NATIONAL SOCIAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMME (NSIP) AND SUSTAINABLE REDUCTION OF POVERTY IN NIGERIA, 2016-2021

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Abstract
The desire to reduce consistent and phenomenal rise in kidnapping, banditry, armed robbery, cybercrime as well as inter-religious cum communal conflicts et cetera which are believed to have been caused by increasing hunger, poverty, unemployment and so on gave birth to the introduction of National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) in Nigeria in 2016. Several years thereafter, the ideals that brought it into existence do not seem to have been achieved, going by available records. This paper therefore assesses the extent to which the various suites (components) of NSIP have impacted on various dimensions of poverty in the country from 2016-2021. The investigation was guided by capability theory and data thereto generated from secondary sources. Findings reveal quite clearly that poverty and other associated challenges rose exponentially and sustainably during the period under review. It was equally found out that corruption among officials thereof undid NSIP greatly. Moreover, growing poverty across the country fuelled the spectre of political apathy thereby undermining one of NSIP's mandate of promoting political participation in the affairs of Nigeria. To reverse the challenges of NSIP and place the country on the path of sustainable poverty reduction, it is hereby suggested thus: Civil Society Organizations and other stakeholders should step up their activities to ensure aggressive mobilization of Nigerians, especially the poor to participate actively in socio-political affairs of the country thereby promoting accountability and transparency in governance. Banning of Nigerians found to be corrupt from holding any public office for life will go a long way in also promoting good governance in the country and thus reduce poverty sustainably.

Keywords: Social, Investment, Programme, Sustainable, Reduction, poverty.

Introduction

Poverty is a deadly and dehumanizing social phenomenon that attacks and ravages its victims, whether they are individuals, families, communities or countries and even the environment across the world. This development has dire consequences for the environment (Ayuba, 2015; National Institute for Legislative Studies – NILS, 2015); Politics (Igbuzor, 2004; Nkom, 2001) and the economy (Kwanashie, 1998) among others. No wonder, Naushad, Faisal and Fahad (2020) see it (poverty) as a social evil that destroys every sector of the world. The need to eradicate or reduce it therefore becomes necessary, in fact, inevitable. Perhaps, this largely explains why all stakeholders in the world have always incepted measures to curb it. Examples are the defunct Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and now, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which have tackling it (poverty) as their main target or goal one.

The efforts notwithstanding, poverty appears to have increased consistently and exponentially in many parts of the world, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and South America, albeit, at different rates (Naushad, et al, 2020). This state of affairs (rising poverty) worsened, following the introduction of neoliberal economic policies in the world as from the 1980s (Lamidi and Igbokwe, 2021; Onah and Olise, 2019; Obadan, 1997) which inflicted a lot of untold hardships on the poor around the world. This prompted the introduction of Social Investment Programme (SIPs). In the case of Nigeria, a number of social investment policies were rolled out to contain the challenges that arose therefrom like Family Support Progamme, Better Life Programme, National Directorate of Employment, Peoples' Bank of Nigeria, National Agricultural Land Development Authority, Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP), Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), Seven Point Agenda, Transformation Agenda and SURE-P from 1986-2015. However, at the inception of Buhari's regime, he introduced his poverty reduction package known as National Social Investment Progamme (NSIP), components of which are: National Home Grown Social Feeding Programme, Conditional Cash Transfer as well as N-Power and Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme.

The SIPs achieved different rates of performances around the world. Naushad, et al (2020) submit that while the social investment or poverty reduction programmes successfully reduced poverty to less than 3% in East Asia, Pacific and Europe, including Central Asia in 2019, the same cannot be said of Mozambique, Burundi and Sierra Leone in Africa where the level of poverty in the countries stood at 53%, 65% and 53% respectively during the same period. Even in the United States of America, poverty is reported by Naushad, et al (Ibid)

to have stood at 11.8% in 2019, while Nigeria's level of poverty was put at 42.8% by 2019 from 40.1% in 2016. As a result of differences in levels of performances of social investment programmes across the world, scholars have been engaged in endless conversations concerning reasons responsible for this state of affairs. While the economic growth/market based strategy argues that poverty reduction can only be achieved through robust economic growth, the other school/strategy opines otherwise. Known as non-economic growth strategy, it argues that poverty can best be reduced through investing in people by way of education, health services, provision of nutritionally balanced and adequate food, including loan facilities et cetera so as to equip and enable the poor benefit from the fruits of progress that obtain in society. We shall return to this later.

