

# Social Intervention Schemes and Poverty Alleviation Among Nigerian Youths

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**Abstract-** The entrenchment of liberal democracy and its attendant participation of the constituents in Africa and Nigeria in particular has over the time heightened the level of youths' engagements in the political processes. Bestowed with fundamental obligations arising from the principles of social contract, the state has become a social agency for providing safety nets for vulnerable youths in the society. Nigeria being a developmental state has in the recent time forced with the initiation of interventionist programmes aimed at alleviating the sufferings of the teeming population. Meanwhile, the source of worry is the awkward implementation of the social schemes by government characterized by institutional Incapabilities and lack in needed executive capacity to achieve the philosophies of the programmes. However, it is against this established premise that the thrust of the paper is to appreciate governmental social schemes aimed at alleviating the youths in the post-recession regime. Methodologically, the study utilized qualitative method while generating its data and analyzed in content. The theoretical framework of analysis is significantly anchored on the Empowerment. The findings of the study reveals that social intervention packages by government had help in alleviating the vulnerable youths. The paper strongly recommends among others; the strengthening of executive capacity and institutions involved.

**Index Terms-** Entrepreneurship, N-power, Nigeria state, Recession, Youth Empowerment.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The trajectory weapon of poverty in Africa and Nigeria has been noted following the serial decline in the standard of living of the citizenry. The Sub-Sahara Africa region has not yet succeeded in resolving the basic livelihood of her teeming population. According to Mwabu (2005), he avers that over fifty percent (50%) of the African population live below the international subsistence standard of one dollar per day and the population is at risk of suffering from reduction in its current standard of living. This is why poverty and material deprivation is prevalent and critical in contemporary political and social discussions.

In Nigeria, it is noticed that the state has been hit by the problem of poverty and this may be attributed to problems of mismanagement of human and material resources, indiscipline and lack of political will by the government beginning from the period of independence to the present day Nigeria (Adebayo, 2009).

However, rather than tackling the crisis that has bedeviled development stride and poverty in the society, the politicians and other government functionaries appeared to have converted leadership positions and public offices into avenue to siphoning public treasury. They equally engaged in misappropriation of funds, money laundering and leaving the poor masses to suffer in destitution. As a result of this underdevelopment and poverty, Nigeria has been forced to witness anti-social activities like armed robbery incidence, cultism, drug trafficking, prostitution, child labour and trafficking, ritual killings and assassination (Akande, 2014). The intention of government to curb the ugly situation made it possible to introduce some programmes which were aimed at alleviating or eradicating poverty among the youths. These programmes have stood the test of time but have not actually impacted positively on alleviating poverty among the youths. It is important to recall that when the former President, General Sani Abacha took power in 1993, he introduced poverty alleviation measures like Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP).

However, upon coming to power in the new democratic dispensation in 1999, the Obasanjo administration in an effort to cushion the effects of poverty among the masses, introduced the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP). The programme had good intention of alleviating poverty among the populace but was later hijacked by the politicians as the philosophy behind the setting up the programme was politicized and the objectives undermined. For instance, the beneficiaries of the programme were party faithful, loyalists and family members. Despite the tumult efforts of Olusegun Obasanjo's administration to alleviate poverty among the youth; different successive government regimes have introduced different programmes as measures to eradicate poverty among the youths. While very few of them witnessed some significant improvement, others failed to address the challenge of poverty for which they were mapped out for. It is against this established backdrop that the paper appreciates the effort of government in the present dispensation in alleviating the youths.

## II. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

### Poverty

The problem of poverty in Africa has over the years engaged the attention of the international community, governmental and non-governmental organizations and veteran scholars from Western and African countries. This is as a result

of confusion and identified mayhem unleashed to Africans. According to scholars like Oduwole, (2015:27); Okoh (1998:56), they conceived poverty as a state of deprivation in terms of economic and social indicators such as income, education, healthcare, social status, self-esteem and self-actualization. To Anikpo (1995:32), poverty is the process whereby individuals or groups are forcefully eliminated from control of decision making machinery that determines the production and distribution of resources in a society. He maintains that poverty has manifested itself in various forms such as hunger, lack of good drinking water, clothes, shelter and good health, poor education and poor distribution of resources.

