

Governance and Poverty Reduction: An Appraisal of Government Policies and Programs of Poverty Reduction in Nigeria (2015-2019)

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Abstract

The rate of poverty in Nigeria keeps rising despite the enormous human and natural resources. The apparent disconnection between Nigeria's endowment in natural resources and the level of poverty has become worrisome to all. Currently, Nigeria is ranked amongst the poorest nations in the world. Statistics from a recent survey by the World Poverty Clock indicates that 93.7 million Nigerians now live in extreme poverty. To address the poverty issue, the successive Nigerian governments have designed various anti-poverty programs. Yet, the plethora of anti-poverty programs has not yielded significant improvement in Nigeria's Human Development Index. Thus, this study evaluates the extent and impact of poverty reduction strategies in Nigeria. It explores the successes that have been achieved and the challenges that have been faced in Nigeria on poverty alleviation. The paper relied on secondary source of data and the elite theory was adopted to explain why poverty alleviation programs failed in Nigeria. The paper identified some of the reasons for the failure of the previous poverty reduction measures, programs and strategies as thus: absence of good governance, inconsistency in policies and programs, poor design and implementation, poor targeting of recipients, poor human capital development, corruption, inadequate funding, among others. The paper suggests that new poverty reduction strategies for Nigeria should be anchored on collaborative governance, productive job creation, empowerment scheme, consistency and commitment for effective implementation, infrastructural development, adequate funding of poverty programs, bottom-up approach, equitable distribution of resources and provision of micro credit schemes by the government.

Keywords: Governance, Poverty, Policies and Programs, Poverty Reduction Strategies, Nigeria.

Introduction

Poverty is seen as a universal phenomenon that affects the socio-economic and political well-being of its victims whether in a developed or underdeveloped country (Orokpo, Haruna, Asmau & Mutong, 2018). In other words, poverty is a global phenomenon which affects continents, nations, and people differently. It affects people in various depth and levels at different times and phases of existence. There is no nation that is absolutely free from poverty. The main difference is the intensity and prevalence of this malaise. However, nations in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America are currently with the highest level of poverty and consequently with the lowest level of socio-economic development, high rate of violence, unrest and generally unacceptable low standard of living (Alfa, Otaiida & Audu, 2014; Aminu, Abdulkadir, Jamilu & Mohammed, 2018). As at June 2018, of the 15

countries across the world where extreme poverty is rising, 13 are currently in Africa. Again, Nigeria came first from the top ten African countries with extreme poverty (World Poverty Clock, 2018). Similarly, World Bank Human Development Report released in November 2018, Nigeria ranked 157 out of 189 countries. Nigeria's score of 0.532 was below the average score in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) 0.537 and the global average of 0.728. Life expectancy at birth remains at 54 years, below the SSA average of 60.7 years. Nigeria continues to rank within the category of countries with Low Human Development (Aliogo, 2019).

Nigeria is blessed with adequate human resources to match its natural endowment which supposed to encourage prosperity and wealth. The paradox is that at the year 2015, the Federal Government of Nigeria said its economy was the largest economy in Africa but the number of poor people in the country was increasing with its continuous growing GDP (gross domestic product). The GDP of 2012 was 6.7%, 7.4% in 2013 and 7.2% in 2014 (Barunji, 2015 cited in Wilson-Osigwe & Akiyode, 2016). Dauda (2017) noted that poverty in Nigeria differs with the pattern in many other countries given that even with the economic growth recorded, poverty is still on the increase with the North-West and North-East geopolitical zones leading in the poverty indices. This situation is at variance with the experiences of developing countries in Europe, America and Asia where economic growth results in poverty reduction. This lends credence to the long-standing assumption that the relationship between poverty, economic growth and development is not even (Orokpo et al, 2018).

Nigeria has all it takes in terms of human and natural resources to become the strongest economy and financial hub in Africa and one of the leading economies in the world. In spite of these blessings, there has been a huge problem with poverty and unemployment (Aminu, 2019). The rate of poverty in Nigeria keeps rising despite the enormous human and natural resources. The apparent disconnection between Nigeria's endowment in natural resources and the level of poverty has become worrisome to all. Despite being the largest oil producer in Africa, Nigeria has struggled to translate its resource wealth into rising living standards (Ikem, 2018; Orokpo et al, 2018; Onah, Okwuosa & Uroko, 2019). Nigeria presents a paradox because the country is rich but the people are poor (Orokpo et al, 2018). Currently, Nigeria is ranked amongst the poorest nations in the world. Statistics from a recent survey by the World Poverty Clock indicates that 93.7 million Nigerians now live in extreme poverty (World Poverty Clock, 2019).

To address the poverty issue, the successive Nigerian governments have designed various anti-poverty programs. Yet, the plethora of anti-poverty programs has not yielded significant improvement in Nigeria's Human Development Index (Fiderikumo, Bredinoand & Adesuji, 2018). It is evident that past and present governments in Nigeria have launched several programs, policies and institutions in an attempt to improve the living standard of the poor and the low income group. Every successive government both military and civilian has come up with one program or the other meant to reduce the level of poverty, give hope

and succour to the poor and or move towards some sort of wealth creation (Orokpo et al, 2018). They have at different times introduced various poverty alleviation programs such as Operation Feed the Nation, Green Revolution, National Poverty Eradication Program, National Directorate of Employment (NDE), The Directorate of Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI), Peoples Bank Project, Better Life for Rural Women, Family Economic Advancement Program (FEAP), Poverty Alleviation Program (PAP), National Poverty Eradication Program (NAPEP), National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) and Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Program (SURE-P). These programs were geared towards improving basic social services, infrastructures, agriculture, housing and increasing access to credit facilities as well as creating employment opportunities. Despite all these programs, poverty still persists among the majority of the people in Nigeria. However, the failure of these poverty programs to achieve the aims they were set up have been attributed different factors such as corruption and implementation bottlenecks (Alfa et al, 2014; Aminu et al, 2018; Orokpo et al, 2018; Aminu, 2019).

As part of efforts to address the challenges around Nigeria's human capital development and the prevalent scale of poverty in Nigeria, the current administration of the Federal Government rolled out the National Social Investment Programs (NSIP) in 2016, aimed at improving capacity and alleviating poverty through incrementally improve capacity and put money in the hands of the poorest (Erezi, 2018). The programs are the National Home-Grown School Feeding Program (NHGSF), the Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) Program, the Government Enterprise Empowerment Program (GEEP) and the N-Power initiative (Aliogo, 2019; Asu, 2019; Idowu, 2019). Under the program, there are different projects developed to address these objectives. Examples of these projects are N-Power, a scheme that employs jobless graduates and pays a stipend of N30,000 monthly (around €75); Farmer Moni, a no-interest loan scheme for farmers; Market Moni and Trader Moni, no-interest loan scheme for small scale traders and petty traders, Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) scheme which is meant to provide people living in extremely poor conditions (Erezi, 2018; Ikem, 2018; Damilola, 2019). Thus, the program was meant to restore livelihood, economic opportunities and sustenance for the poor across the country.