The major objective of this paper is to assess the extent to which National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) impacted on poverty, hunger and unemployment et cetera in Nigeria between 2016 and 2021. The paper is broken into six interrelated parts, starting with this. Clarification of some key concepts is undertaken in part two, while literature review is the preoccupation of the next (part three). Part four discusses the different initiatives introduced by NSIP. Evaluation of NSIP in alleviating poverty is presented in part five and the paper is concluded in the last (part six) with recommendations made thereto. Having successfully dwelt on the introduction, let's now review related literature on the subject after which the theoretical framework is articulated.

Literature Review

Conceptual Framework

Some key concepts employed in the paper are operatioanlized so as to provide their contextual meanings. These are;

Social Investment Programme (SIP)

Various scholars have defined it differently. Examples are:

Onah and Olise (2019) define it as social and economic policies put together by many developed and developing countries in response to the global economic crises of the 1980s and 1990s to lessen the negative effects of spending cuts, privatization, unemployment and poverty among others which arose, following the introduction of neoliberal economic reforms.

For Frazer and Sabato (2015) and Yi (2015) all cited in Onah and Olise (2019), it refers to investment made by governments in response to the challenges of poverty, social exclusion and unemployment and so on among the poor, especially the youths. In the case of the European Commission, SIP is a set of

policies and instruments that promote investment in human capital and enhancement of people's capacity to participate fully in social and economic life as well as the labour market.

Above imply that SIP is a social and economic package introduced by governments across the world so as to mitigate rising poverty, unemployment, social exclusion and lack of capacity to effectively participate in the life of society due to the introduction of neoliberal economic reform. Areas covered by the programme include education, health, economy, job creation, poverty reduction and so on. This leads us to operationalization of the meaning of National Social Investment Programme which flows from the framework of Social Investment Programme (SIP) that is the global version/name.

National Social Investment Programme (NSIP)

It is the Nigerian brand or version of (SIP) defined variously by scholars as presented below:

Lamidi and Igbokwe (2021) say NSIP is a platform for empowerment of unemployed Nigerian youths. This means that it (NSIP) is a bundle/collection of several initiatives put together by the government of General Buhari to address the problems of rising poverty, unemployment, cyber crime, falling standard of education and so on, consequent upon rising global economic crises. On their part, Onah and Olise (2019) see NSIP as a neoliberal market based policy reform in response to the global economic crises of the 1980s and 1990s. From the foregoing definitions, this paper sees NSIP as the Nigerian version of SIP worldwide which was introduced by the Buhari regime in 2016 to contain and or reduce the rising tide of unemployment (especially among the youths), collapsing health and educational services, including deepening poverty et cetera. NSIP is broken into four interrelated suites, namely: National Home Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP); N-Power Programme; Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) and Government Enterprise and Empowerment Progmme (GEEP). The essence of NSIP(s) is to reasonably reduce the scourge of poverty in Nigeria. This therefore leads us to operationalization of the concepts of poverty and poverty reduction.

Poverty

Prevailing thinking/scholarship from both orthodox and radical perspectives say of it as impaired access to both material and non-material resources of society. From the orthodox perspective by Burkey (1993); Oversees Development Association (1995) et cetera, it (poverty) is impaired access to material

resources such as food, shelter, clothing, medicines and so on; while the radical perspective represented by Wresinski (1987), Nkom (2001) and Igbuzor (2004) including other scholars ascribes the phenomenon to blocked access to both material and non-material resources (like lack of adequate income, food, education, exclusion from affairs of society including marginalization and so on). Foregoing conceptions of the phenomenon however fail to address the angle of lack of human resource development. Thus, the paper opines that poverty within this context refers to conscious and unconscious denial of opportunities for the poor to acquire appropriate skills, attitudes and values that will enable them exit poverty (Sen, 1990); Human Development Report (1997); Chete and Adeoye (2003); Oni, Akerele, Abimbola, Odekunle and Opatola, (2003). Poverty has severe negative consequences on individuals and society, hence the need to reduce it. Let's therefore operationalise the concept of poverty reduction.

