

THE STATE AND POVERTY PROGRAMME FAILURES IN NIGERIA: A HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

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Abstract

The relevance of history in appreciating the past, understanding the present and predicting the future cannot be ignored. This paper explores the history of poverty policy failures in Nigeria. In its attempt to unveil the underlining reason for the inability of past poverty policies to reduce poverty in Nigeria, the study adopts the theory of post-colonial state. Data was collected through the qualitative method with reliance on secondary data sources like books, journals and other documentary materials. The study adopts qualitative descriptive data analysis. The paper highlights various past and current poverty reduction programmes articulated and implemented by the Nigeria state. It discovers that the culture of corruption inherent in Nigerian political environment accounts for the failure of these poverty reduction programmes to achieve their desired objectives. The paper affirms that unless, selfless and responsible political leadership is entrenched in Nigeria, the issue of poverty reduction shall remain unresolved.

Keywords: Poverty Reduction, Policy Failures, Historical Narrative, Informal Sector, Self-employment, Nigeria.

Introduction

The post-colonial history of Nigeria is redolent with development strategies targeted at reducing the sufferings of the unemployed. Since independence in 1960, Nigeria had launched and implemented over 40 poverty reduction programmes to reduce poverty. Some of these past attempts include the establishment of the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), the Green Revolution, the Directorate of Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), the Peoples' Bank of Nigeria (PBN), the Better Life Programme (BLP) for rural women; a gender specific programme designed to improve the life of rural women, the Family Support Programme (FSP), the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), the National Agricultural Land Development Authority

(NALDA), the Strategic Grains Reserve Authority (SGRA), the Accelerated Crop Production (ACP), the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP), the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), the Universal Basic Education (UBE), and the Vision 2020, the N-Power, among numerous others.

Similarly, the country had ceded to, and domesticated several global and continental development plans, targeted at mitigating the grave effect of poverty. Some of these continental plans include: the Lagos Plan of Action; the United Nation's New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s; the Africa-Europe Summits' Cairo Plan of Action; the World Bank led Strategic Partnership with Africa; the International Monetary Fund-led Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), the Japan-led Tokyo Agenda for Action, the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD); the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) among others.

Successive administrations in Nigeria (civilian and military) had ostensibly demonstrated its commitment to, and concern for the plights of the ordinary citizen in Nigeria. Nkom (1989:10), observes that:

motivated by the desire to advertise their “concern” for the sufferings of the ordinary citizen, successive governments in Nigeria have tried to outdo each other in the introduction of new strategies and programmes portrayed in sleek slogans and catchy/captivating acronyms.

In their desperate attempt to “buy” legitimacy and political support, successive governments had tried to whitewash their poverty reduction programmes in order to distinguish them from the ones of their predecessors (Nkom, 1989:10). In most cases, “achievements” claimed to have been recorded for such programmes in speeches, statements and media releases were often at variance with the reality on the ground. Poverty reduction measures and their objectives have tended to be designed by people who are far removed from the poor, rural environment and their knowledge of poverty is basically shaky and unreliable. This is particularly so because government officials do not deem it necessary to consult or involve the poor population in the design and implementation of some of the poverty reduction programmes. Nkom (1989) asserts that, the policy has been inspired largely by the ideology and interest of the World Bank and IMF and not the needs and objective realities of the people. Similarly, successive governments in Nigeria had initiated several programmes,

aimed at reducing poverty, but these programmes had not been successful (Iloabanafor, 2005).

Theoretical Framework

This paper is predicated on the Marxist theory of post-colonial state of Africa. The Marxists see the state in its generic sense, as maintaining an order in which the interest of the ruling class is favoured in the long run. This is because it preserves the conditions under which the ruling class is dominant. Thus, Ake (1985:5) observes that:

the state is a specific modality of class domination, one in which domination is mediated by commodity exchange so that the system of institutional mechanisms of domination is differentiated and disassociated from the ruling class and even the society appears as an objective force standing alongside society.

The important point to note about the character of the state in advanced capitalist society is that it has been able to play the role of organizing the conditions under which the bourgeoisie maintain its dominance singly because it is not a direct instrument of this class. It appears relatively autonomous from the ruling class and from the dominated class (Draper, 1974:74-84). According to Ekekwe, (1980.iv) the state's relative autonomy allows it, ostensibly, to cater for the general interests of society, but it is also crucial for organizing the bourgeoisie hegemony. Thus, from the Marxist persuasion, the state in capitalist Western formations, though functions in the interest of the bourgeoisie, it hardly appears to be serving this purpose since it is ordinarily seen to be neutral, which is the same as saying that the state is class-neutral. As Ake (1985:3) argues, 'although the state is institutionally constituted so that it is independent of the social class, including the hegemonic class, it is by no means, independent of the mode of production. Thus, state domination remains class domination but the autonomy of the state tends to obscure this to the 'ordinary eye'.

