And so, the approach to poverty alleviation as expressed in the fundamental objectives of the Development Plans did not involve policies and programmes which directly targeted the poor. The poor were implicitly expected to benefit from the “trickle-down efforts” of the overall process of development. But this has not been the case. And so growth must be accompanied by a deliberate policy of targeted interventions.

II.2 Government Programmes and Policies Related to Poverty

In the light of the government’s concern for poverty reduction, numerous policies and programmes have been designed at one time or another, if not to meet the special needs of the poor, at least to reach them. The advent of the Structural Adjustment Programme in 1986 brought out more forcefully the need for policies and programmes to alleviate poverty and provide safety nets for the poor. This emphasis arose from an awareness of the unintended negative effects of structural adjustment policies on the vulnerable groups in the society. While structural adjustment had its salutary effects on economic growth, it lacked emphasis on development and also accentuated socio-economic problems of income inequality, unequal access to food, shelter, education, health and other necessities of life. It indeed, aggravated the incidence of poverty among many vulnerable groups in the society.

As a result of the continuous deterioration of living conditions in the late 1980s, several poverty alleviation programmes came on board. They were designed to impact positively on the poor. By the end of 1998, there were sixteen poverty alleviation institutions in the country. In 1994, the Government set up a broad-based Poverty Alleviation Programme Development Committee (PAPDC) under the aegis of the aegis of the National Planning Commission. The primary
objective of the PAPDC was to advise the government on the design, coordination and implementation of poverty alleviation programmes. Its work contributed immensely to the emergence of a new approach to the design and organisation of poverty alleviation programmes culminating in the establishment in 1996 of the Community Action Programme for Poverty Alleviation (CAPPA). CAPPA is a community based approach which adopts a combination of social funds and social action strategy. The CAPPA document drew largely from the past experience on poverty reduction efforts in the country and attempts to ensure that the poor are not only carried along in the design and implementation of poverty projects that affect them but that the poor themselves actually formulate and manage the poverty projects. Various agencies (Government, Donors and NGOs) involved in poverty alleviation in the country have embraced the CAPPA strategy. Also, in 1996, a draft National Poverty Alleviation Policy document was produced by the Government through the National Planning Commission. Its thrust is the improvement in human welfare in the immediate and distant future.

Specifically, a number of government programmes initiated in the past, have aimed at improving basic services, infrastructure and housing facilities for the rural and urban population, extending access to credit farm inputs, and creating employment. Most of the programmes were, however, not specifically targeted towards the poor, though they affect them. There are specific multi-sector programmes (water and sanitation, environment, etc) as well as sector-specific programmes in agriculture, health, education, transport, housing, finance, industry/manufacturing and nutrition. (Box I contains some government programmes related to poverty). Some achievements have been recorded by these poverty-relation programmes in the areas of food crop production, agricultural
and industrial extension services, primary health care, education enrolment, mass transit programme and financial sector services through the People’s Bank of Nigeria and Community Banks. However, the fact that the incidence of poverty remains very high, the existence of the various programmes notwithstanding, points to the ineffectiveness of the strategies and programmes. A number of factors have contributed to the failure of past poverty-related programmes and efforts. Some of them are:

(i) lack of targeting mechanisms for the poor and the fact that most of the programmes do not focus directly on the poor.

(ii) Political and policy instability have resulted in frequent policy changes and inconsistent implementation which in turn have prevented continuous progress.

(iii) Inadequate coordination of the various programmes has resulted in each institution carrying out its own activities with resultant duplication of effort and inefficient use of limited resources. Overlapping functions ultimately led to institutional rivalry and conflicts.

(iv) Severe budgetary, management and governance problems have afflicted most of the programmes, resulting in facilities not being completed, broken down and abandoned, unstaffed and equipped.

(v) Lack of accountability and transparency thereby making the programmes to serve as conduit pipes for draining national resources.

(vi) Overextended scope of activities of most institutions, resulting in resources being spread too thinly on too many activities. Examples are DFRRI and Better Life Programmes which covered almost every sector and overlapped with many other existing programmes.
(vii) Inappropriate programme design reflecting lack of involvement of beneficiaries in the formulation and implementation of programmes. Consequently, beneficiaries were not motivated to identify themselves sufficiently with the successful implementation of the programmes.

(viii) Absence of target setting for Ministries, Agencies and Programmes.

(ix) Absence of effective collaboration and complementation among the three tiers of government.