Poverty Reduction

This paper associates with the meaning of poverty reduction articulated by Wikpedia (2008) as any effort that seeks to reduce the level of poverty in society or among people from a high to a relatively lower level. This involves provision of people's material and non-material needs as well as initiation of policies and establishment of institutions and programmes. When poverty is high and pervasive in society, it disenables the majority. It is therefore necessary to address the issue of empowering the poor to exit them from poverty (capability), details as seen below.

Capability

Multiplicity of meanings are associated with the concept. Kuhumba (shijakuhumba@gmail.om) for example sees it as freedom that people have to pursue what they desire. For Oni, Akerele, Opatola, Abimbola and Odekunle (2003), it means, the freedom, latitude or opportunity that a person has to pursue what he/she wants. Therefore, this paper defines capability as the ability or opportunity that a person has to work/struggle for what he/she desires which is usually made possible through provision of education, health services, balanced food and a voice in the affairs of his/her community among others. Often time, the bottom line of capability is the provision of ideas, skills and attitudes which those that have put to use and earn income. From what they earn, goods and services that are desired are procured. This enables them fend for themselves without depending on others for handouts which could be withdrawn, any time.

This leads to operationalisation of sustainable reduction of poverty as explained here under.

Sustainable Reduction of Poverty

Series of meanings are associated with the concept. However, for this paper, it is referred to as reduction of poverty from a high to a relatively lower level both in the present and future. Expressed differently, it means stepping down the level of poverty from comparatively high to low level over a long period of time. It is important to note that the only and best way to reduce poverty in society both in the short and long runs is to develop the human resources therein, as the poor can generate incomes by stretching their knowledge, skills, including creativity to use from which they will be rewarded. Upon the rewards, they can secure goods and services that they desire and their level of poverty will sustainably fall. Moreover, since they can exert control over what they demand including education, they will have the freedom to choose whatever they desire. Overtime, poverty among them will fall continuously. Having clarified key concepts employed in this paper, we shall now examine.

Empirical Review of Related Studies

As indicated earlier, over the ages, conversations have been raging among scholars as to the best ways to stimulate development and reduce poverty in society. These are conducted around two main strands of thought – the economic growth and non-economic growth. The economic growth represented by Smith, Richardo, Rostow, Harrod-Domar, Obadan, Balassa and a host of others submits that the best strategy to adopt in reducing poverty in society is to commit all or most resources therein to stimulate production of various goods and services so that fruits of the surpluses generated therefrom can be enjoyed by a few if not all in the short run, but, definitely in the long run, such (fruits of progress) will be shared by all the rich and poor alike (Kuznets, 1955). In his book entitled "Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations", Smith (1776) argues that for this to happen, the state should play only minimal/watchman roles in socio-economic life of society so as to allow private initiatives drive the pace of development therein.

As is always common with capitalism, the unbridled desire for more and more profits by capitalists unleashed crises and anarchy on society as was the case in the 1930s and the global economy was on the brink of collapse (Ake, 1989; Nwozor, 2012). This prompted the emergence of John Maynard Keynes' views (1936) in his work titled "General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money"

changed the tenor of the conversation and urged for birth of a transcendental/expansionist state where market forces will play only minimal and subordinate roles, though, within the framework of a capitalist system. Other bourgeois theories of growth that existed alongside Keynesianism were Linear stages of Growth, savings-investment gap and structural transformation and so on. Despite embrace of Keynesianism and relative stability experienced in the global economy, especially the Developed Countries, the boom and bust usually associated with capitalism (like increased production, rising income, rising cost of energy, unemployment and stagflation among others) reared up their ugly heads and once more threatened the world capitalist system (Nwozor, 2012). This forced a review of the role of the state in development and birthed neoliberalism (Ohiorhenuan, 2002; Todaro, 2001). Otherwise referred to as Washington Consensus', neoliberalism blames the unending spectre of underdevelopment, poverty, hunger and other vices in Third World Countries on existence of an over-interventionist, corrupt, inefficient and wasteful state. The solution, it argues lies in relapse into laissez fairism that places main responsibility of development on the "magic of the market" (Bhagwatti and Balassa cited in Nwozor, 2012). Consequently, it suggests that the state should dismantle public enterprises, cut down expenditure on social services, liberalize the economy and discontinue central planning et cetera. In summary, the economic growth strategy argues that for society to experience development and poverty reduction, economic growth must take place, albeit, it is not sufficient to reduce poverty and must be combined with other strategies. It equally implies a more activist/vibrant market to drive the pace of socio-economic development in society rather than the state, though Keynesianism asserts otherwise. Ultimately, it means more benefits for all in society in terms of more goods and services, incomes, jobs et cetera whether in the short or long runs (Kuznets, 1955).