Despite these programs initiated by the current administration to reduce poverty, the menace of poverty keeps soaring. Evidently, a report by Brookings Institute in June 2018, crowned Nigeria 'the poverty capital of the world', taking over India, a country with seven times the population of Nigeria. Their findings were partly based on data drawn from the World Poverty Clock (Damilola, 2019). Thus, the worsening incidence of poverty necessitates continual assessment of anti-poverty strategies and programs. At this juncture it is pertinent to examine the effectiveness of these poverty reduction strategies by the current administration. Hence, the objectives of this paper are:

1. To evaluate the policies and programs instituted to alleviate poverty in Nigeria
2. To identify the constraints to effective policy against poverty in Nigeria

3. To proffer sustainable strategies of poverty reduction in Nigeria

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

The Concept of Poverty

Poverty has no precise definition but in the simplest form, it refers to the inability of an individual to attain the minimum standard of living. It can also be defined as a social condition characterized by inadequate access to basic human needs (food and non – food) to the sustenance of socially acceptable minimum standard of living in a given society (Mustapha, 2014). According to Alfa et al (2014) poverty simply refers to a situation or condition whereby an individual or a group of individuals lack the essential things that make life worth living such food, shelter, clothing, portable water, health care, education and employment opportunities. In terms of dimensions, poverty can be seen as lack of access to tangible basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing, water, nutrition and health, education, as well as intangible ones like human dignity and freedom (Murthy and Kamath, 2003 cited in Fiderikumo et al., 2018). Poverty is classified into two forms: absolute poverty and relative poverty. Absolute poverty refers to a situation where a person's basic subsistence needs (for food, clothing, and shelter) are not being met while relative poverty refers to a situation where a person's needs are not being met in comparison with the rest of his or her society (Alters, 2009; Onagunisiaka, Fuadah & Mohammad, 2014).

In other words, poverty levels can be absolute (where income is so low and basic needs are not met) or relative (where basic needs are met but the person or household is still disadvantaged). Of the two classification of poverty, the worst is absolute poverty also known as extreme poverty or poorest of the poor. It is a situation in which persons lack the means necessary to meet basic needs, such as food, clothing, and shelter. It is a situation in which the income level is so low that basic human needs cannot be met. Thus, poverty exists when people lack the means or income to satisfy basic human needs.

There is no one cause or determinant of poverty. Combination of several complex factors contributed to poverty. However, various scholars have attempted to describe factors that have exacerbated the poverty situation in Nigeria. They include among other factors; inappropriate macroeconomic policies, low productivity and low wages in the informal sector, a lag in human resource development, lack of accountability, mismanagement, corruption, poor policy formation, implementation and evaluation, lack of involvement of the poor, dependence of the economy on oil, poor economic policies and management, poor revenue allocation and distribution, ethnic and religious conflicts, poor infrastructures, over-population, unequal distribution of resources, inadequate education and employment opportunities, environmental degradation, low growth resulting from poor economic planning and massive corruption in government, the absence of social security system or safety nets, bad governance, ineffective educational system, and poor healthcare systems, amongst others (Mustapha, 2014; Orokpo et al, 2018; Ikem, 2018).

From the foregoing, poverty can be caused by several factors which are personal, socio-cultural, economic, and/or political. However, poor governance and corruption, in addition to other factors, have been considered as major causes of poverty in Sub-Saharan African countries.

Poverty Reduction

Poverty is a phenomenon that cut across all societies. It cannot be totally eradicated but it can be reduced to a barest minimum. Poverty reduction simply refers to all formal activities geared towards lowering the prevalence and rate of poverty in the country. In other words, it is a process by which deliberate actions are taken in order to ensure that people who are unable to meet up with the basic necessities of life are supported and assisted to achieve same (Lawal & Hassan, 2012; Kpelai, 2013; Odalonu & Obani, 2018).

Governance and Poverty Reduction

Governance strictly refers to the administration of a state. Therefore, the ultimate objective of governance is to efficiently and equitably deliver public good to the citizens of a state and this is what is referred to as good governance (Momodu & Matudi, 2013). Florence et al (2015) viewed governance as the use of state resources and power in an accountable way to achieve and promote the well-being of the citizenry. In this way, governance is referred to as the way in which governments exercise power for the management and distribution of a country's social and economic resources (Ogundiya, 2014). The scope of governance is wide as it includes all the day-to-day activities of the government, such as the exercise of authority on the economic, political and administration in all level in the nation. According to Kooiman (2003) cited in Uddin, Mahmud & Hasan (2019) governing refers to those social activities which make a purposeful effort to guide, steer, control, or manage societies. Thus, governance describes the patterns that emerge from the governing activities of social, political and administrative actors. This has to do with the authoritative steering of social processes. It includes activities of governmental and non-governmental actors; civil societies, action networks, partners, and private-sector entities, which occur at multiple levels (Uddin et al, 2019).

On the other hand, the concept of good governance has no single definition but in the context of this paper, good governance refers to the rightly exercising of authority, the ability to problem-solving and conflict resolution, the capacity to manage resources efficiently for development, and high level of responsiveness to the needs and the interest of the citizens (Otoghile et al, 2014). Good governance can also be refers to as governance that meets or satisfies the yearnings or needs of the people in terms of development and welfare. Good governance is integral to economic growth, the eradication of poverty and hunger, quality education and sustainable development (Kola, Gana & Olasumbo, 2017). Thus, good governance is characterized with accountability, transparency, rule of law, participation, inclusiveness, equity, responsiveness, effectiveness and efficiency.

According to Diamond (2004) cited in Alfa et al (2014) the deepest root cause of poverty is not lack of resources. Rather, it is a lack of good governance – the instability or unwillingness to apply public resources effectively to generate public goods. Public goods include physical structures such as roads, bridges, ports, sanitation, potable water, electricity, public transport and telecommunication, social, economic and political infrastructure – schools, clinics, markets, courts, vaccination programs, improved agricultural techniques, a neutral and capable state of bureaucracy. All of the above are products of good governance (Alfa et al, 2014). Good governance consist of the following: capacity of the state to function in the service of the public goods, transparency, accountability, rule of law, mechanism of participation and dialogue to enable the public provide input to the policy process, policy design and implementation. If good governance is conceptualized in this way, it promotes development and by implication reduces the poverty level of the people (Alfa et al, 2014).