(x) Absence of agreed poverty reduction agenda that can be used by all concerned – Federal Government, State Governments, Local Governments, NGOs, and the International Donor Community.

(xi) Most of the programmes lacked mechanisms for their sustainability.

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<td><strong>Some Government Programmes Related to Poverty</strong></td>
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Multisectoral Programmes include: the National Directorate of Employment, which consists of four main programmes: the Vocational Skills Development Programme, the Special Public Works Programme, the Small Scale Enterprises Programme, and the Agriculture Employment Programme; the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure, which supports mainly rural infrastructure projects; and the Better Life Programme, which supports a multitude of programmes targeted at women, including agriculture and extension services, education and vocational training, cottage industries and food processing, primary health care delivery and enlightenment/awareness and cooperatives. The last is now replaced by Family Support Programme.
BOX 1 CONTD.

**Agriculture Sector Programmes** include the Agriculture Development Programmes; the National Agricultural Land Development Authority, the Strategic grains Reserves Programme. The Programme for Accelerated Wheat Production, as well as the development of artisanal fishery, small ruminant production, pasture and grazing reserves. These programmes promote utilization of land resources through subsidized land development, supply of farm inputs and services and credit extension to farmers, and institutional support for produce marketing cooperatives.

**Health Sector Programmes** include the primary Health Care Scheme, which aims at providing at least one health centre in every local government; and the Guinea-worm Eradication Programme, launched in 1988 with assistance of donor agencies including UNICEF, which supports health interventions to control diarrhea diseases, eradicate guinea-worm, and promote changes in knowledge, attitudes and practices relating to water use, excreta disposal and general hygiene. The effectiveness of the PHC programme was hampered by inadequate funding from the LGAs, and lack of equipment, essential drugs, and trained manpower. The Guinea-worm Eradication Programme succeeded in reducing the number of reported guinea-worm cases from 650,000 in 1988 to 222,000 by the end of 1992.

**In the Education Sector**, the Nomadic Education Programme developed curricula for nomadic education, trained nomadic teachers, and provided infrastructure for the nomadic schools; additional programmes were targeted towards girls education, women and children in exceptionally difficult circumstances, and adult literacy.
BOX 1 CONTD.

In the Transport Sector, the Federal Urban Mass Transit Program was established in 1988 to rescue the public transport system from imminent collapse. New buses were put into public service and loan schemes helped cooperatives and private operators acquire transport vehicles. However, the demand for public transportation in many urban areas continues to outstrip supply.

In the Housing Sector, a Sites and Services Scheme commenced in 1987 to increase the supply of land for residential development by all income groups. The programme consists of site clearance, construction of concrete drains and culverts, etc. However, shortage of funds resulted in non-payment of compensation to former owners of assets in the acquired areas, and non-development of essential infrastructure such as access roads, water, power supply, etc.

Financial Sector Programmes include a few initiatives begun in 1989/90: the National Economic Reconstruction Fund which provide long-term loans at concessionary interest rates to promote small and medium scale industrial projects; the People’s Bank of Nigeria which extends credit to the poor who could not have access to the credit facilities available in the commercial and merchant banks; and the Community Banking Scheme which provides credit to small scale producers on their own personal recognition.

Nutrition-Related Programmes consist of programmes aimed at improving food security, prevention of micro-nutrient deficiencies in children and women, promotion of exclusive breast-feeding, deworming of school children and promotion of food quality and safety.
Manufacturing Sector Programme includes a Small-Scale Enterprises Programme. This is designed to promote the growth of small-scale enterprises in Nigeria. The programme involves government promotion of small-scale industries through easier access to bank credit, artisan technology and the provision of appropriate infrastructural facilities.


Not only has the failure to ensure the successful implementation of the various programmes and policies made the incidence of poverty to loom large, the phenomenon has continued to spread and deepen. And very many factors have tended to compound the poverty situation, among which are: slow economic growth, economic mismanagement, infrastructural deficiencies, weak political commitment to poverty alleviation programmes and measures, and a host of macroeconomic and sectoral problems such as inflation, rising unemployment, exchange rate depreciation, external debt overhang, etc (CBN, 1999:68-73). These problems are also acknowledged by the government as enunciated by Aliu (2001:4-5) as follows:

(i) Poor macroeconomic and monetary policies resulting in low economic growth rate and continuous downwards slide in the value of naira from 1986;

(ii) dwindling performance of the manufacturing sector which has the capacity to employ about 20 million people but currently employs
only about 1.5 million by all the 2,750 registered members of the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN);
(iii) increasing foreign debt overhang of almost US $30 billion, requiring US $3.5 billion annually for servicing from an economy earning just US$10-15 billion;
(iv) poor management of the nation’s resources, coupled with large-scale fraud and corruption, most of which has been siphoned out of the country in hard currency; and
(v) poor execution of Government Programmes and projects especially those aimed at the provision of social welfare services and those aimed at the provision of economic infrastructure.

