

# AN OVERVIEW OF RURAL POVERTY ALLEVIATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC

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## ABSTRACT

*Although, poverty is worldwide phenomenon, it has been observed that Nigeria is one of the poorest countries in the world in rooter of rural poverty, despite its abundant natural resources. The rural poverty level in Nigeria has reached an alarming rate stage where 70% of its rural population lives below the poverty line. However, available statistics shows that poverty in poor countries is absolute and more pronounced in rural areas. Under the present democratic dispensation, the rural folks that constitutes significant segment of the Nigerian society live in abject poverty and are neglected in terms of socio-economic and political well being. The paper provides a conceptual overview of poverty within the context of ruralism and assesses the performance of poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria in the Fourth Republic. It also argues that democracy cannot thrive in an impoverished society where people live below one dollar (\$1) per day, and where stresses of disease, famine and climatic shock are pervasive. Finally, the paper suggests the way forward towards poverty reduction in rural Nigeria.*

## Introduction

The relationship between poverty and democracy lies at the center of this study. Where poverty level is low it is more possible for democracy to thrive and vice versa. In a situation where the people are impoverished and live below \$1 per day, where there are stresses of diseases, famine and climatic shock are pervasive, democracy cannot thrive (Sachs, 2005). Although poverty is a universal phenomenon that affect socio-economic and political well being of its victims whether in a developed or underdeveloped country, however, available statistics shows that poverty in poor country is absolute and more pronounced in the rural areas. Nigeria began her democratic experience in 1960 which was toppled in 1967, which again continued in 1979 and was toppled again in 1983, but continued on that line since 1999. However, one important feature of the

Nigerian state especially the rural areas is the fact that most of the roads are bad, women and children walking barefooted and trekking long distance to get water and firewood, pupil studying under trees, a dilapidated and ill equipped health centres and scores of poverty driven problems (Aderonmu, 2007).

More worrying is the fact that, the environmental factor surrounding the Nigerian democracy makes democratic institutions to remains weak and fragile, therefore becoming susceptible to collapse when faced with a low level of political stress. Since independence in Nigeria, governments have put in place several policies to enhance the development of the rural areas. Local government systems have been improved upon to bring the government closer to the people. However, it has been observed that despite the efforts of government and the changes made to the system, the rural areas in Nigeria remain largely underdeveloped compared to the urban centers. This study is therefore concerned with the effort of governments since 1999 aimed at enhancing the status of rural areas.

### **Methodology**

The methodology used in this research was drawn from the review of literature with respect to the research strategies used in similar studies. The method adopted for this study include data from text books, Journals, Magazines, government publications and selected interview from member of the general public

### **Conceptual Clarification**

#### **Poverty**

The concept of poverty is very clear to everybody; many people feel and dwell in it but the idea put forward by the Human Development report of 1997 becomes useful here. It describes poverty as “the denial of opportunities and choices most basic to development”. Poverty is seen as both a condition in health, education, knowledge, information, human rights, confidence, dignity and self-esteem (Ndukwe, 2005).

It presupposes that one may be financially buoyant and still suffer from one form of poverty or another. For instance, a person who rides a posh car but lives in a congested environment is seen to suffer from health, dignity and self-esteem poverty; whereas a housekeeper that lives with the affluent but cannot successfully feed and satisfy himself suffers from another form, which perhaps is the form of poverty we recognize very well.

No doubt, the definition above has given us the general context and connotation of poverty. It refers to an individual's personal affliction, which, in other words, presupposes that effective alleviation strategies revolve around the enhancement of the individual's income or cash support. This concept refers to indigence, destitution, a have-not situation and complete inability to feed on one's own; it is the severest level of poverty. It is the situation most of our communities find themselves; they have limited access to cash, social and physical infrastructures, as well as other basic amenities. This has been responsible for the unabated rural-urban migration, especially in the less-developed societies and communities of the country. There is a variation in the perception of poverty at various levels of individual, community and nation. Individually, one tends to appreciate poverty as the inability to afford the basic necessities of life-nourishing meals, decent clothing, and reasonable shelter-lack of skills, gainful employment and powerlessness to improve one's condition through personal, community or government support. At the community level, the perception encompasses the absence of collective opportunities necessary to create choices, promote economic activities and thus lift people out of poverty. It is conceptualized as a general depreciation and inadequacy of social and economic infrastructure and, by extension, inadequate employment and income earning opportunities. The term "poverty" does not lend itself to a straight forward definition. It is a complex universal phenomenon of multiple dimensions.