Ekekwe (1985:12) notes that the distinction between state in advanced capitalist societies and those in post-colonial formations is that whereas the state in the former functions to maintain the economic and social relations under which the bourgeois accumulation takes place, in the later, factors which have to do with the level of development of productive forces make the state direct instrument of capital accumulation for the dominant class or its elements. Thus, as Ake (1985:10) argues, the state was crude tool of

colonial capital, used to coerce Africans into commodity relations, to change their pattern of production, to prevent the emergence of capitalist African bourgeoisie. The colonial state was instrumental in synchronizing the colonial state in the economy with that of the metropolitan state. The pervasive role of colonial state in the economy, which was primarily meant to serve metropolitan capitalism, foreclosed the development of orthodox capitalist culture in the colonies so that capitalist accumulation took the form of using the instrumentality of the apparatus of the state.

Using the Marxian theory of the post-colonial state of Africa to explain the study, the state in Nigeria is a direct instrument for primitive accumulation by public officials to the peril of development plans and collective interest of ordinary Nigerian citizens. Again, given the instrumentalist character of post-colonial state of Nigeria, relevant public officials see the control of poverty reduction programmes such as NAPEP, NDE, N-Power, YOU-WIN, as opportunity for self-enrichment of themselves materially. Against this background, it can be appreciated why Nigerian political class are reluctant to invest genuinely in training human capital which is the basis for tackling poverty, especially in the informal sector of the economy. This is because investing in human capital would deny state officials responsible for these poverty reduction policies opportunities to misappropriate the funds. It is within the context of this theory that the inability of Nigeria state to formulate and implement genuine and sustainable poverty reduction programmes can be explained and understood.

Specific Government Responses to Poverty concerns in Nigeria

It is obvious that government has shown concerns on poverty issues in Nigeria. As a prelude to our discussion, it is important to note that poverty has been a perennial problem in Nigeria prior to the advent of European traders in West African sub-region. The primitive men in the communal setting had hunting as their major occupation. The pre-colonial agriculture framework of the geographical segments that eventually emerged as Nigeria was operating at a subsistent level until the colonization of the country by the British government. Therefore, what the natives produced through communal life was not enough to fight poverty (Okeke&Ijere, 1999).

The Colonial Era

The British Colonial Masters, in their adventure to colonize and exploit the human and material resources and their quest to expand their empire, inherited poverty and backward

natives as liabilities. The ideology of the colonial agricultural policies, which derived from the alien development philosophy, was that development should follow a specific evolutionary dimension; in which the western capitalist societies were regarded as the model which the underdeveloped countries should adopt.

Njoku (2001) argues that the economic forces that motivated the British to colonize Nigeria were of two major purposes. As a colony, Nigeria was expected to serve as a source of cheap raw agricultural and mineral resources for British industries, and secondly as an assured and protected market for British manufacturers. Agricultural product such as palm oil and kernels, cocoa, groundnuts, forest products such as timber and minerals such as tin were direly needed by British industry. The colonial agriculture policy was therefore, centered squarely on production for export. Production was in the hands of small-scale peasant farmers who employed traditional techniques of the peasants and paid no attention at all to domestic food production. In spite of the importance of agriculture in the colonial economy, the government invested extremely little in the sector. The fact was that the expatriate firms were satisfied with their monopoly of the import-export trade mainly because of the proven capacity of the peasants to supply their export requirements. This implies that Nigeria was forced to follow the capitalist path of development. The colonial regime defined for the country the path of development they should follow and determined the goals and direction of changes; the rate of change; the source of change; how changes should occur, by whom and for whom changes were affected (Nzimiro, 1995).

The social system was actually incapable of developing the nation's agriculture. The introduction of capitalist form of agriculture created more hunger for the people and dislodged more inhabitants from the rural area into urban slums where they further deteriorated. The traditional crops, which had preserved the bodies of the under-privileged masses, were progressively neglected for the sake of foreign crops, quite unfamiliar with the peasants and crops strains which have been effectively controlled by the multi-national and which would remain out of the peasants reach.

Post-Colonial Era

Nigeria's independence as a sovereign nation brought about great expectations of prosperity to all Nigerians. The politicians who took over the governance of the country, at the demise of colonial rule, promised bright future for all Nigerians. Colonial exploitation was to be replaced with meritocracy, where people would be rewarded for hard work. All the

colonial obstacles to economic and social empowerment and development were to be dismantled.