From the foregoing, it is clear that good governance is an indispensable imperative for the management of a country's resources. It therefore implies that when the power and resources are not well managed for the welfare of the citizen, there is bound to be a problem. In the absence of good governance, no nation can effectively design and implement sustainable development policies. This has been a serious challenge for development and implementation of poverty reduction programs in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

Several studies related to poverty have been acknowledged and different theories of poverty have been clarified. These theories are important in providing the nature and causes of poverty based on the perceptions and opinions of different schools of thought (Aminu et al, 2018). For instance, the power theory assumes that the distribution of political power in a society determines the magnitude and extent of prevalence of poverty among the individuals in that society. Tilted towards power theory is the elite theory. Thus, this study is anchored on elite theory. The elite theory of poverty posits that the structure of political power in a society determines the extent and distribution of poverty among the population. In this case, the ruling elite, constituted by the few, establishes and legitimizes an exploitative property system, through which it determines the allocation of opportunities, income and wealth, relying on the use of elite power, including the use of oppressive state agents such as the police and armed forces. Poverty is a socio-economic phenomenon whereby the resources available to society are used to satisfy the wants of the few while the many do not have their basic needs. So people are poor because certain political, economic and social structures have been imposed on them to be poor and not that they are lazy or choose to be poor (Alfa et al, 2014)

The essential theme of the elitist theory is that there is in every society a minority of the population which takes the major decisions in the society. As those decisions have political implications, the elite exercise considerable political influence. Taking a look at the various

poverty alleviation programs in Nigeria since independence, they have left much to be desired because the elites who have been in charge of the governance of the country enunciate and implement policies that are not realistic. The masses and the poor for whom the programs are meant are not adequately consulted and are not given the opportunity to take active part in issues that affect them (Alfa et al, 2014). Poverty and inequality in Nigeria are not due to lack of resources, but to the ill-use, misallocation and misappropriation of such resources. At the root there is a culture of corruption and rent-seeking combined with political elite out of touch with the daily struggles of average Nigerians. Public resources are not inclusively, transparently, efficiently and effectively managed. This translates into lack of access to basic services for the majority of the population and poor outcomes in human development (Oxfam International, 2017).

In Nigeria, there is a strong overlap between the political elites and those who hold economic power. Campaign financing by the elite often results in situations where policymaking processes and the functioning of institutions are hijacked, and skewed to work in favour of a small percentage of the population made up of the economic and political elite. This has reinforced the ability of this small group to use government at all levels to reap economic benefits. The concentration of economic power is used to further the interests of sectors, companies and individuals, creating a vicious and unjust cycle that maintains and increases elite control over economic markets and resources, at the expense of everyone else (Oxfam International, 2017).

Elite capture and cronyism hamper poverty reduction and increase inequality by undermining well-intentioned policies aimed at promoting inclusive growth. Examples of this phenomenon are at play in many key sectors of the Nigerian economy. Elite capture and cronyism ensure that substantial economic gains are hijacked by those in positions of power and influence, resulting in the non-delivery or sub-delivery of intended results from well-designed policies. These developments have kept majority of Nigerians poor and continues to broaden the severity of inequality (Oxfam International, 2017). For instance, twenty years into Nigeria's democracy, budget analysis regularly shows the dynamics of wealth distribution in Nigeria: the high cost of maintaining small political elite in office comes at the detriment of the majority of poor Nigerians. Apparently, determined effort to reduce poverty is lacking among Nigeria's top political and policy leaders. Only a few extremely wealthy elites have access to good life provided for themselves by themselves through legitimate and sometimes illegitimate means, especially from corruption related contracts. It does appear that Nigeria's teams of policymakers are yet to really come to terms with the scale of poverty in Nigeria (Ikem, 2018).

Materials and Methods

This research is descriptive in nature and data were collected from secondary sources through the review of various national and international publications like official documents, government publications, magazines, newspapers, journal articles, books,

periodicals, internet, National Bureau of Statistics and international research organizations such as Global Poverty Ranking Index (GPRI), Human Development Index (HDI), World Poverty Clock, etc. Content- analysis technique was adopted for the analysis of data. Thus, data collected were analyzed and interpreted descriptively in order to reflect the objectives of the study.

Results and Discussions

The presentation and analysis of data for this study are based on the objectives of the study as follows:

1. To evaluate the policies and programs instituted to alleviate poverty in Nigeria
2. To identify the constraints to effective policy against poverty in Nigeria
3. To proffer sustainable strategies of poverty reduction in Nigeria

Policies and Programs Instituted to Alleviate Poverty in Nigeria

There have been several programs geared towards raising the living standards of rural people and the urban dwellers, creation of job and reduction of youth unemployment in Nigeria. Since the 1970s, successive Nigerian governments have had a variety of policies and programs set up to reduce poverty in Nigeria. These policies and programs are highlighted in the table below;

Table 1: Poverty Alleviation Programs in Nigeria (1972- 2018)

*	Poverty Alleviation Program	Year Established	Main Focus/ Objective	Target Group	Current Status/ Outcome
General Yakubu Gowon (1967 -1975)	National Accelerated Food Production Program (NAFPP)	1972	Funding of agriculture	Farmers	Disbanded
	Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB)	1975	Funding of agriculture and cooperatives	Farmers	Restructured
General Olusegun Obasanjo (1976- 1979)	Operation Feed the Nation (OFN)	1976	To arouse Nigerians, the habit of cultivating	Rural and urban dwellers	Disbanded : Many Nigerians refused to

			food and cash crops in order to be self-reliant. Created awareness of food shortage		go back to the farm, since the rapid increase in oil revenue encouraged people to migrate to the city looking for greener pasture.
Alhaji Shehu Shagari (1979-1983)	Green Revolution	1980	Big mechanized Farming/ To ensure self-sufficiency in food production and to introduce modern technology into agricultural sector through the use of modern inputs	Farmers	Disbanded : Despite the program, food supply is insufficient in the country because of the farmer's reluctant to adopt modern agricultural technology
General MuhamaduBuhari (1983-1985)	Back-to-land Program	1984	Aggressive graduate involvement in agriculture	Graduates	Disbanded