Devitt, (1977) described rural poverty as the shortage of needed material and as a part of a syndrome which includes: low status in the community; lack of influence; economic and political dependence; insecure or irregular sources of income; a limited range of economic and social opportunities (actual or perceived). According to the Ekong (2003), rural poverty extends beyond those who suffer from deep, persistence and widespread wants and isolation. The poor also include the indigent, who must live below minimum acceptable standards in a given time and place; and those who feel deprived of what is being enjoyed by other people in the society which they consider themselves to be part. In this sense, rural poverty is not entirely a matter of absolute levels of living but must be assessed in relation to what is available to others Ajayi, (2001).

It is important to observe that rural poverty is not manifested only in terms of lack of employment and liquidity, but that most grievous efforts of rural poverty are present in terms of pervasive spread of such nutritionally

preventable diseases as kwashiorkor, inability to afford simple preventive and curative health service, illiteracy and widespread social vices such as petty stealing and even daring crimes. Poverty is a multi-faced affliction. It is a ravaging economic and social phenomenon that manifests in the inability of the victims to acquire the basic necessities of life. Poverty goes beyond material deprivation to include insecurity, vulnerability and exposure to risks, shocks and stress. Especially, it includes not having enough to eat, poor drinking water, poor nutrition, unfit housing, a high rate of infant mortality, low life expectancy, poor environmental conditions, low level of energy consumption, low educational opportunities, inadequate health care, lack of productive assets, lack of economic infrastructure and lack of active participation in the decision making process. The above also means that poverty can afflict both individuals and communities. Community development or self-help development is a process whereby villagers and their chiefs have organized themselves by providing direct labour and other contributions such as money, for community amenities. The developmental initiatives come from within the community and are much related to their needs.

### **Democracy**

‘Democracy’ is the collective term for a wide variety of regimes. These include radical democracies and moderate one’s representative and direct democracy, parliamentary versus presidential government, majoritarian and consensus democracy, and established democracies as opposed to partial democracies, (Merkel, 1999).

The trademark of democratic regimes is ‘government of the people, by the people’ (or elected representatives of the people) ‘and for the people’, to quote Abraham Lincoln’s famous definition of popular government. But the degree to which that trademark is reflected in practice varies from one democracy to the other. And so, too, does the extent to which popular government is complemented by free speech, a free press, an independent judiciary and the impartial enforcement of the rule of law. This is suggested by indicators of the political performance of democracies regardless of whether they are based upon yardsticks of ‘political productivity’ measures of the political process, policy outputs and policy outcomes or socio-economic outcome indicators (Roller 2001).

For example, some democratic regimes pride themselves in the reduced role they give to the state, the larger role for the private sector and

the higher degree of economic freedom they reserve for the individual, such as most English-speaking nation states. In contrast to this, other democracies produce big government and collective care from cradle to grave, such as the constitutional democracies in Northern Europe, Benelux, France and Germany.

### **Theoretical Framework**

For the purpose of this study, the researcher made use of the structural functionalist theory which was propounded by Herbert Spencer in 1971, unfolding the concept of democracy in the Nigerian state. Uya (1985) wrote that to understand the functionalist theory, one must look into the biological implications of a living organism as it patterns to the evolutionary theory.

In this simple organism all the necessary functions of life were performed by the same part, the single cell. Therefore, the development of a single cell gave rise to differentiation of cells into parts enhancing specialization, adaptation and integration of the organism to its environment. Thus, the greater the degree of adaptation, the fitter the organism was to survive. This is the Darwinian doctrine of survival of the fittest.