After independence, some of the colonial agricultural policies were continued and in some cases modified. For instance, the marketing boards were retained but it continued to exploit the peasant farmers until the reformation of the board in 1976. The agricultural research and demonstration institute were retained and new ones were also established in different parts of the country. The post-colonial government gave the agricultural sector the attention it deserved. The authorities matched their word with action to actualize their dreams. Of great significance was the role of regional governments in poverty reduction through agricultural development programmes.

South Eastern and Western Regional Governments' Programmes

Prior to independence, small-scale peasant farmers had dominated the Nigerian agricultural sector. The policy of the regional governments in the South-East and South-West towards the modernization of agricultural system and increasing the volume and quality of produce centered on tree-crop planting. The plantation, the farm settlement and the small holders schemes were the three approaches adopted by the governments to achieve their goals (Njoku, 2001). Let us briefly discuss the three approaches below:

a) Plantation Scheme

The plantation approach involved expropriation of vast areas of land. Plantations were established in areas where there was abundant and population sparse. The respective Nigeria Development Corporations managed their plantation, namely – the Eastern Nigerian Development Corporation (ENDC) and the Western Nigeria Development Corporation (WNDC).

Investment in tree-crop planting during 1962-68 accounted for not less than 45% of planned capital allocations of the governments of the Eastern, Western and later Mid-Western Regions. This was a remarkable departure from the colonial practice, which relied on the initiative of small-scale farmers and received only facilitative aids from government. It was obvious that the schemes were not just aimed at improving the performance of the agricultural sector but also at raising the living standard of the rural dwellers, feeding a rapidly expanding urban population, providing raw materials to the industrial sector and generating revenue for government.

b) Farm Settlement Scheme

The regional government of East, West and Mid-West established a number of farm settlements during the 1962-68 plan periods. The settlement scheme involved relocation of farmers, and the main reason for the establishment of the farm settlements rested on the fact that peasant farmers were ill-equipped to serve as the pivot of the agricultural modernization, which was the primary aim. Agricultural transformation necessitated fundamental changes in the traditional unit and basis of production. The farm settlement scheme obviated the problem of land tenure, lack of access to capital and lack of familiarity with new technique and basis to replace the bush fallow system of traditional farming. The scheme was meant to attract the growing army of young school leavers to energize the sector and boost agricultural outputs to cater for the teeming population. The farm settlement programmes proved less successful than the dream, which conceived, bore and nurtured it. The entire scheme turned out to be too capital intensive to be sustained.

c) Smallholder Tree-Crops Scheme

The poor performance of the plantation and the farm settlement necessitated the government to adopt an alternative approach in its desire to invigorate and modernize agricultural production in Southern Nigeria. The Ministry of Rural Development adopted this approach in the Eastern region. The Regional Government's Oil Rehabilitation scheme was tied up to the programme. Farmers and Farmers' Cooperatives who owned a minimum of five acres of a block of land were qualified to participate in the programme. Farmers and communities were encouraged by the ministry to pool their fragmented plots of land into compact blocks to meet the five-acre required as minimum standard, to enable them benefit, on application, from the ministry's planting and replanting service.

Farmers responded positively to the smallholder tree-crop scheme because it did not involve government or the participating farmers in undue financial strain. It was also not per capital intensive. Donor agencies such as the World Bank gave material and technical support to the programmes. The ministry provided a Rural Development Officer who served as an on-sites extension consultant. The programs recorded huge success. By the end of 1966, a total of 50,000 acres had been planted or replanted according to ministry's specifications and with high-yield seeds. Besides, over 4,000 farmers had participated in the programmes. A sticking success of the agriculture policies was that the leading institution in Africa for research in tropical agriculture today was the successful researchers, which have yielded high response, pest resistant seeds (Njoku, 2001).

Northern Government Programme

The agricultural improvement of the Northern Regional government centered on a demonstration extension programme. The ministry of Agriculture, which was in charge of the project, conducted demonstrations on the farm plots of selected local farmers, applying a package of recommended techniques developed by the Ministry. Farmers from the vicinity were invited to observe each step of the planning and maintenance process, and yields obtained therefrom.

The aim of the programme was to provide incentives along with complementary input to private farmers in their traditional agricultural practice. It was a device to disseminate improved farming techniques to a large number of farmers through the demonstration effect, which improved crop yields was expected to achieve. Njoku (2001) documents that the programs were extended to all the Northern provinces and the project involved about 4,435 individual demonstrations. The scheme represented transferable means of introducing new farming techniques and new inputs because the techniques were easy for the local farmers to absorb. This was the state of the art before the sudden and unfortunate military coupe d'état which toppled the civilian government in 1966.