In buttressing the difficulties encountered in arriving at a common and generally accepted definition of poverty, Onyekpe, (2007:18); Aboyade (1997:11), posit that there seems to be general agreement that poverty is a difficult concept to handle and that is more easily recognized than defined. Even attempts made to categorize some specific areas at which poverty could be viewed are faced with lack of agreement. For instance, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Guideline on Poverty Alleviation (2000:29) stressed that an adequate concept of poverty should include all the most important areas in which people of either gender are deprived and incapacitated in different societies. It should encompass the casual links between the core dimensions of poverty and the central importance of gender and environmental sustainable development. Being multidimensional in nature, poverty entails inadequate livelihood material goods and failure to achieve basic capabilities in nutrition, health, economic and social life. As noted by Taiwo and Aguu, (2016:12); Ucha, (2010:19) and Adebayo (2009:28); poverty is a consequence of deprivation, lack of good health and social or economic exclusion, including lack of access to active involvement in community life in all its ramifications

### III. YOUTH AND YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

Youth is a broad base concept which has been given multifarious definitions by the scholars and public policy analysts. Youths are those persons between the age of 15 and 24 years (United Nations, 2010). This definition considers those under the age of 14 as children. However, under the Rights of the Child, persons up to the age of 18 are defined as children (The Youth and United Nations, 2010). The broader use of the term underscores the need for policies and programmes to focus less on age and more on recognizing the specific development needs of people as they transit from childhood to adulthood (UN, 2010).

The National Youth Policy and Strategic Plan of Action defined youth as person between the ages of 18-35 years and is a citizen of Nigeria. This implies that youth can be regarded as any person on the stage of transition to adulthood who depends on others for means of survival, shelter and other necessities of life. Youths are seen as the foundation of a society; their energies, character, inventiveness and orientation define the pattern of development and security of a nation. They are the most volatile and yet the most vulnerable segment of the population in terms of socio-economic, emotion and other aspects (Anasi, 2010:67; Zakaria, 2006:36)

On the other hand, youth empowerment suggests the various ways of developing the capacity and capability of youths

toward becoming job creators and not necessarily job seekers (Oyekunle; Akindele & Olatunde, 2013:27) The main purpose of youth empowerment is to encourage youths to acquire entrepreneurial skills and knowledge to become independent. This is usually done by providing youths with training facilities and funding. The need to improve youth empowerment in Nigeria is not the concern of government alone. Youth empowerment concerns individuals and non-governmental organizations.

### IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

The research process of reviewing extant literature cannot be really overemphasized. This is attributed to the import it plays in cultivation of knowledge. It is important to underscore herein the necessities behind literature review as it takes into cognizance the current state of knowledge in the area of investigation, appreciation of findings and methodology; and systematically identifies the gap or lacuna in knowledge of the subject or topic of investigation. However, the review and appreciation of relevant extant literature will be organized under the following themes:

#### **Social Schemes and Institutional Incapabilities in Nigeria's Failed State**

The situation of poverty in Nigeria has continued to have effects on the masses due to the kind of havoc it has caused to rural and the urban dwellers. Its direct effect among the populace is low standard of living. The resultant implication on the youths is the mass exodus of Nigerian citizens to another country. Some of these migrants are people with high productive skills and capabilities, which if they are well trained and empowered by the government, they would have become very productive and therefore contribute meaningfully to development of the nation. However, it is the quick response to the awful poverty crisis in Nigeria that the different interventionist programmes had been initiated and established by successive governments. Poverty alleviation strategies implemented so far in Nigeria focused more on growth, basic needs and rural development approaches. The government introduced these programmes to help revamp and reconstruct the economy (Ndoma, 2017:23). However, available extant literature on government policies toward social intervention schemes in Nigeria have been categorized under

- **The Pre-Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) Regime**

This started at initial time when the government showed concern on the development needs of the newly independent Nigeria state following the introduction of first National Development Plan in 1962. The philosophy behind the plan included the development of opportunities in the health sector, employment, education and improvement of access to these opportunities. Similarly, the Fourth National Development Plan which appeared to be more precise in the specification of objectives that were associated with poverty reduction, emphasized increase in real income of the average citizen as well as reduction of income inequality among other things. During this era of National Development Plans, many of the programmes which were put in place by the government had positive effects on poverty reduction. Although the target population for some programmes were not specified explicitly as poor people or

communities were socially and economically excluded from the gains of the programmes (Ogwumike, 1995:41; Akpata; Igalajobi & Awoniyi, 2010).