General Ibrahim Babangida (1985- 1993)	Directorate for food, Roads & Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI)	1986	Feeder roads, electricity, portable water and toilet facilities for rural dwellers	Rural Areas	Disbanded
	National Directorate on Employment (NDE)	1986	Combating mass Unemployment/ To reduce unemployment and promote skills acquisition and entrepreneurship	Unemployed youths	Epileptic: Little success was recorded by providing vocational training on different skills to many Nigerian youths.
	Better Life Program (BLP)	1987	To encourage self-help and rural development programs, skill acquisition and health care.	Rural women	Disbanded : Slight achievement on the women's rights and their awareness to become self-reliant.
	People's Bank of Nigeria (PBN)	1987	To extend credit services to the poor and to encourage savings	Underprivileged in rural and urban Areas	Disbanded : The credit facilities extended to the poor did not

					tackle poverty issue in Nigeria
General Sani Abacha (1993-1998)	Family Support Program (FSP)	1994	To improve the life of rural dwellers, especially women.	Families in rural areas	Disbanded : The program failed due to lack of supervision and monitoring.
	The Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF)	1994	To rehabilitate and provide urban roads, water, educational materials, health and agricultural facilities	The general populace	Disbanded : There were serious criticisms of massive fraud and nepotism on the contract awarded by the officials.
	Family Economic Advancement Program (FEAP)	1997	To target rural areas through the granting of credit facilities to support the establishment of cottage industries and assisting Nigerians in low income group in subsistence	Rural Areas	Disbanded : Corruption, poor supervision and poor management defeat the program.

			agriculture.		
Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007)	Poverty Alleviation Program (PAP)	2000	To provide employment opportunities and infrastructures	Unemployed youths	Restructured: Poor management and corruption did not allow the program to succeed
	National Poverty Eradication Program (NAPEP)..	2001	To empower youths, provide rural infrastructural development, healthcare, education and natural resource conservation.	The poor and unemployed graduates	Disbanded : Poor management and corruption affected the performance of this program
	National Economic Empowerment Development Strategies (NEEDS)	2004	To provide social amenities and poverty reduction	The poor people	The program failed as 70% of the country's population are poor.
Dr Goodluck Jonathan (2010-2015)	Subsidy Re-investment and Empowerment Program (SURE-P).	2012	To mitigate the immediate impact of the petroleum subsidy discontinuation on the Nigeria	Unemployed graduates, the poor and vulnerable segments	Disbanded : Failed due to lack of transparency and large scale corruption. The money

			population, to accelerate economic transformation and to develop critical infrastructure projects and national safety net program.		set aside to finance the program was siphoned by the government officials.
Gen. Muhammadu Buhari (2015- 2018)	Need for Power Program (N-Power Program)	2016	To reduce youths unemployment and facilitate transferability of employability , entrepreneurial and technical skills	Unemployed graduates	Little success was recorded because few unemployed youths with connections are trained and engaged in temporary employment and allowances are paid in cash
	National Social Investment Programs (NSIP)	2016	To improve capacity and alleviate poverty; to improve manufacturing; to give loans to Micro	Poor people, petty traders, pupil and graduates	On-going. However the poverty rate is still soaring high despite the

			Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs and to provide jobs to graduates.		existence of this program
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Source: Compiled by the author from (Odalonu & Obani, 2018; Aminu et al, 2018)

From the table 1 above, it is evident that Nigeria has witnessed a number of initiatives at various points in time aimed at alleviating poverty among the populace. The relevance of reviewing these programs is to identify the successes or failures of each of these programs with a view to provide a supplementary intervention mechanism that will help in minimizing the incidence of poverty in Nigeria (Aminu et al, 2018). However, a review of these alleviation Programs above revealed some degree of ineffectiveness in achieving the set objectives or in producing the anticipated results because of poor implementation, high level of inconsistencies and corruption (Aminu, 2019).

Constraints to Effective Policy against Poverty in Nigeria

Successive Nigerian governments have designed and implemented numerous policies to tackle the menace of poverty and bring a lasting solution to the people. However, every effort towards this direction has not yielded the expected results (Tela, 2014). From Nigerian independence in 1960 to date, poverty alleviation efforts in Nigeria centered on food production, employment generation, empowerment, skills acquisition, education and self-reliant, all with the aim of fighting poverty in the country (Aminu et al, 2018). However, poverty remains endemic despite the introduction of all these anti-poverty programs by successive Nigerian governments. Many reasons have been given for the abysmal performance of poverty alleviation initiatives in Nigeria. These are: bad governance, poor design and implementation, policy inconsistencies and discontinuity, poor funding, corruption and mismanagement, inadequate stake-holding by beneficiaries and operators, poor infrastructural development, ineffective leadership, inefficient integration of states and local governments, poor coordination and implementation, lack of participation of target group, lack of targeting mechanism, etc., (Kpelai (2013; Tela, 2014; Arisi-Nwugballa et al, 2016; Wilson-Osigwe & Akiyode, 2016; Dauda, 2017; Danaan, 2018; Odalonu & Obani, 2018; Ajor & Odey, 2018; Orokpo et al, 2018; Bisong, 2019; Aminu, 2019).

According to Kpelai (2013) one major problem observed which affect all poverty reduction strategy in Nigeria is that of implementation. Their laudable objectives are usually overwhelmed by corruption which has become so pervasive and deep-rooted that it is now self-perpetuating and therefore would require multifaceted approaches in eliminating the causal factors. In same vein, Ajor & Odey (2018) asserted that one major reasons for the failure of poverty alleviation programs in Nigeria lies at the foot of corruption which have

bedeviled the country. Almost all poverty alleviation programs introduced by the various governments ended up enriching a few. As many of the operators of poverty alleviation programs corruptly enriched themselves, Nigerians became poorer while the privileged few got richer. Some of these constraints to poverty reduction programs are explicated below:

1. Absence of good governance - The issue of good governance is a problem that has crippled the growth and development of many countries in the world particularly Nigeria. There are many indicators to reveal the lack of good governance in Nigeria. The indicators are interwoven that they have multiple effects on the Nigeria populace. The primordial cause of lack of good governance in Nigeria is the absence of visionary leader to lead the country. Most of the leaders Nigeria ever had since the return of democracy in 1999 have been in power to pursue personal, ethnic and religious ambitions. These leaders had no vision for the good of the nation. Most of the developmental challenges Nigerian had today is attributed to these leaders who lacked good vision for the nation. These leaders lacked commitment for true nationhood and allowed personal ambitions and ethnic, regional as well as religious persuasions to override national considerations. These leaders give privileges and undue advantage to their family members, friends, and associates, in the distribution of public resources (Adeosun, 2012; Odo, 2015; Kola, Gana & Olasumbo, 2017). Thus, poor leadership and bad governance have been identified as some of the factors which have hampered grassroots development in Nigeria (Egbe 2001). Lack of transparency, accountability, good morals, and ethical conduct are wanting among many of Nigeria's leaders. The result is that some of the resources meant for the implementation of some of the programs are misplaced, diverted or even misappropriated, with gross impunity. There is no stringent monitoring regulatory system to check mismanagement of funds (Ajor & Odey, 2018). Thus, Nigerians are poor and deprived even when the country is blessed with resources. The reason is not farfetched. It is all centred on bad governance (Aminu, 2019).