The Era of Oil Boom

The military regime, on taking over political power did not rejuvenate the agricultural sector, instead the regime caved in to the emerging oil industry to the awful neglect of agriculture sector. The discovery of oil completely alienated able bodied men and women from agriculture because the youth migrated to the cities to take up white cola jobs. Consequently, only the elderly people were left in the village to produce food for the teeming population. Under the circumstance, there was scarcity of food and there was need for an agriculture programme to deal with the situation. This was prompted the then military head of state Olusegun Obasanjo (rtd) to introduce Operation Feed the Nation in 1976.

Operation Feed the Nation (OFN)

Following the outcry of the masses for hunger, the then Federal Government introduced poverty alleviation scheme to ameliorate the situation. The then Military Head of State, Lt. Col. Olusegun Obasanjo launched the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) programme on 21st of May 1976. In his speech at the launch, the Head of State averred that in the last years, the country has witnessed an alarming decline in agricultural production.

Government has had to import increasing quantities of a variety of food items from abroad. Prices of foodstuff have galloped. To make matter worse, young people have been drifting from rural areas to cities in unprecedented number, leaving behind them old men and women who cannot be expected to meet the growing food needs of the country (Obasanjo, 1976)

Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) programme was purposefully meant to stimulate the growth of food by individuals, especially the peasants, the schools, colleges, universities and diffused through media and education the idea that everyone must grow food for the nation. The publicity made the programme become widely accepted. To facilitate action in this direction, the government created the necessary incentives to make the laudable programme practically possible through package deals like agricultural inputs, such as improved seeds, fertilizers and pesticides as well as proper marketing and storage arrangements. In addition to what the state governments had already ordered for the cropping season, the federal government made available to all the state governments fifty thousand (50,000) tons of fertilizers for distribution to subsistent farmers. Farmers were made to pay a uniform price for each type of fertilizer they bought irrespective of where they lived. The federal government subsidized the process of these fertilizers. Larger quantities of improved seeds were multiplied so that in future all farmers in Nigeria could plant the highest yielding seeds available from the research institutes. Fishing nets and simple farm implements such as hoes and cutlasses produced from local foundries were made available, while large quantities of pesticides were kept in readiness to prevent pests from frustrating the efforts of the government in this direction. To protect the farmer from seasonal fluctuations in the prices of farm produce and ensure that he derived a reasonable share of the nation's wealth, the Federal Military Government announced a guaranteed minimum price for maize, guinea-corn, beans, rice and yams (Obasanjo, 1976:11).

The Federal Military Government (FMG) expanded its agricultural policy in the Third National Development Plan and laid serious emphasis on food production. The overall aim of the plan was among others to:

- train intermediate and high level manpower for agriculture;
- conduct research and develop improved facilities of crops and live-stock
- increase disease and pest control activities for food stuffs and live-stock (FGN, 1978:6).

Lofty as the programme and its implementation sounded, it was evident that the operation feed the nation did not achieve its primary objectives of combating hunger and liberating the country from poverty and self-sufficiency in food production. The failure of the programme was its emphasis on importation and distribution of fertilizer, improved seedlings, pesticides etc. rather than encouragement in the development of human capital/indigenous science and technology to manufacture these products domestically. Many saw the programme as government effort to hoodwink Nigerians rather than to feed them because it never yielded the anticipated food security or encouraged agriculture. The programme merely created awareness about food insecurity in Nigeria and the need for both the government and individuals to tackle the problem, without providing tangible solution to the problems. Nzimiro (1985) observes that the programme was controlled and directed by the bureaucratic bourgeoisie for their own benefits. The end of Obasanjo military regime ended operation feed the nation scheme and gave rise to the emergence of Green Revolution Programme by the emergent civilian administration of President Shehu Shagari in 1979.

Green Revolution Programme (GRP)

In its effort to tackle the problem of increasing poverty, hunger and starvation facing the country, the Second Republic Federal Government of Nigeria, inaugurated the Green Revolution Programme in April, 1980 to boost agricultural production and to ensure rural development through agro-industries, construction of feeder roads, provision of housing, education facilities, water and electricity in the rural areas. This was to increase food production and boost export of agricultural products. To realize this objective, on 14th April, 1980 the Federal Government set up a National Council on Green Revolution. The Council was charged with the following specific functions:

1. To coordinate the activities of all ministries and organizations that has bearing on agricultural production, processing, marketing and research.
2. To give general directions to the ministries of Agriculture and Water Resources on issue relating to the development of agricultural sector.
3. Monitor the activities of the Federal Ministries of Agriculture and Water Resources and assist these ministries in every way in their pursuit of the goal of self-sufficiency in agricultural production.