- **The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) Regime**

The uncertainties of life that characterized pre-SAP regime forced the government with no other alternative than to import the policy from external environment without due consultation and its attendant incidence on the lives of the Nigeria citizens. It is the effort of the government to alleviate poverty that made it introduce policies following the severe economic crisis in Nigeria which worsened the quality of life. However, the implementation of the SAP further worsened the living condition of many Nigerians especially the poor who were the most vulnerable group (Aiyedogbon&Oluofasa, 2012:5). According to Ndamu, (2017:8); Nwaobi,(2003:22) and Ogwumike,(2002:52); they maintain that as a result, the government had cleverly designed and implemented many poverty alleviation programmes from 1986 to 1993 and also between 1993 and 1998. These programmes included the Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), Better Life Programme (BLP), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), People's Bank of Nigeria (PBN), Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) and Family Support Programme (FSP) Garba, (2006:23). These programmes had suffered failure and were caused by political instability, political interferences and lack of clearly defined policy framework with proper guidelines. In most cases, the programmes were poorly implemented and lacked continuity. They were characterized by corruption as being witnessed on the part of the government officials.

## V. THE BIG PUSH REGIMES

Following the return of Nigeria from military system characterized by authoritarianism, excessive use of coercion and state apparatus, high poverty index and distressed economy, the emerging Nigerian state has conceived the need to key into the trending wave of democracy and democratization in Africa. The Nigeria government has continued uneasily to revamp the economy with the intention of engaging the youths and marshalling schemes aimed at alleviating the suffering of the citizens. With the inception of democracy in Nigeria's fourth Republic in 1999, it was estimated that about 70% of Nigerians lived in poverty (Ogwumike, 2001). The launching of the Poverty Alleviation Programmes (PAP) came on plank as pro-tem anti-poverty gauge It targeted at correcting the deficiencies of the past efforts of alleviating poverty through the objectives of providing direct 200,000 unemployed people. As a result of the ineffectiveness of the programme, the government introduced National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) in 2001. The programme was established to address the challenges of poverty and mobilize resources from all the tiers of government throughout the nation. The establishment of NAPEP was precipitated when the federal government observed that poverty was on the increase despite the large number of ongoing efforts and programmes to fight poverty. As noted by Elumidale, Asaolu & Adereti (2006:21), NAPEP has been structured to integrate four sector schemes which include:

- Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES)
- Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS)
- Natural Resource Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS)

Generally, these schemes were strategies designed by the government to facilitate ambitions towards poverty eradication especially the absolute poverty that has been ravaging the nation. In order to achieve the objectives of NAPEP, #6 billion was approved in 2001. NAPEP differs from other past poverty alleviation strategies because it was not a sector project implementation agency but a coordinating organ that ensures that the core poverty eradication ministries were effective.

## VI. SOCIAL INTERVENTION SCHEMES UNDER PRESIDENT BUHARI'S ADMINISTRATION

The emergency of the present administration of President Mohammad Buhari has witnessed an increase in number of youths who are unemployed and constitute serious threat to the peaceful existence of the state. Trapped with the geometric increase of jobless youths, the administration was left with no option than to initiate certain schemes that would help ameliorate the suffering of the people. It was on this philosophy to give the citizens the needed sense of belonging that the following programmes were launched.

- **The N-Power Programme**

N-power is one of the social intervention schemes initiated by the Federal Government of Nigeria under the present administration of President Mohammad Buhari. It was designed to help provide job creation and empowerment for young Nigerians to acquire and develop life-long skills to become solution providers in their communities and to become players in the domestic and global markets. In the quest to actualize the policy frame and safe guard the needful social safety nets, N-power is aimed at addressing the challenges of unemployment especially among graduate youths as it is categorized into Graduate Teachers Corps which is targeted at 500,000 graduates. N-power knowledge is targeting 25,000 non-graduates while N-power Build targets 75,000 non-graduates recruitment. Through N-power, young Nigerians youths will be empowered with the necessary tools to go and create, develop, build, fix and work on exceptional ideas, projects and enterprises that will change the communities, the economy and the nation.

However, the programme has been designed for young Nigerians between the ages of 18-35 years. The focus is to provide the young graduates and non-graduates with the skills, tools and livelihood to enable them advance from unemployment to employment, entrepreneurship and innovation. Also, the first phase of this programme is targeted towards Nigeria's critical needs in education, agriculture, and technology construction, creative and artisanal industries. It will also prepare Nigerian youths for a global outstanding push where young Nigerians can export their services to work on global projects that can earn Nigeria foreign exchange. Accordingly, the goals of N-power included the following; to reduce the rate of unemployment in the country, bring about a system that would facilitate transferring of employability, entrepreneurial and technical skills and to bring solutions to poorly public service and government diversification

policy. The programme is designed in such a way that it can be divided into three classes.