III. CURRENT EFFORTS AT POVERTY REDUCTION
The Government of President Olusegun Obasanjo, since inception in May, 1999, has expressed deep concern about the rising incidence of poverty in Nigeria. The Government realized that if the worsening poverty situation is not checked, the future of the nation would be doomed. In light of this, the Government has introduced a number of programmes and measures aimed at making a dent on poverty. Among the early activities of the Government were the launching of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme, the Poverty Alleviation Programme and the constitution of the Ahmed Joda Panel in 1999 and the Ango Abdullahi Committee in 2000. The immediate concern of the Panel/Committee was the streamlining and rationalization of existing poverty alleviation institutions, and the coordinated implementation and monitoring of relevant schemes.
and programmes. These culminated in the introduction early in 2001 of the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) and the establishment of the National Poverty Eradication Council (NAPEC).

3.1 The Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP)

This was an interim measure introduced early in 2000 to address the problems of rising unemployment and crime wave, particularly among youths. It was ultimately aimed at increasing the welfare of Nigerians. Essentially, the primary objectives of PAP are three-fold:

- reduce the problem of unemployment and hence raise effective demand in the economy;
- increase the productiveness of the economy; and
- drastically reduce the embarrassing crime wave in the society.

One could glean from government pronouncements that the targets/components of the PAP include the following, among others:

- provide jobs for 200,000 unemployed;
- create a credit delivery system from which farmers would have access to credit facilities;
- increase the adult literacy rate from 51 percent to 70 percent by year 2003;
- shoot up health-care delivery system from its present 40 percent to 70 percent by year 2003
- increase the immunization of children from 40 percent to 100 percent;
raise rural water supply from the present 30 percent to 60 percent and same for rural electrification;

• embark on training and settlement of at least 60 percent of tertiary institutions’ graduates; and

• development of simple processes and small-scale industries.

To actualize the objectives of PAP, several measures were put forward in the 2000 Budget as well as other policy documents such as:

• increase in the salary of public sector workers that has been decimated over the past two decades;

• improving the supervisory capacity within the nation’s institutions;

• rationalization of organizations and methods within the system, particularly that of the existing 16 poverty alleviation institutions in Nigeria;

• encouraging and rewarding all deserving Nigerians for industry and enterprise;

• substantial reduction of avenues for easy and illegitimate acquisition of wealth; and

• the launching of Universal Basic Education Programme.

The orientation of the PAP is holistic in nature, and if properly planned and managed could tame the menace of poverty in Nigeria. But inspite of the broad feature of the programme, emphasis seemed to have placed more on the creation of jobs through public work system. To this end, avenues were to be provided for the gainful employment of 200,000 idle hands. This aspect of the programme was designed to provide jobs for at least 5000 unemployed in each
State. To actualize the programme, the Federal Government earmarked N10.0 billion, which was later raised to N17.0 billion by the Senate. No doubt, this pointed to the Government’s commitment to the programme.

However, in implementation, the programme appeared to be ad-hoc in orientation with little attention paid to the policy framework. The emphasis on massive construction and other public work projects made it look like a one-off affair rather than making it a revolving one.

The programme also paid little attention to the framework of allocation of funds, sustainability aspect of the PAP and the needed collaborative arrangements its success. The political connotation of the PAP served as an important threat to the success of the programme. The programme was portrayed as the ruling party’s programme and hence had met with resistance from the chief executives of the states controlled by other political parties. This was quite noticeable in the launching of the programme at the state level in February 2000.

Besides, the PAP also emphasized provision of credit to micro-enterprises and trading to the exclusion of income and employment generating projects. The programme also lacked appropriate framework for beneficiary targeting. The timing and phasing of the direct labour (200,000 jobs) were not explicitly stated. Yet, this aspect was very crucial to the success of programme.