The Green Revolution programme was conceived not only to boost agricultural production, but also to ensure rural development of agro-based industries, the

construction of feeder roads, the provision of water, housing, education, health facilities and electricity in the rural areas to improve the quality of rural life. (Shagari, 1980).

On June 3, 1980 the Federal Government set up National Council on Green Revolution. The terms of reference were, among others to:

- ❖ review the policies and programmes of various ministries concerned with the Green Revolution and advise the Council on the adequacy or otherwise of such policies and programmes for the achievement of the objectives of the Green Revolution.
- ❖ review the activities of existing institutions under the various ministries and advise the council on the strengthening of such institutions or the creation of new ones, where necessary, for the implementation of the administrative policies and programmes of the Green Revolution.
- ❖ set up sub-committees and expert working groups to study in detail all aspects of the policies and programmes for the Green Revolution to form the basis of the advice by the committee to the national council.

The committee was also charged not to overlook the tremendous contributions, which the professional and the intellectual communities could make to the success of the Green Revolution so that in the end Nigerian will be able to feed her population and have excess for export.

The problem with the green revolution was that it was executed through councils and committees whose membership was political party loyalists who saw the objects as a political patronage. Thus the rural farmers were left out in the scheme. The green revolution programme produced over-night elitist “farmers” who had no business with farming and in fact, knew nothing about farm work. As the local farmers became disenchanted and frustrated about the implementation of the programme, food importation became more pronounced and the consequence was intensified food insecurity. Achebe (2003) sums up the green revolution programme thus: “it gave Nigerians more food for thought than food for the stomach” The programme came to abrupt end in 1983 when the Buhari-led coup d’etat toppled the civilian government after it had gulped N3.8 billion tax payers’ money. Indeed, the Green Revolution Programme induced poverty and economic inequality among Nigerians.

Better Life Programme (BLP)

As a hangover, Nigeria, a nation under the affliction of uncertainty, poverty and inflation, cried out for panacea of this perennial monster-hunger. A four-day national workshop on women in development was held from the 1st to the 4th of September, 1987 at the International Conference Centre, Abuja. The workshop was organized with human and material resources contributed mainly by the Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), the Federal Ministries of Education, Health, Works, Housing and Information, Directorate of Social Mobilization (MAMSER) and the National Directorate of Employment (NDE). The workshop culminated in the Better Life for Rural women programme (Ijere, 1991).

The Better Life for Rural Women Programme was launched by late Mrs. Maryam Babangida, wife of the then military head of state, General Ibrahim Babangida (rtd) on 19th September, 1987. The programme was aimed at promoting rural development through the mobilization of women at the grassroots. The project was designed to address numerous social, cultural, political and economic problems facing the people. The broader objectives of the better life programme among others include encouraging and stimulating the rural populace in general toward improving their standard of living, their families and environments.

The state governors and the local government council chairmen followed suit to launch the programme in their respective states and council areas. The wife of the head of state was the chairperson at the National level, while wives of state governors and wives of the local council chairmen were the chairpersons at their respective government domains. Thus, a programme designed to improve the life of rural women increased rural misery because real rural women were alienated completely from the programme. Indeed, the better life programme became bitter life for rural women in Nigeria. The net effect was that escalation of poverty and hunger among rural dwellers especially the women.

The Family Support Programme (FSP)

The Family Support Programme was another gender specific poverty reduction programme which was inaugurated in 1994 by the wife of the then Head of State of Nigeria, Mrs. Maryam Sani Abacha. It was a child of necessity borne out of the need to improve the life and lots of Nigerian masses, especially women in the rural areas. It was to improve the

previous experiences of women in Development Programme by broadening its coverage and sharpening its focus. This programme was a shift of policy thrust on the role of family in national development, particularly as it affects major social sectors such as health, education and economic empowerment among others. The policy objectives of the Family Support Programme inter alia include:

- (a) To improve and sustain family cohesion through the promotion of social and economic well-being of the Nigerian family for its maximum contribution to national development.
- (b) To promote policies and programmes which strengthen the observance and protection of human rights and the advancement of social justice and human dignity.
- (c) To promote decent health care delivery in reducing maternal and child mortality and morbidity through improved health care system.

The strategies for implementation of Family Support Programme include:

- (a) Sponsoring media captions, news talk, television and radio discussions.
- (b) Establishment of relevant clubs and societies so that the rural family life shall be touched through the assistance given to women by loan.
- (c) Mounting workshops, seminars, symposia and public lectures to mobilize the people through competitions and quizzes, publications and training schemes.

The programme was implemented through media propaganda which did not have any meaningful impact on the target group. This led to its eventual collapse..

Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP)

Not to be beaten by his predecessors and to demonstrate that he too had a way out of the nation's poverty, the late Gen. SaniAbacha introduced the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP). The Family Economic Advancement Programme was established by Decree No. 11 1997 and amended by Decree No. 4 of 1999. The programme was entrusted with the tasks of providing credit for agricultural production and processing, cottage and small-scale industries through co-operative societies to encourage the design and manufacture of plant, machinery and equipment and to establish pilot project at village levels as a means of providing employment. Before the project wound up in 2000, it had financed

20,382 projects with a total credit of N3.33 billion; trained about 2000 loan beneficiaries in cooperative laws, principles and practice and financial management and basic marketing skills (FGN, 2000). The major problem of the programme which led to its eventual demise, was the top-bottom stance of FEAP. The makers and managers of the programme were drawn from the superstructure of the society. No rural or indigent family was known to have benefited meaningfully from the programme. At the end of the programme, it gulped N10 billion tax payers' money (*Tell Magazine*, 1998:11).

Agricultural Development Project (ADP)

Nigeria as a neo-colonial state, depended so much on the importation of food to feed its people, yet we could not afford to continue to import enough food to feed our teeming population due to competing demand on our meager foreign exchange earnings. There was the need to stop the food dependency syndrome with its related dangers that have characterized the economy. The increased food crisis encouraged the government to embark on the agricultural development projects as a production strategy so as to realize an efficient and effective national food policy.

The Agricultural Development Project (ADP) was established in 1974 with initial three experimental project centers at Fantua in Kaduna State, Gombe in Bauchi State and Gusau in Sokoto State. After ten years the project was introduced, the scheme was expanded to cover the whole of the country, the World Bank, the Federal and the State Governments financed the project jointly.

The Agricultural Development Project (ADP) was established on a simple philosophy of “gaffing on to the existing rural socio-economic system those vital inputs and basic infrastructures which it lacks to raise agricultural productivity and the quality of rural life (Gana, 1983:96). In fact, instead of embarking upon a radical transformation of the existing modes of production, the projects were simply planned to provide essential services and inputs to the existing system of production. The operational strategy include among others, establishment of a network of Farm Service Centers for an efficient input supply system; construction of spatial network of rural feeder roads to facilitate accessibility to farm service centre and markets.

River Basin Development Authorities (RBDAS)

The River Basin Development Authorities (RBDAS) scheme was first launched in 1976 with a view to developing Nigeria's water resources to facilitate agricultural and rural development. The objective of the establishment of the organization was to tackle the perennial problems of draught and unemployment caused to many farmers during the dry season. The River Basin Development Project Authorities was basically created to undertake a comprehensive development of both underground and surface water resources for multi-purpose use; assist in the development of fisheries and improved navigation on rivers, lakes, reservoirs, lagoons and creeks in the country, among others (Gana, nd:16).

National Directorate of Employment (NDE)

The National Directorate of Employment (NDE) was established through decree No. 24 of 1986. The Federal Government of Nigeria established this Directorate with clear mandate to provide 70% of job opportunities available in the informal sector and micro-businesses. The programme implementation strategy includes training Nigerians on how to take advantage of the opportunity, including Youth Corpers to achieve the following: (a) make unemployed youths to have marketable skills through the entrepreneurship development programme; and (b) Start-Your-Own-Business programme for other employable, but unemployed Nigerians.

The NDE was basically established to create jobs for Nigerians as a means of reducing poverty. The programme had several schemes to achieve its objectives, including: youth employment and vocational skill development scheme; small scale industries and graduates employment scheme; agricultural sector employment scheme; school leavers apprentice scheme; entrepreneurs training programmes for graduates scheme; and resettlements of trained beneficiaries scheme.

The NDE trained more than 2 million unemployed Nigerians, provided business training for not less than 400,000 people, vocational training in up to 90 different trades and assistance to more than 40,000 unemployed to set up their own businesses. The directorate organized labour-based groups through which 160,000 people benefited (FGN, 2001) According to Ogwumike (2007), Oyemomi (2006), NDE is one of the institutions that survived the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) era, and has continued to articulate development policies and programmes with labour intensive aimed at solving the

unemployment problems in the country. However, the Directorate has been fraught with problems, including: inadequate funding from the federal government; duplication of efforts with the statutory roles of the federal ministry of labour and productivity in the area of compilation of statistics on the unemployed in the country and claims to maintain a data bank on these, as well as matching applicants with vacancies, among others.

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that the National Directorate of Employment has not succeeded in its objective to stem the increasing incidence of unemployment in Nigeria.