2. Corruption and mismanagement - Corruption is the abuse of public office for private gain. Ogundiya (2014) averred that corruption is rampant at all levels of government, crippling basic health and education services and other social infrastructures. Corruption is evil, and it affects all areas of human lives. Corruption increases poverty and disproportionately affects those in the low-income group because it pulls resources from the national treasury into the hands of a few individuals who are politically powerful (Otoghile et al, 2015). Corruption not only makes the poor poorer, but through the misallocation of resources it also undermines initiatives that are meant to provide for people's basic needs, such as sanitation and healthcare (Transparency International, 2011). For instance, in order to improve energy, \$16 billion was appropriated to improve electricity supply during the 8 years of the Obasanjo regime, from 1999 to 2007 but up to today Nigeria lack stable electricity supply. Again, in 2008 Nigeria's Senate Committee on Public Affairs

uncovered a sum of N2.4 billion fraud in NAPEP. It was alleged that the money, that was meant to purchase tricycles as a form of empowerment for Nigerians at the lowest rung of the economic ladder, was diverted. By August 2008, the committee further revealed that only 500 of the 4,500 units of tricycles were bought even though the full funding was released. Similarly, the N500 million released to purchase spare parts for the tricycles was also embezzled (Damilola, 2019).

The incidence of corruption has taken a frightening dimension to the extent that Nigeria is now internationally regarded as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Nigeria was ranked 136, and scored 28 in 2016, ranked 148 and scored 27 in 2017, and ranked 144 and scored 27 in 2018 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) on a scale of zero (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean), (Transparency International, 2016, 2017 & 2018). This situation increases the number of both rural and urban poor, since very little effort is done to improve their lives (Aminu et al, 2018). One major factor that has hampered on the successful implementation of the numerous poverty reduction programs in Nigeria is corruption. Corruption has bedeviled various antipoverty programs of government and the manifestations and problems associated with corruption in Nigeria have various dimensions. These corrupt practices include project substitution, misrepresentation of project finances, diversion of resources, and conversion of public funds to private uses among many others (Abbas, 2013; Wilson-Osigwe & Akiyode, 2016). In fact corruption is the anchor for all other problem bedeviling Nigeria as a nation. The insecurity, unemployment, kidnapping, poverty, hunger and deprivation, injustice and others are some of the problem corruption is breeding in Nigeria (Kola, Gana & Olasumbo, 2017).

3. Policy inconsistency and discontinuity - Past governments had come out with policies and programs to reduce poverty in the country but almost all the programs could not see the light of the day due to lack of continuity of the program. The end of each administration led to the collapsed of the program. Whenever new regime emerged, it will discontinue or abandon the previous government policies on poverty alleviation irrespective of the successes recorded. Thus, every government intends and decides to kick start its own poverty alleviation program instead of sustaining or continuing an existing laudable program (Wilson-Osigwe & Akiyode, 2016; Aminu et al, 2018).

4. Lack of infrastructural facilities - Poor infrastructural development hinders economic expansion and poverty reduction. The level of infrastructure development in Nigeria falls below average. For instance, there are under-supply of electricity, poor road network, poor drinking water, unhygienic environment, low purchasing power, etc. When all these prevail in the country, poverty will continue to escalate instead of decreasing (Aminu et al, 2018)

5. Inadequate funding of poverty reduction programs - Lack of proper funding of poverty alleviation programs by the government is seen as one of the challenges of poverty

alleviation programs in Nigeria. The typical example is the National Poverty Eradication Program (NAPEP). The coordinators at the state and local government levels have turned the exercise into their own personal property and they do and undo at the stage of servicing the people (Aminu et al, 2018).

6. Top down approach - The target of poverty reduction programs is the poor especially the most vulnerable in the society. However, most of the poverty reduction programs do not get to the people at the grassroots where most of the poor people reside. The political ruling elites hijack some of the programs. Thus, it is still the usual top down approach and not bottom up approach as emphasized in the design of best poverty reduction strategy. The problem here is that government and the ruling elites claim to know and understand what poverty is, who the poor are and what they need in order to alleviate poverty, whereas, only the poor understand poverty and it is only them that can tell how it can be alleviated (Abbas, 2013).

7. Poor targeting mechanism - One significant flaw in the policies and programs of poverty reduction in Nigeria is the failure to effectively target the poor as well as focusing on specific target, community and their specific poverty related problems in addressing them. The roles of the poor in Nigeria and their communities in poverty reduction have not been fully appreciated by the implementers of the program. As it has been pointed out earlier, poverty is multidimensional in nature which must be attacked with a multidirectional and integrative approach. However, the approaches employed by the various poverty reduction bodies and agencies in the country have been so unidirectional that little achievements made in one direction, if at all, are usually eroded by problems emanating from other dimensions. This could explain the reason why in spite of the various efforts put in place to address the scourge, there is still high incidence of poverty in the country (Abbas, 2013)

8. Lack of collaboration and coordination - Lack of collaboration among the three tiers of government, involvement of social partners and other stakeholders in planning, implementing and evaluating general poverty reduction programs in Nigeria hampers government interventionist programs. The previous policies on poverty alleviation in Nigeria has been dominantly designed and implemented by the state without inputs from other sectors. The involvement of beneficiaries and other major stakeholders in the identification of projects and programs would sufficiently address some of these problems of poor collaboration (Ugoh & Ukpere , 2009).

9. Macro-economic distortion - Inadequate macro-economic management policies in Nigeria resulted in an unpleasant shift in economic activity. Before the advent of crude oil, it was a well-balanced economy with five principal export commodities, namely, cocoa, palm produce, rubber, groundnuts and cotton. The country's structural shift occurred when

undue concentration was given to crude oil to the neglect of agriculture. This led to mass poverty of the rural sector, with the consequent rural-urban drift, which also swelled the number of the urban poor (Aminu et al, 2018).

10. Internal Conflict - Issues of insecurity and instability in the Northern Nigeria especially at the North East caused by insurgency affects the implementation of the poverty reduction programs in the affected areas thereby increasing the poverty level and hunger in the region. People are displaced from their source of livelihood in many parts of the North Eastern states in Nigeria where human security has been in its lowest helm thereby encouraging poverty and hunger (Wilson-Osigwe & Akiyode, 2016)

Strategies of Poverty Reduction in Nigeria

The Nigerian government can adopt different strategies to sustain poverty alleviation programs in Nigeria. However, this study proposed the following strategies:

1. **Infrastructural Investments**- Investment in infrastructure, especially in power, roads, rail, ports, etc. For instance, investment in power generation that would lead to attainment of 24/7 electricity supply would invariably lead to increase in economic activities and reduction of unemployment. Again, investment and improvement of road networks would lead to easy movement of goods and people from one location to another.

2. **Collaboration and Partnership** - Harnessing the power of partnerships is critical in poverty reduction efforts. There should be joint and coordinated efforts of the Federal Government, State Governments, local authorities, private sector and civil society organizations. The Social investment Programs of the Buhari administration would help reduce the number of Nigerians who live in extreme poverty if Federal Government can partner more with State Governments to scale up the programs in the states.