3.2 The National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP)

Introduced early in 2001, NAPEP is the current Programme which focuses on the provision of “strategies for the eradication of absolute poverty in Nigeria” (FRN,2001:3) NAPEP is complemented by the National Poverty Eradication Council (NAPEC) which is to coordinate the poverty-reduction-
related activities of all the relevant Ministries, Parastatals and Agencies. It has the mandate to ensure that the wide range of activities are centrally planned, coordinated and complement one another so that the objectives of policy continuity and sustainability are achieved.

Upon consideration of the Joda Panel and Abdullahi Committee Reports, fourteen (14) core poverty alleviation Ministries were identified as follows:

(i) Agriculture and Rural Development
(ii) Education
(iii) Water Resources
(iv) Industry
(v) Power and Steel
(vi) Employment, Labour and Productivity
(vii) Women Affairs and Youth Development
(viii) Health
(ix) Works and Housing
(x) Environment
(xi) Solid Minerals Development
(xii) Science and Technology
(xiii) Finance, and
(xiv) National Planning Commission

Similarly, thirty-seven (37) core poverty alleviation institutions, agencies and programmes were identified. The poverty reduction-related
activities of the relevant institutions under NAPEP have been classified into four, namely:

(i) **Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES)** which deals with capacity acquisition, mandatory attachment, productivity improvement, credit delivery, technology development and enterprise promotion;

(ii) **Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS)** which deals with the provision of potable and irrigation water, transport (rural and urban), rural energy and power support;

(iii) **Social Welfare Service Scheme (SOWESS)** which deals with special education, primary healthcare services, establishment and maintenance of recreational centres, public awareness facilities, youth and student hostel development, environmental protection facilities, food security provisions, micro and macro credits delivery, rural telecommunications facilities, provision of mass transit, and maintenance culture; and

(iv) **Natural Resource Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS)**

Which deals with the harnessing of the agricultural, water, solid mineral resources, conservation of land and space (beaches, reclaimed land, etc) particularly for the convenient and effective utilisation by small-scale operators and the immediate community.

In effect, the current poverty eradication programme of the country is centered on youth empowerment, rural infrastructure development, provision of social welfare services and natural resource development and conservation.
Details about these are provided in the Blueprint for the schemes under the National Poverty Eradication programme (as revised in June 2001). In the attempt to overcome the inadequacies of previous programmes, the NAPEP Blueprint has the following features (Aliu, 2001:12-13):

- it adopts the participatory bottom-up approach in programme implementation and monitoring;
- it provides for rational framework which lays emphasis on appropriate and sustainable institutional arrangement;
- it provides for pro-active and affirmative actions deliberately targeted at women, youths, farmers and the disabled;
- it provides for inter-ministerial and inter-agency cooperation;
- it provides for the participation of all registered political parties, traditional rulers, and the communities;
- it provides for technology acquisition and development particularly for agriculture and industry;
- it provides for capacity building for existing skills acquisition and training centres;
- it provides for the provision of agricultural and industrial extension services to rural areas;
- it provides for institutional development for marketing of agricultural and industrial products; and
- it provides for integrated schemes for youth empowerment, development of infrastructure, provision of social welfare services and exploitation of natural resources.
What becomes obvious from a careful consideration of the foregoing and their elaborations in the blueprint is that much of the problems that attended previous efforts have been sharply focussed upon following their identification. Nonetheless, the statement of good intentions and enunciation of measures towards poverty eradication are only necessary but not sufficient conditions. The way forward is to recognise the problems and look beyond to operational and incidental matters that may arise at the level of implementation vis-à-vis some pertinent issues that may not have been adequately covered in the blueprint.

3.3 Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP)

The government is currently preparing a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) under the supervision of the Economic Policy Coordinating Committee in the Office of the Vice President. The PRSP is a document that will show the commitment of the government in addressing poverty reduction. It will contain a comprehensive poverty reduction plan and strategies to address it over a time horizon. A National Core Team which was inaugurated in February, 2001, is responsible for the technical preparation of the PRSP in two stages. The first stage involves the preparation of an Interim-Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (I-PRSP), which would dovetail into the second stage of preparing the full PRSP. The I-PRSP was introduced to avoid delays in receiving international assistance which donors have predicated on the production of a PRSP. The I-PRSP includes a stocktaking of the country’s current mechanism for poverty reduction and a road
map of how the country will develop its full PRSP. The I-PRSP was completed in August 2001, thus paving way for the preparation of the PRSP.