In applying this to the doctrine of democracy and good governance in the Fourth Republic, requires a mutual coordinated links between the rulers and the ruled to ensure effective governance. Thus differentiation and specialization may occur in any of the parts of society. And this requires that they be integrated with other parts of the civil society so that the entire polity can adapt to its environment. This tendency can be said to be a panacea towards safe-guarding societal dysfunction. Consequently, the parts of Nigerian society are its political and democratic institutions namely, the National Assembly, the court system, the police, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), local government to mention but a few. Thus, the Nigerian Fourth Republic requires the coordinate working and harmonization of these democratic institutions to ensure good governance in Nigeria. The malfunctioning of one of the above institutions means the corresponding dysfunction of the entire political landscape of Nigeria. This can impede growth and sustainable development in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

However, the Nigerian experience of functionalism sees the ideology as soothed for the dominant class in the society whose whims and

caprices predominates such democratic institutions. The agenda of governance becomes skewed to one side, hence, Nigeria experiences high level of what can be referred to as elitist hedonism. For instance, from the beginning of the erstwhile Obasanjo's Fourth Republic in May, 1999, the political climate has been a function of the powers of manipulations of the few elites in the society. The rural areas suffers neglect due largely to the fact that it is not of interest to the elites.

### **National Development Plans in Nigeria**

We have had series of development plans in Nigeria. Nigeria is permanently hunted by the specter of development. Two years after independence, the first National Development Plan policy was formulated between 1962 and 1968 with the objectives of development opportunities in health, education and employment and improving access to these opportunities, etc. This plan failed because fifty percent of resources needed to finance the plan was to come from external sources, and only fourteen percent of the external finance was received (Ogwumike, 1995).

Collapse of the first Republic and the commencement of civil war also disrupted the plan. After the civil war in 1970, the second national development plan 1970 to 1974 was launched, the plan priorities were in agriculture, industry, transport, manpower, defence, electricity, communication and water supply and provision of social services (Ogwumike, 1995).

The third plan, covering the period of 1975 to 1980 was considered more ambitious than the second plan. Emphasis was placed on rural development and efforts to revamp agricultural sector. The fourth plan 1981 to 1985 recognized the role of social services, health services, etc. The plan was aimed at bringing about improvement in the living conditions of the people. The specific objectives were: an increase in the real income of the average citizen, more even distribution of income among individuals and socio-economic groups, increased dependence on the country's material and human resources, a reduction in the level of unemployment and underemployment (Ogwumike, 1995).

During these periods, Nigeria's enormous oil wealth was not invested to build a viable industrial base for the country and for launching an agrarian revolution to liquidate mass poverty. For instance, the Green Revolution Programme the replaced Operation Feed the Nation failed to generate enough food for the masses. In the recent past, various strategies

for development have also been tired with little or no result; among these were the structural adjustment programme (SAP), Vision 2010, national economic empowerment and development strategy (NEEDS), creation of development centres, etc. currently, seven point agenda of the president administration with vision 2020 without any clear methodological approach towards achieving them. It is obvious that the current results so far are not what development connotes.

**Poverty Eradication Programs of Nigerian Government Democratic Era 2000-2012**

S/N	Program	Target Group	Nature of Intervention	Year Established
1.	Poverty Alleviation Program	Urban Youths	Job creation, Development Entrepreneurs	2000
2.	National Poverty Eradication program	Rural & urban Areas	Agriculture, Rural development, Education & Health	2001
3.	National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS)	Rural & Urban Area	Addressing economic and social political and institutional issues	2004
4.	Vision 20-2020	Rural & Urban Area	Energy, Agriculture and food Security Wealth Creation, Land Reform Security of Lives and Property Education for Children Transportation	2007

5.	YouWin	Urban & Rural Development	Youth and entrepreneurial empowerment scheme	2012
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Source: Federal office of statistics (2006) socio-economic profile of Nigeria. the Presidency Abuja.

### **Appraisal of Poverty Alleviation Programmes in the Fourth Republic**

The damaging consequence of the effect of poverty on the economic and political development aspirations of most nations often give their leaders a relentless concern and effort towards mitigating the social malaise. Prior to the country's journey to the current democratic dispensation in May, 1999, various regimes both military and civil rules have put in place different programmes in an attempt to fight against poverty. Among such programmes according to Ijaiye and Mobolaji (2004) include the River Basin Development Authority (RBDA), the Operation Feed the Nation, the Green Revolution (GR) the Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme (ACGS), the Directorate of Foods, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DIFRRI), National Directorate of Employment(NDE), the Family Support Programme (FSP) and the Family Economic and Advancement Programme (FEAP).