3. **Government should Create Targeted Poverty Reduction Program** - This means keeping track of every household and individual living in poverty. This requires a process of identifying the poor population, and for each case, analyzing the reason behind the poverty.

4. **Bottom-up Approach and Equitable Distribution of Resources** –Nigeria like other Africa's poverty alleviation strategy should take a bottom-up approach. Inclusiveness is the key to any effective poverty alleviation strategy. In this sense, the people mostly affected by poverty must be involved in formulating the strategies to be implemented. Again the government should equitably distribute the national wealth to all and sundry.

5. **Peculiarity Policy of Poverty Reduction** - it is difficult to carry out a holistic and comprehensive poverty reduction program that would fit and satisfy the six geopolitical zones. Therefore Nigerian governments should develop policies based on the peculiarities

and dynamics of individual communities and localities. Country-wide policy of poverty alleviation is not a tenable solution for African countries. Nigerian governments and African countries should adopt and adapt the Chinese formula whereby the national government implements different varieties of programs that are designed specifically to address the poverty conditions in different communities and families.

6. Good Governance - Good governance is a sine-qua-non if Nigeria must eliminate poverty. There should be mechanism of participation and dialogues to enable the public provide input to the policy process, policy design and implementation. Also, there should be transparency, accountability, equitable distribution of public goods, good morals and ethical conduct among Nigeria's leaders.

7. Adequate Funding of Poverty Programs – Government should reduce the cost of governance and channel the resources to adequate funding of poverty reduction programs. Also, the government should increase the amount of public resources allocated to the provision of public goods and services, chiefly health, education, social protection, energy and safe water.

8. Fight Corruption- Corruption is a cause of poverty and a barrier to successful poverty eradication. It is a hindrance to poverty alleviation efforts of most developing countries. Therefore, the government at all levels should fight corruption until it is completely obliterated in all sphere of our nation. Government at all level should fight corruption genuinely as all these have direct implications on the rate of poverty and the ability of government to deliver prosperity and well-being to the average Nigerian.

9. Improved Human Capital. The Federal Government should invest in health and education to fill the skills gap in the economy, and meet the international targets set under the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).. It will also guarantee access to basic education for all, improve the quality of secondary and tertiary education, and encourage students to enroll in science and technology courses.

10. Job Creation and Youth Empowerment- Prioritizes job creation through the adoption of a jobs and skills program for Nigeria including deepening existing N-Power programs, and launching other public works programs. The Federal Government should provide support for the poorest and most vulnerable members of society by investing in social programs and providing social amenities.

11. Provision of Micro Credit Schemes - Access to microfinance has been proven to reduce poverty around the world. In order to improve industry and to improve manufacturing, government should give loans to Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).

12. **Agricultural Investment** - Invest in agriculture and assist farmers to grow enough food to feed the nation. This will roll back over dependency on importation of goods that can easily be grown locally. The import expenditure saved can be invested back into agricultural technology.

Poverty Trends in Nigeria

The United Nations Development Program estimated the proportion of Nigerians living in absolute poverty at 2015 to be 62.6% of its population, while the Human Development Index was put at 0.514 and ranked 152 out of 188 countries (National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, 2016). According to the World Poverty Clock Report, 73 million people, (40%) of Nigeria's population were extremely poor and living below the international poverty line of \$1.90 (680 Naira) a day in 2016. As at 2017 the number was 79 million Nigerians, 43% of the population was extremely poor. In 2018, 87 million people or 45% of Nigeria's population were extremely poor and living below the international poverty line of \$1.90 (680 Naira) a day. The trouble with this index is that the number is skyrocketing and as a percentage of Nigeria's population. Again, it was further revealed that 91.16 million Nigerians were living below a dollar a day as of February 13, 2019. This figure has increased to 93.7 million in June 2019. These trends are illustrated in the above table figure;

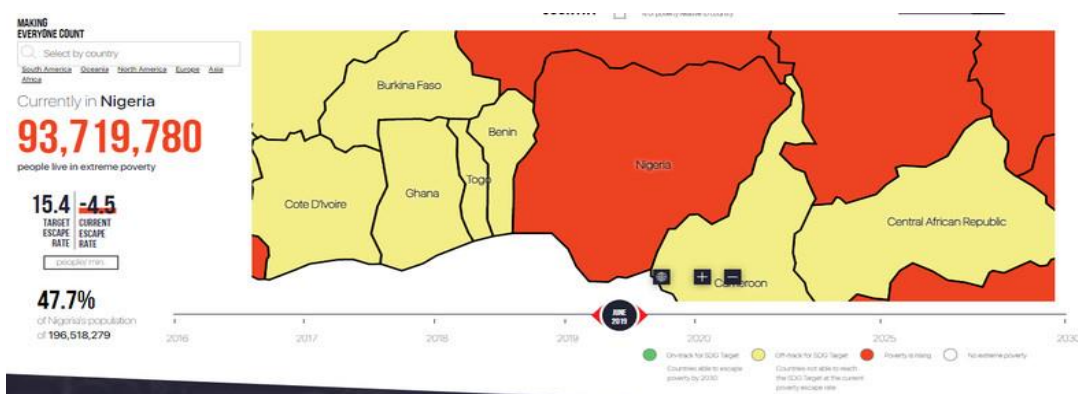
Table 2: The Trend of Poverty in Nigeria 2016-2019

Year	Population in Poverty (Million)	Poverty Incidence (%)
2016	73	40
2017	79	43
2018	87	45
2019 (June)	93.7	47.7

Source: National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (2016); World Poverty Clock (2019); National Bureau of Statistics (2019).

Table 2 above shows that the incidence of poverty as at 2016 was 40% which amounted to 73 million Nigeria below the poverty line. This figure further increase to 43% (79 million people) in 2017, 45% (87 million people) in 2018 and 47.7% (93.7 million people in June 2019.