IV. SOME PERTINENT ISSUES ON THE WAY FORWARD

Inspite of the expressed concerns of past governments and the plethora of programmes and policies that have a bearing on poverty, the incidence and scourge of poverty have worsened over the years. The factors which have constrained the effectiveness of the programmes and policies have been outlined already. Now, with the NAPEP being the centrepiece of the Government’s efforts at poverty reduction what are the prospects of achieving the international development goal of halving the incidence of poverty by 2015? This question is pertinent against the background of the Nigerian economy which is characterised by low economic growth, rapid population growth, mismanagement of available resources and large-scale corruption. Therefore, for NAPEP to make a meaningful dent on poverty, there is the need for poverty reduction programmes to be implemented within the framework of rapid economic growth with equity, controlled population growth, sound economic management, and good governance, among others. Some of these and other pertinent issues relating to poverty reduction programmes are discussed briefly as follows:

(i) Broad-based Economic Growth with Equity

Rapid growth is important for poverty reduction. Therefore attention must be focused on those macro and microeconomic policies and programmes which
would ensure the rapid growth of the economic. Economic growth is crucial in efforts aimed at conquering poverty as it would:

• Generate income earning opportunities for the poor, make job creation possible, and thereby make use of their most abundant asset – labour;
• Produce additional resources for the government to use for social programmes aimed at overcoming poverty; and
• Increase the incomes poor people receive as remuneration for their labour.

However, economic growth alone is not sufficient for poverty reduction. Therefore, growth must be accompanied by a deliberate policy of redistribution and equity, promoted by participation. In this direction, broad-based growth that involves the poor and generates employment is recognised to have a tremendous impact on poverty. In Nigeria, targeted efforts are required to induce broad-based growth and provide social services and infrastructure aimed at reducing the depth and severity of poverty across the country. Given the high incidence of poverty in the country, the pursuit of rapid economic growth cannot be overemphasised in the current and future efforts at poverty reduction. Indeed, for a considerable decline in poverty, indications are that an economic growth rate of 7-8 per cent is required. And policies to foster growth would need to be complemented by those aimed specifically at reducing poverty.

(ii) Targeting of Interventions

Considering the magnitude and profile of the magnitude and dimensions of poverty in Nigeria, it would be clear that a sizable number of poor and
disenfranchised people cannot participate directly in broad growth process. And given the level of impoverishment, they may also not be able to have access and use of the social and economic infrastructure provided to improve human capital. It is therefore essential to provide targeted resource transfers and support to such groups of people in rural and urban areas. The government can target the delivery of some services and resources to reach poor areas and to communities living in poverty, building on existing community-based organisations, civil society groups and their activities where possible. Some element of targeting should also be introduced in public expenditure, especially for social sector spending (health and education) which touch the lives of the poor people than most of other public expenditure.

(iii) Nature of Involvement of Beneficiaries

Experience from the past poverty alleviation programmes has shown the inability to involve the people in their planning and implementation. However, one of the main features of NAPEP is the adoption of the bottom-up approach to programme implementation and monitoring (Aliu, 2001:12). But then, this tends to give the indication that the bottom-up precludes the involvement of beneficiaries in the identification of projects and programmes. This is more so as “NAPEC is mandated to ensure that the wide range of activities are centrally planned, coordinated and complement one another so that the objectives of policy continuity and sustainability are achieved” (FRN, 2001:5). If the above indication is accurate, then there is the need to extend the bottom-up concept to include direct participation of the benefiting communities in project identification. Experience has shown that the non-involvement of such
communities is always a detraction from appropriateness of projects, as well as their sustainability. This is because the top-down approach widely adopted in project identification and selection has often led to beneficiaries not associating themselves with such projects. Therefore, there should be sufficient participation of the grassroot people in the identification and implementation of projects affecting their lives. This will not only increase their commitment to such programmes but will also de-emphasize the erstwhile perception of such programmes as conduit pipes for national cake sharing, which they feel is responsible for their poverty. It also promotes empowerment on project management as well as its sustainability.