The unfortunate pre-occupation with policies in the few months preceding the national elections obscured the appreciation of some of the fundamental changes that occurred during the Fourth Republic between 1999 and 2007. However, the overwhelming consensus in 1999 was for the injection of economic reforms that would change, in a fundamental way, the structure and performance of the economy. Consequently, reforms work when they emerge from a national consensus. Experiences around the world show that reforms at whatever level of analysis, cannot be forced on the people as in the case of Obasanjo's Fourth Republic.

The democratic era under Obasanjo's regime witnessed the introduction of the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) designed to provide employment to 200,000 unemployed youths all over the country. It was also aimed at inculcating and improving better attitudes toward a maintenance culture in urban and rural roads and public buildings. By 2001 PAP was phased out as a result of structural inefficiency and fused into the newly created National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP). The



National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) consists of four schemes namely

- i. Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES)
- ii. Rural Infrastructural Development Scheme (RIDS)
- iii. Special Welfare Services Scheme (SOWESS)
- iv. Natural Resources Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS)

For the first time in the history of Nigeria's democratic rule, rural areas were accorded special consideration through the creation of Rural Infrastructural Development Scheme in an effort to ameliorate the deteriorating and devastating conditions of life in Nigerian rural areas. The (RIDS) was designed to deal with rural energy and power supply, portable water, irrigation scheme to boost rural agricultural production, rural transportation and communication. The main programmes for implementation were:-

- i. Rural Electrification
- ii. Rural Water Development and Supply
- iii. Rural Transportation, Development
- iv. Rural Communication Development

The question to ask is whether this policy designed under the National Poverty Eradication Programme to accord attention to rural areas was successful. A critical assessment of the performance of NAPEP in the rural areas lives much to be desired. Available evidence shows that rural population still remained polarized and impoverished under the civil democratic rule in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. According to British Broadcasting Corporation World News programme on 10 years of democracy in Nigeria, (1<sup>st</sup> May, 2009), the level of poverty which stood at 34 million populations in 1999 when Nigeria returned to democratic rule has risen to an alarming and astonishing rate of 74 million populations within ten years of democratic rule.

(Federal office of statistics)

The ruling People's Democratic Party at that time used the programme for Political patronage. In the comment of Omah (2004), "the Poverty Alleviation Programme funds were used to buy PDP officials at all levels to dispense favour to party loyalists. PDP leaders up to the state and local executives are known to have forwarded the list of party faithful, cronies and family relations for inclusion in the Poverty Alleviation Programme.

In addition to the above, the management of Poverty Eradication Programme was worsened by the adoption of a top-bottom approach in the implementation of the policy. The target groups, who are the poor in the society who are predominantly in the countryside, were hardly reached due to the fact that the programme existed at the state and local government headquarters, but failed to have linkage with the traditional and community leaders for effective penetration of the grassroots (Eze, 2003).

The dismal performance and achievements of the National Poverty Eradication Programme gave impetus to holistic and elaborate conception of the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) at the federal level. At the state level, it was tagged "State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (SEEDS) while at the local level, it was coined as Local Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (LEEDS). The programme was holistic and elaborative in the sense that it was designed to address a wide range of socio-economic and political issues in the country most especially in the rural areas by reforming governmental institutions, developing the private sectors, implementation of social charters and value orientation. In spite of these programmes put in place to address the perennial problem of grinding poverty in the country, there had not been substantial achievements especially at the local level as most of the people in rural areas remained impoverished and socio-economically and politically subjugated and demean.