Directorate of Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructures (DFRRI)

In the face of alarming decline in agriculture production, increasing poverty and massive food shortages, the Federal Military Government under General Ibrahim Babangida established the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) in 1986. This was decisive initiative and concrete step taken to tackle the problem of rural poverty and under-development through a comprehensive and sustained programme of rural development. The decision to set up the DFRRI was derived from the premise that since human, natural and mineral resources, which constituted the primary ingredient for national growth and development, are located massively in the rural areas, genuine rural development can only be achieved when the rural people are motivated to effectively use their immediate environment to start off a sustained development process.

The Directorate's role was guided by four fundamental objectives namely to:

- Contribute to efforts aimed at laying a solid foundation for the rapid growth and development of the country's food and agriculture.
- Contribute to the country's search to attain food self-sufficiency in five years beginning from 1998.
- Contribute to efforts to make food and the agricultural sector the true mainstay of the Nigerian economy.
- Make food and agriculture one of the directorate's major thrusts for rural development (Gana, n.d).

To achieve these objectives, the directorate designed an intervention programme package for food production to revolve around four major strategies, these include among others to:ensure strong, effective and efficient grassroots participation through the community based implementation strategy; ensure an efficient contribution in support of food

and agricultural production services and activities in selected areas of arable crops, oil seeds, horticulture, livestock, fisheries, agro-based raw material production; ensure the creation of vulgarization support activities and services required in all its selected areas of intervention; proper harvesting-handling techniques, storage and preservation, processing and transformation, marketing and distribution, etc. (DFRRI, 1998).

Considering the infrastructural development as part of the effort to make rural areas conducive for living and to facilitate increased food and agricultural production, the directorate was actively involved in the provision of the following basic infrastructure:

A. Rural Feeder Roads:

The Directorate's rural feeder roads construction programme between 1986 and 1990 was designed to be constructed in each phase. The target was to construct 90,000 kilometers throughout the country with each local government areas benefiting.

B. Rural Electrification Scheme:

DFRRI made effort in collaboration with the States Rural Electrification Boards, the Federal Ministry of Mines and Power and various communities to electrify the rural communities. The strategy was to create step down stations from the 33KV National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) station to enable various communities to buy transformation and distribution cables only and hook up with NEPA.

C. Rural Housing Scheme:

In collaboration with the Nigeria Building and Root Research Institute of the Federal Ministry of Science and Technology, DFRRI embarked on a rural housing programme to ensure the large scale manufacture of the clay and bricks which were used by rural communities, as well as the use of sand, cement and coconut or oil palm fiber to manufacture roofing sheets for rural housing construction. The Directorate concentrated heavily on the technical extension workers for each state of the federation as phase one of the programme. In phase two of the project, the state technical extension workers were equipped to train government extension workers who would in the final phase go to their respective local communities to teach the people the techniques of house construction using local resources.

D. Rural Health:

Emphasis and contribution were in the provision of portable water through a nation-wide rural water and sanitation programme. The programme was designed to provide water to 250 rural communities that were penciled to benefit in phase two of the scheme (Gana, undated:11)

Directorate of Social Mobilization (MAMSER)

On 2nd September 1987, the Federal Military Government, through Decree No. 31, established a body known as the Directorate of Social Mobilization (Decree 31 1987). The Directorate had a governing body at the Federal, State and Local Government levels.

Objectives of the Directorate

- A.** Create a new cultural and productive environment, which will promote pride in productive work, self-reliance and self-discipline
- B.** Generally awaken the rights and obligations of a citizens to the nations;
- C.** Encourage the people to actively and freely participate in discussions and decisions affecting their general welfare; and
- D.** Promote new sets of attitude and culture for the attainment of the goals and objectives of the Nigerian state.

The functions of the Directorate *inter alia* include to:

- sensitize, induct and equip all Nigerians to fight against internal and external domination of resources by a few individuals or groups.
- promote self-reliance and pride in the consumption of home produced commodities.
- propagate the need to eschew all vices in public life including corruption, dishonesty, electoral and census malpractices, ethnic and religious bigotry.
- inculcate in all Nigerian the virtues of patriotism and positive participation in national affairs, (MAMSER, 1987).

The decree stipulated that the Directorate shall liaise with and work in close cooperation with relevant Government ministries, agencies at the federal, state and local levels; and cooperate with all the other private and public organizations, institutions, and individuals concerned with the realization of the objectives of the Directorate.

The government of a state and each Local Government Council in every state shall participate in the functions of the Directorate in such manner as the President, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces may, from time to time, determine. Accordingly, and without prejudice to the establishment of state equivalent of the Directorate under section 6 of the Decree, all Local Government Councils shall be constituted into committees for the implementation of the social mobilization programmes as envisaged in the decree (Decree No. 31, 1987).