(iv) Political Allegiance and Continuity of Programmes, Projects and Services

The communique and syndicate reports of the first retreat for Executive Governors and State Coordinators of the NAPEP, June 24-25, 2001, issued under the aegis of the Presidency, raised some very crucial issues. Paragraph 7 of the communique states the following:

Discussion at both the Plenary Sessions and Syndicate Groups were frank, and devoid of political, tribal or religious colourations, in a free and relaxed atmosphere where the sole goal of all participants was to evolve lasting strategies to eradicate a problem which, participants agreed, respects no political, ethnic or religious boundaries. Participants expressed full support and commitment for the programme but urged that everything be done to avoid its derailment either through partisan considerations, corruption or other malpractices which militated against the success of previous programmes (emphasis ours).
Similarly, the third resolution/recommendation of syndicate Group A at the retreat read: That NAPEP should not be limited to the life span of any particular Government or Administration in power but should be sustained to elicit desired objective and impact.

These remarks bring to the fore the issues and problems associated with political culture and the politicisation of programmes and projects. The foregoing paragraph 7 of the communiqué under reference accurately underlines the fact of poverty not recognising political boundaries. However, the Nigerian reality point to the fact that political differences could be a strong factor in the accentuation of poverty in particular areas. This arises when relevant schemes and programmes are resisted in some regions/zones or states simply because of the perceived advantages the implementation could confer on some political parties. For instance, there were reports of the Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP) government in old Anambra State refusing the construction of Federal roads in the State because the rival National Party of Nigeria (NPN) could make it a campaign issue. Similarly, in year 2000, there were reports that the Alliance for Democracy (AD) Governors of South-West Zone were apprehensive that the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) at the Centre might have conceived of the PAP for strategic political gains. Indeed, there were allegations of the AD Governors working against the PAP in order to frustrate the PDP Federal Government.

The point to stress is that poverty is too critical an issue that everyone, irrespective of party affiliation and leaning, should be deeply concerned about its eradication. The idea of sabotaging a scheme simply because it was initiated by a rival political party/group should not arise. It is only with such a spirit that a scheme could live beyond its initiators—a factor that is pertinent to the
sustainability and continuity of services. Perhaps, consideration could be given to making poverty alleviation an explicit constitutional matter in view of the fact that no one administration can meaningfully bind its successor to its programmes. This also reinforces the need to give expression to poverty alleviation objectives in national development plans with the strategies consolidated into the nation's overall development/policy management framework.

(v) **Good Governance, Transparency, Accountability and Social Responsibility**

Corruption is generally acknowledged as having adversely affected previous poverty alleviation efforts in Nigeria. Corruption is one of the aspects of bad governance. The anti-corruption crusade of the present administration is expected to have favourable implications for poverty alleviation if successfully carried through. The communiqué earlier referred to has as one of the imperatives for success of the NAPEP “ensuring that corruption and other sharp practices at any stage of the programme are not condoned but severely punished”.

The manifestations and problems associated with corruption have various dimensions. Among these are project substitution, plan distortion, misrepresentation of project finances, diversion of resources to uses to which they were not meant, even conversion of public funds to private uses, etc. The effect of corruption is both direct and indirect on poverty increase. On the hand, the indirect effect follows from the reduction or misapplication of resources which penalizes growth rate and growth potential. When growth rates are lowered, there will be no outputs and incomes to redistribute. So poverty could escalate. One the other hand, the direct effect is that the poor are denied resources and access to
facilities that could have been provided through judicious application of the siphoned/diverted resources.

A related problem is that lack of social responsibility manifest in the vandalisation or wilful destruction of facilities that benefit the poor. It is expected that the bottom-up approach to project identification with attendant association of beneficiaries with the projects, will minimise vandalisation. But beyond that it is crucially necessary that efforts and resources are committed to security of provisions. Finally, in order to ensure transparency and accountability in the management of poverty reduction programmes and projects, all the stakeholders should be involved in the monitoring and evaluation of such projects.

v. CONCLUSION

The embarassing paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty in Nigeria suggests the compelling need for a single-minded pursuit of the objective of poverty reduction and its eventual elimination. To this end, there is the need for an agreed poverty reduction agenda that can be used by all stakeholders – Federal Government, State Government, Local Governments, NGOs and the International Donor Community. There is also the need for strong political commitment to the poverty reduction goal, as well as a depoliticisation of poverty alleviation programmes and projects. Very importantly, in order to make a meaningful dent on poverty it is crucial for poverty reduction programmes and measures to be implemented within the framework of rapid broad-based economic growth with equity, controlled population growth, sound economic management and good governance, among others. Finally, it is important to give expression to poverty alleviation objectives in national development plans with the strategies and
measures integrated into the country’s overall development/policy management framework.

REFERENCES