- The N-power teacher corps
- The N-power knowledge
- The N-power Build

N-power teacher corps is a programme premeditated for unemployed graduates which is a voluntary one. It will engage and train 500, 000 young unemployed graduates. The programme will last for duration of two years. The volunteers are entitled to receive their stipend at the end of every month. Also, the volunteers are expected to receive computing device that will contain information for specific engagement, as well as information for their continuous training and development. Participants will provide teaching, instructional and advisory solution in four key areas.

- (a) **N-Power Agro Programme:** The volunteers under this programme undergo training after they would start to function as intermediaries between research institute and the farmers. They help in facilitating, communicating and as well assisting farmers in decision making. It also ensures that appropriate knowledge is implemented to achieve the best results on agriculture. N-agro will equally rely on technological usage since it aspires to determine the type of soils, sizes of farmlands, irrigation in order to ensure that farmers are operating optimally.
- (b) **N-Power Health Programme:** Participants under this platform undergo an initial induction training prior to deployment. N-power health programme is established to train volunteers to work as public health assistants. Its function is to sensitize the community members including pregnant women, children, families and individuals on health kits and preventive measures. It equally assists in providing diagnostic services to people.
- (c) **N-Power Teach Programme:** The N-power teach programme engages qualified graduates for the benefits of basic education. The volunteers are deployed to primary and secondary schools across the country to assist in impacting needful knowledge on the children. They will not replace the current teachers, but will work as support teachers, assisting the teachers, school management and other functionaries within the school. They will also be deployed to the rural areas to take basic education to children in marginalized communities.
- (d) **N-Power Tax Programme:** In order to ensure high efficiency in collection of tax, the federal government mobilized some volunteers who will assist the Federal Inland Revenue Services (FIRS) in collection of taxes. The government seeks to encourage non-complaint and partially complaint tax payers to come clean and declare and pay their appropriate tax due to the government. Following this, N-power will be required to select 3700 volunteers to work as a Community Tax Liaison Officers to work in their states of residence within the state's tax authorities. They will have the following key responsibilities which will include answering online inquiries, customer management, creating awareness of tax compliance.
- (e) **N-Power Community Education Programme:** Some volunteers under N-power Teacher Corps are deployed to

different parts of the nation to instruct on Civic education and as well as Adult education. They perform similar function like the N-power Teach and are also recruited following the same process and as well possessing the same requirement

- (f) **N-Power Knowledge Programmes:** This programme is the federal government's first step towards diversifying to a knowledge economy. There are eight other innovations hubs across the country which is expected to provide incubation and acceleration of the technology and creative industries; hence this programme will work alongside with them. The programme is a "Training to jobs" initiative essentially ensuring that participants can get engaged in the marketplace in an outstanding capacity, as free lancers, as employees and entrepreneurs.
- (g) **N-Power Creative Programme:** This will train and develop 5000 young creative talents. The strategy is to put Nigeria's creative industry on the global radar as exporters of world-class services and content. Training lasts for 3 months which can be divided as 1 month in-class and 2 months hand-on-group project, across selected cities in Nigeria. The participants are being trained and certified in one of the following: Animation, Graphic Design, Post-Production, and Script Writing.
- (h) **N-Power Tech Hardware:** N-power Tech Hardware is aimed at empowering 10,000 computer device technicians into the ICT industry. This programme is for device technicians who will train and facilitate tooling for at least 10,000 technicians to boost the device servicing and manufacturing industry. The output of this programme will serve as a critical catalyst for the expansion of local capacity to serve and produce mobile phones, tablets, computers and other relevant devices to serve the local and international market.
- (i) **N-Power Tech Software:** This is to empower 10,000 volunteers into developing software in the ICT industry. This programme is expected to train, tool and position 10,000 hand-on-software developers for the local and international software development market. Participants will undergo a project based model to training wherein they will be exposed to foundational software development tools as well as resources to thrive as a modern day software developer entrepreneur. The programme will seek to establish the foundational knowledge, tools and platform upon which participants can pursue a career as software development entrepreneurs. The participants will be trained and the training will last for 11 weeks. The programme will also offer a continuity platform to support participants with learning and engagement opportunities on a continuous basis. They will also be enabled with a device to continue the practice and exploration of opportunities after training.
- (j) **N-Power Build Programme:** N-power Build is an accelerated training and certification programme that will engage and train 75,000 young unemployed Nigerians in order to build a new crop of skilled and highly competent workforce of technicians, artisans and service professionals.