As part of its special functions, the Directorate shall gear all its efforts towards the implementations of social mobilization in the nation in order to awaken the consciousness of all categories of Nigerians to their rights and obligations as citizens of Nigeria. It shall also encourage and organize an appropriate federal and state government bodies or agencies and local government councils for the successful attainment of the objectives of the Directorate.

On Saturday, 25 July 1987, the President and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida launched the mass mobilization campaign. In his address, the President stated, among other things that:

if we were to contemplate the 27 years of our country since independence; examine the dire circumstances of our society today, in all providence of life; reflect on the profligacy with which we squandered undreamt of vast oil wealth, concede that the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) is the much needed antidote against past economic misdeeds and an elixir for future economic health, if, moreover, it is clear that too many unquiet and disquiet forces seem determined to torment and destroy our social peace and harmony, we would surely appreciate the anguished cry of the right-thinking patriotic Nigerians. (Decree No. 31, 1987:2).

The Head of State stated that one of the cardinal principles on which MAMSER philosophy was built was to raise our individual and collective national consciousness and enable us dream great dreams and attain lofty goals; to seek and to attain what is noblest in human nature; to place the highest value and respect the dignity of human life, to rediscover the meaning of human life, to accept responsibility, to pursue honest endeavors and to take pride in personal advancement through dedication and hard work; to respect one another and to guard the rights to others as jealously as we guard our own; to believe in rules and to respect and play by the rules and above all to return to those ties not so many years ago when everyone accepted that the community and the nation's interest came first and personal interest last.

The failure of MAMSER arose from the fact that rural Nigerians it intended to mobilize were hungry people whose confidence in nation building had been destroyed by the firm grip of poverty. Before MAMSER transmuted to National Orientation Agency (NOA) it was evident that the programme was sheer white elephant project.

National Accelerated Food Production Programme

The National Accelerated Food Production Programme was conceived under the Third National Development Plan against the background of increasing food shortages. Some farmers were selected as a vehicle for producing and multiplying improved seeds for wider distribution to other farmers in rural areas to boost food production for the teeming population in the rural and urban areas. Its main thrust was on imparting to farmers improved practices and management through a coordinated package approach, (Njoku, 2001:2).

It is obviously certain that national acceleration food production programme failed to result in amelioration of Nigeria's food problem. This was self-evident as the living standard of the poor got worse.

Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP)

On assumption of office in May 1999, the Obasanjo administration was primarily concerned with how to revamp the nation's economy and save the people from further economic decay. It took decisive steps to put in place an enabling environment first for thriving of the nascent democracy and putting the economy on the part of sustainable growth and development, and secondly regaining international respectability and credibility. Specific measures taken included:

1. Establishment of Anti-Corruption Bill to fight the ills of the society.
2. Curtailing excessive and extra-budgetary spending by government.
3. Adoption of measures to achieve fiscal prudence, transparency, minimal deficits and efficient resources use.
4. Introduction of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme to wipe out illiteracy and ignorance.
5. Review of developments in the various critical sectors of the economy and outlining measures to move the nation forward to the right direction.
6. Introduction of improved minimum living wage
7. Establishment of poverty alleviation programmes (PAP Document, 2001).

The poverty alleviation programmes were the first priority of Obasanjo's administration. It was a major step to accelerate economic growth and eventually eliminate the monster (poverty) generally, the measure adopted was to empower Nigerians to be more economically productive, with a view to improving their quality of life. The measures were designed to be people-oriented. The government provided a poverty reduction fund for the creation of two hundred thousand jobs in the 2000 fiscal year (PAP Document, 2000). The programme was to engage unemployed in direct productive activities as a means of reflecting the economy and providing them with direct jobs. Specifically, the measures tended to address the problems of low economic growth and high youth unemployment included the provision of five million jobs which involved the training and settlement of at least 50% of unemployed graduates estimated at about one hundred and thirty thousand per annum (PAP Document, 2000). The government sponsored a turn to agriculture programme to boost agricultural output by various measures, which included enhanced provision of various inputs such as fertilizers, credit facilities and modernization of farming practices, which was also part of the youth unemployment reduction programme.

Conclusion

The study established that poverty reduction strategies adopted by successive governments to stem the tide of poverty have not been successful. This was due to the programmes' top-down stance in formulation and implementation. The study concludes that as long as government remains dishonest, insincere in formulation and implementation of poverty reduction policies, the issue of poverty shall remain a fundamental threat to the people. It recommended that for poverty reduction policies to be result oriented, government must be sincere, honest and pragmatic in its implementation. Also, the people whom the programme is meant to benefit must be allowed to drive such programmes. In other words, bottom-top approach is highly recommended.

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