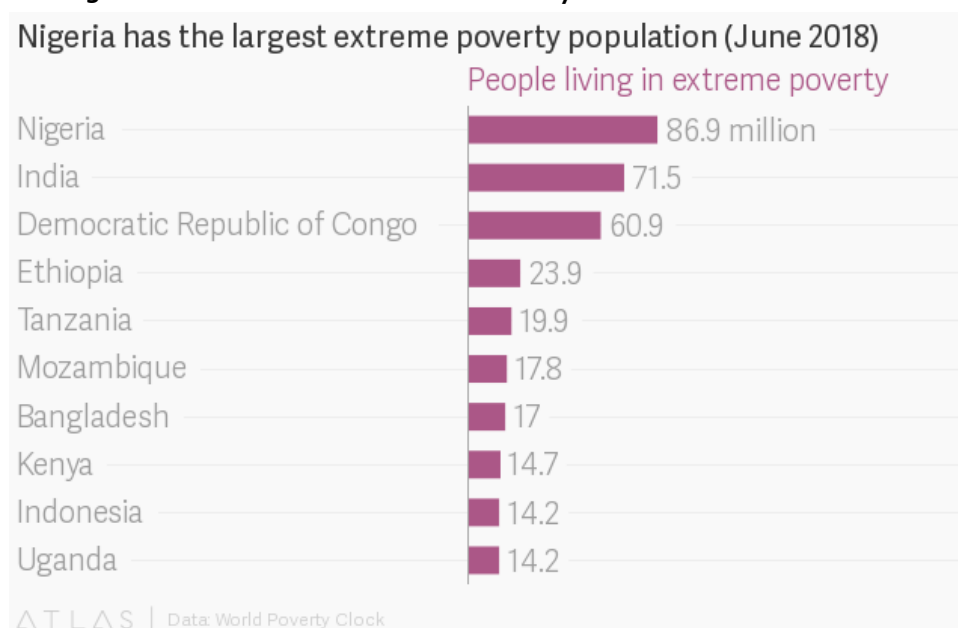
Figure 1: The Current Poverty Rate in Nigeria



Source: World Poverty Clock, 2019

The above figure revealed that there were 93.7 million Nigerians living in extreme poverty as of June 5, 2019.

Table 3: Ten Countries with Extreme Poverty in the World

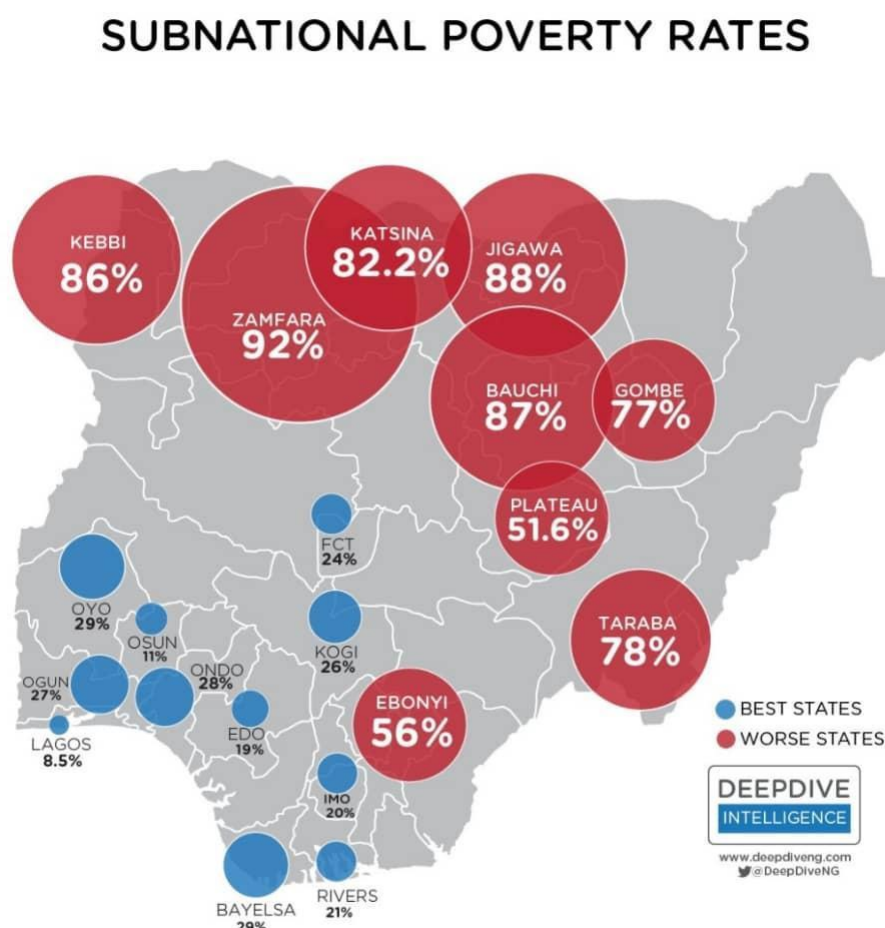


Source: World Poverty Clock, 2018

According to data on table 3 from the World Poverty Clock, a web tool produced by World Data Lab, it was first revealed in June 2018 that Nigeria had overtaken India as the nation with the highest number of people living in extreme poverty across the world, with an estimated 86.9 million Nigerians measured to be living on less than \$1.90 (N684) a day. Thus, the World Poverty Clock had named Nigeria the poverty capital of the world in June, 2018 when it revealed that Nigeria had 86.9 million approximately 87 million people living in poverty. Specifically, the report published by World Data Lab based in Vienna, Austria, revealed that, "At the end of May 2018, our trajectories suggest that Nigeria had about 87 million people in extreme poverty, compared with India's 73 million. What is more, extreme

poverty in Nigeria is growing by six people every minute, while poverty in India continues to fall.” India with a population of 1.324 billion people previously held the position, which is now occupied by Nigeria which has a population of about 200 million (Aderinokun, 2018; Olayinka, 2019).

Figure 2: Sub national Poverty Rate in Nigeria



Data Source: Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (2017). "Nigeria Country Briefing", Multidimensional Poverty Index Data Bank. OPHI, University of Oxford.

Source: Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (2017)

While the North have had the most opportunities in government since Nigeria gained independence in 1960, the region still remains the poorest in the country due to bad governance, corruption and high rate of insecurity. The map above, courtesy of the "Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative" which shows the sub national poverty rate in the country clearly indicates the North still lagging behind other states in development. According to the report, Zamfara state is the poorest in the country with 92% of its people living the poverty line, followed by Jigawa, Bauchi and Kebbi who have 88%, 87% and 86%

respectively. The states with the least poor in the country are Lagos (8.5%), Osun (11%), Edo (19%) and Imo (20%).

Summary of Findings

A review of the all the poverty reduction programs of previous administrations in Nigeria revealed some degree of ineffectiveness in achieving the set objectives or in producing the anticipated results because of poor implementation, high level of inconsistencies and corruption (Aminu, 2019). While some believe that bad governance brought about by ineffective leadership, massive corruption, low productivity, unemployment, debt-burden and conflicts are associated to failure of poverty eradication programs, others attributed the high level of poverty to macro-economic distortion, globalization, high population growth rate and poor human resources development (Tela, 2014). However, this paper attributes some of the reasons for the failure of the previous poverty reduction measures, programs and strategies as thus:

1. Absence of good governance.
2. Corruption
3. Policy inconsistency and discontinuity
4. Poor targeting of recipients,
5. Top-down approach
6. Poor infrastructural development
7. Inadequate funding.
8. Lack of collaboration and coordination
9. Poor human capital development, etc.