## VII. CONDITIONAL CASH TRANSFER PROGRAMME

In order to cushion the high level of poverty among poor Nigerians, President Buhari introduced the payment of #5000 each to over one million indigent citizens of Nigeria in which youths were among. This is one of the social intervention schemes which aimed at addressing poverty among the Nigerian citizens. It is important to note that few months of excuses about the state of the nation's poor economic fortunes; Nigerians became excited following the commencement of the payment of #5000 naira conditional cash transfer. The programme has never been left unchallenged but has received a lot of criticisms from different quarters including important stakeholders in the government. Some argued that the poverty alleviation is caricature of youth empowerment. For instance, some questions had been asked on the yardstick for measuring poverty in Nigeria. The value of #5000 monthly to these vulnerable Nigerians. These are some of the questions which have been used to criticize the programme.

## VIII. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

The theoretical framework utilized in the paper is anchored on empowerment theory as propounded by Solomon, (1976) in his book titled *Black Empowerment*. According to his postulation, personal, interpersonal and environmental resources are needed to update the skills, knowledge and motivation of people to achieve valid social roles. He further maintains that powerlessness and feeling of hopelessness are as a result of the inability to use resources and support to achieve goals. Validating the theory of empowerment as postulated by Solomon (1976), Denier (1999), used the theory to study children "*Birth through Eight*" resources for educating children with diverse abilities. The study guided children to acquire relevant knowledge and skills and to participate in decision making process (Okala and Uche, 2014). In his contribution to the import of empowerment theory to social formation especially the vulnerable youths in the society; Lee (2001), emphasized that it helps to develop a more positive and potent sense of self, construction of knowledge and capacity to achieve a critical perspective on social and political realities; and cultivation of resources, strategies and competencies to attain personal and collective goals. Empowerment theory provides an effective support system for individuals and communities that have been blocked from achieving collective goals and overcome social barriers and self-fulfillment within existing social structures (Payne, 2005; Okala and Uche, 2014).

However, the initiation of multifarious social schemes in Nigeria by different political regimes have become a source of empowerment to the citizens especially the vulnerable youths who are jobless and roaming the streets. Social schemes and packages like Graduate Internship Scheme, N-power and Conditional transfer of money to the youths have become succor and empowerment. The beneficiaries are bent on using the acquired knowledge to develop themselves and the entire society. The implication is the involvement of the youths in the decision making process and imparting economically to the growth of the economy.

## IX. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is not a disputable fact that in Nigeria, the incidence of poverty has remained high in spite of the number good poverty alleviation programmes. Since youths are the driving force of the nation, there is needed to make good policies that will guarantee their self-reliance, alleviate their vulnerability and make them have that self-confidence to be patriotic citizens of the country. It is based on this frame the study appreciated the different social intervention packages aimed at alleviating poverty among the Nigerian youths. The findings reveal that social intervention packages by government had helped in alleviating the vulnerable youths. Also, the paper looked at the fact that despite that the government has called it a thing to fulfill her obligations toward the citizens; it has lacked the needed executive capacity to administer its social policies to the populace. Also discussed is the social schemes and institutional incapacities in Nigeria's failed state. Social intervention programmes under the political regime of President Mohammed Buhari were appreciated. The theory of employment was adequately utilized for the sake of analysis. However, arising from the investigations and findings of the study, the paper sets to recommend the following practical and theoretical significance for public policy by government and other relevant stakeholders;

- Strengthening of executive capacity and institutions involved will be of immense help to overhaul the likely lapses that might hinder the successful achievement of programmes.
- There is the need for government to build base on incremental policies that will help alleviate poverty. It has been observed over the years that each government comes to the corridor of power with its programme of action devoid of existing plans aimed at alleviating poverty. This has continued to lead the state into inconsistencies in its policy making.
- The National Assembly should always strive to checkmate the presidency based on the strengths and weaknesses of any social intervention programme. This will help eliminating the likely challenges that stand to thwart the efforts of government in achieving its policies and programme

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