Furthermore, the regime of Umar Yar' Adua (2007-2009) had introduced the Seven Point Agenda of which poverty alleviation is a component. Available statistics suggest that there had not been substantial and effective policy implementation in this area to justify the huge resources invested in the policy. For instance, the regime retains some of the old programmes that are either inactive or moribund such as NDE, NAPEP, NEEDS, Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) etc. The most worrisome about the policy initiative is that while it remained thick in both print and electronic media, it is very light in terms of practical approach and implementation. Against this background, the poverty alleviation programme under Yar'Adua has not made any meaningful impact on poor masses of Nigeria. The objectives and purposes of the programme ran parallel to the expectation of Nigerians.

The Goodluck administration which took over power after the demise of Yardua government continued the programme with the

transformation agenda. The government also introduced SURE-P which aimed among others to bring rapid development in the rural areas. One giant strides undertaking by the government is the establishment of 11 universities mostly located in the rural areas. The development that comes with such investments in terms of infrastructure and job opportunity is massive. One trademark of this government is the insecurity that bedeviled most of the rural areas especially in the North East Nigeria. Most of the people in the region have been displaced by the activities of the Boko Haram insurgence.

The government of Buhari came into power based on the beauty of democracy which gives options or alternatives to the electorates. The government promised change to the people even at the rural areas. On settling in government, the Buhari government introduced N-power programme aimed at providing jobs to 500000 youths in the country, introduced in the school, feeding programmes among others. However, two years on the government has not successfully tackle the problem of insecurity, as most of the rural populace in the north east are still displaced.

The implication of this is that Buhari's poverty alleviation programme may follow the same disastrous path as those of his predecessors.

### **Conclusion**

The paper demonstrates that rural poverty is complex and endemic and therefore a pragmatic approach is required for sustainable poverty alleviation programme. And that whatever programme is initiated to transform rural life, must be vigorously, honestly and patriotically pursued to ensure the success of such programme. There can be no viable and workable political system that can address the problem of rural dwellers other than democratic governance. Democracy is not only the best system but a system that guarantees against exclusion and marginalization of the poor particularly the rural poor. On this note we concur with the argument of Ake (1996:26) that democracy is not merely desirable, it is necessary. It will not solve all the problems of Africa but none of the major problems can be solved without it".

### **Recommendations**

It is important to discern that the causes of poverty in rural areas in Africa and Nigeria in particular cannot be attributed to population and the recalcitrant attitude of the ruralists for a change and embrace innovations,

although these may be contributory factor. However, the major explanatory factor responsible for persistent poverty, hunger and rural underdevelopment in Nigeria is unequal ownership of land and other productive assets, the pattern of technical innovation and capital accumulation which is biased against labour informed the nature of rural exploitation. In other words, rural poverty is deeply rooted in historical incorporation of Nigeria's economy into the capital system with systematic appropriation of surplus produced by the peasant farmers. Unfortunately, postcolonial Nigerian state failed to pursue patriotic, aggressive rural development policy that can ensure the transformation of the socio-economic and political life of the rural dwellers.

It is against this background that we propose the following strategies for addressing the problem of rural poverty: In addition to upholding the sanctity of our nascent democracy, there is need for the creation of National Rural Development Commission (NRDC) with specific responsibility of improving rural agricultural production, rural infrastructural and social development, rural investments and development of communications and transportation system.

The Adult Literacy Programme should be vigorously pursued and strengthened to provide opportunity for rural population to improve their intellectual potentials. This will make it easier for adaptation to change and innovation aimed at rural transformation. In addition, rural Community Based Organizations (CBOs) should be included in the initiation and implementation of Poverty Allegation Programmes.

This will give room for meaningful contributions from rural representatives of the poor at the grass root level. The bureaucratization and over-politicization of the operational mechanism of Poverty Alleviation Programmes be minimized to give room for effective and efficient performance. Similarly, funds earmarked for alleviating poverty should be committed into the programme and not to be used by party functionaries to be dispensed for favour. There is a need for institutional strategy for checking the influence of elites and bureaucratic officials in the implementation of laudable government programmes on poverty alleviation. This is necessary because most times the benefits and objectives of these programmes are either hijacked or truncated by these social forces. Government should promote appropriate technological innovations and partnership among the people to enhance sustainability through the people's ownership of productive resources.

Finally, the government and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) and intellectuals should embark on research to generate data or create information system on the magnitude of rural poverty and target remedial measures.

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