It was on the basis of the foregoing reasons for the failure of the previous poverty reduction programs that at the inception of this present administration, led by President Buhari deemed it necessary to tackle the challenges of poverty and unemployment in the country. Accordingly, the Federal Government rolled out a comprehensive National Social Safety Net Program to address unemployment and improve the condition of living of the extremely poor and vulnerable Nigerians (Aminu, 2019). Thus, the administration of President Buhari designed and implemented the ongoing National Social Investment Scheme (NSIP) as strategy for combating poverty and unemployment. The program consists of four major components include the Job Creation and Youth Empowerment (N-Power), National Home Grown School Feeding Program (NHGSFP), National Cash Transfer Program (NCTP) and Government Enterprise and Empowerment Program (GEEP) (Bisong, 2019; Aminu, 2019; Aliogo, 2019; Idowu, 2019). After three years of the implementation of the program; what are the successes and the challenges?

According to the National Coordinator of the Program, Maryam Uwais, through the program, welfare support has been provided as well as the creation of jobs for Nigerians in the formal and informal sectors of the economy. The N-power, specifically, has to a reasonable extent address the challenge of unemployment as it has provided a structure for

large scale and relevant skills acquisition and development. The program has boosted the business of petty traders, market women, farmers and artisans. The program generally, has helped to reduce unemployment, empower the people economically, encourage school enrolment, built capacity, equip less educated people with skills to be self-employed and promote scholarship in the areas of science and technology (Aminu, 2019).

Similarly, independent investigations carried out to evaluate the impact of NSIP by Africa Network for Environmental and Economic Justice (ANEEJ), Action Aid and the National Economic Summit Group indicates that the NSIP had met the urgent needs of Nigerians in different areas including providing employment, supporting small businesses and poverty alleviation. For instance, Action Aid focused on three out of four programs namely: Home-Grown School Feeding Program (NHGSFP), N-Power, and the GEEP schemes across the 36 states and the FCT. The report stated that:

- a. The Social Investment Programs, despite the challenges encountered, are effective and relevant in the states because their expected outcomes have been achieved.
- b. The report described the school feeding program as effective as most expected outcomes have been achieved: feeding of pupils in primary 1 to 3 reportedly resulted in increased enrolment in schools.
- c. Through the GEEP, small business owners in Nigeria have gained access to micro-credit finance to expand their businesses. Graduates were trained and linked to paid employment while non-graduates were equipped with skills to be self-employable through the N-Power programs.
- d. The N-Power job scheme provides jobs for 500,000 young Nigerian graduates and 20,000 non-graduates in different areas of public services. Known as N-Power volunteers, they are deployed in all the 774 local government areas of the 36 states.
- e. The Home-Grown School Feeding program is now feeding over 9.5 million children in public schools in 31 states nationwide; while the GEEP loans, comprising Market Moni, Farmer Moni and Trader Moni are providing micro-credit loans to over 2 million Nigerian petty traders, artisans and businessmen nationwide (The Nation, 2019).

In spite of these achievements, poverty rate keeps soaring higher since 2016 to date – October, 2019. Statistics on the incidence of poverty in Nigeria revealed certain characteristics. These include that the majority of poor people in Nigeria reside in the rural areas; that poverty is higher in the Northern part of the country than South and lastly, that though there exist disparity in the poverty rates between North and South/ rural and urban areas (Bisong, 2019). However, higher rate of poverty in the northern part of Nigeria is discernible. It was due to insecurity and instability in the Northern Nigeria especially at the North-East caused by insurgency which affected the implementation of the poverty reduction programs in the zone thereby increasing the poverty level and hunger in the region. People are displaced from their source of livelihood in many parts of the North Eastern states in Nigeria where human security has been in its lowest helm thereby encouraging poverty and hunger (Wilson-Osigwe & Akiyode, 2016).

Generally, the implementation of the NSIP program has witnessed some challenges. These challenges range from irregular payment of monthly stipends to the N-power beneficiaries, poor funding, politicization and lack of adequate publicity to create awareness (Aminu, 2019). The Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) scheme which is meant to provide people living in extremely poor conditions with monthly stipends directly from the government have not yielded any positive result. This initiative has generated so many concerns and controversies because there is no proper data of citizens in living extremely poor condition or demographic classification to support this kind of initiative in a transparent manner, especially for a country such as Nigeria that is still struggling with basic census data. Thus, the CCT is widely considered to be another white elephant project, as in the case of other previous attempts at poverty reduction in Nigeria (Ikem, 2018).

Again, the School Feeding Program of this current administration, which targets school children from the very poor background, has not received adequate public support because of perceived corruption that it may have generated. Moreover, the National Social Investment Program (NSIP) of the current administration, aimed at giving financial support to indigent Nigerians, is also not void of corruption allegations. A report by Sahara Reporters, a leading citizen journalism platform, documented various cases of corruption and petty frauds in the Trader Moni scheme, just as another investigation into the N-Power project, by the Cable Newspaper, an online newspaper, revealed corrupt activities within the system (Damilola, 2019).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper examined the poverty reduction strategies in Nigeria with a view of proffering sustainable solution to the persistent rise in poverty incidence in Nigeria. The paper identified some of the reasons for the failure of the previous poverty reduction measures, programs and strategies as thus: absence of good governance, inconsistency in policies and programs, poor design and implementation, poor targeting of recipients, poor human capital development, corruption, inadequate funding, among others. Based on the prevalent scale of poverty in Nigeria, it depicts that the ongoing poverty reduction strategies had little or no impact on the poverty situation in the country. Several development experts have suggested that while poverty cannot be eradicated out rightly, but it can be reduced significantly if the right steps are taken, consistently. Apparently, ending poverty is a holistic approach that needs robust planning and political will power to implement the plan. Thus, the paper suggests that new poverty reduction strategies for Nigeria should be anchored on the following recommendations:

1. There should be collaborative governance, concerted and coordinated efforts among the levels of government in poverty reduction strategies in Nigeria.
2. The government should create jobs and empowerment schemes to engage the jobless youths.
3. Government at all levels should adequately fund poverty programs in Nigeria

4. The government should strictly adopt bottom-up approach in poverty alleviation efforts. In other words, the people mostly affected by poverty should be involved in formulating the strategies to be implemented
5. There should be equitable distribution of the national resources to all and sundry.
6. Government should provide loans and micro credit schemes for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).
7. Government should drastically invest in infrastructural development especially in power, roads, rail, ports facilities, etc.
8. Government at all level should fight corruption genuinely as all these have direct implications on the rate of poverty and the ability of government to deliver prosperity and well-being to the average Nigerian.

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