Decades after application of this strategy, underdevelopment, poverty, unemployment, misery and so on did not only grow in the Developing World, but, grew consistently and exponentially thereby making the search for non-economic growth strategies necessary. One of such strategies suggested is human resource development (hrd). By hrd, it means set of activities deliberately undertaken so as to empower poor people in society through provision of education, health care services including adequate and nutritionally balanced food plus having a voice in affairs of where they belong among others. This definition is in line with Human Development Report (1990) cited in Umo (2003) which sees it (hrd) as a process of expanding human choices by enabling them

enjoy long, healthy and creative lives. In essence, the main motivation behind hrd is the provision of life long ideas, skills, appropriate attitudes and aptitudes that will enable human beings contribute actively to production and as well benefit therefrom. As Chete and Adeoye (2003) persuasively opine, human beings are the active agents who accumulate capital, exploit natural resources, build social, economic and political organizations to advance national development. As a matter of fact, as possessors of ideas, skills and creativity, they (people) can contribute to production of goods and services as employees to be paid or as owners of businesses to sell their products and make money. From the incomes gotten, they can buy goods and or services produced by others which they desire. Moreover, with the ability to command various values that they desire, their participation in political activities of where they belong will be enhanced. Expectedly, they will influence policies and distribution of values and their level of poverty will reduce sustainably. Such a strategy reduces their total and regular dependence on their benefactors for handouts which could be withdrawn at any time. This strategy makes hrd to be superior to other strategies in poverty reduction. This leads us to a review of works influenced by human resource development perspective, following the introduction of social investment programme and Nigeria's version – National Social Investment Programme.

A study undertaken by Peng (2011) titled "Social Investment Policies in Canada, Australia, Japan and South Korea" focuses on Governments of Canada and Australia (two Anglo-Saxon Liberal welfare regimes) and two East Asian welfare regimes (Japan and South Korea) who introduced various programmes intended to improve the living conditions of their citizens. While Canada and Australia learned theirs towards children, Japan and South Korea broadened theirs to benefit all segments of the society like children, the elderly, women and men alike. The work however fails to state the methodology employed in generating data thereto.

On his part, Woodling (2016) with the title of his paper "Social Investment Fund" highlights the efforts made by Ghanaian government to tackle poverty in the country which was launched in 1998. The programme is applauded for accessing the poor therein to infrastructure and Non-Governmental Organizations including Local Governments.

A work that highlight efforts designed to reduce poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean, then improve living conditions of the poor is that by Cecchini (2017) captioned "Reducing Poverty Amidst High level of Inequality: Lessons from Latin America and Caribbeans" in which he discusses how the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean influenced governments of countries in that

region to access the poor therein to quality health and education services, including ensuring that the services got to the entire population of the poor there. Gender mainstreaming was also stressed by the Commission so that all children, the elderly and disabled could benefit from the anti-poverty programmes introduced there, while the poor in both rural and urban settings were accessed to critical infrastructure. The paper does not however address the issue of sustainability in reduction of poverty which is the core concern of Social Investment Programme (SIP).

In their paper entitled "National Social Investment Programme and Sustainable Poverty Reduction in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects" Onah and Olise (2019) say that NSIP was introduced in Nigeria to address the problems of hunger, poverty and unemployment among others, following the introduction of neoliberalism in the 1980s and 1990s. Data for the paper were generated from both primary (interview) and secondary sources, while the theoretical framework of choice was public policy implementation.

Aminu's paper (2019) entitled "Effort of National Social Investment Programme (N-Power) on Standard of Living of Business Education Graduates in Kano State" assesses the extent to which N-Power has impacted on graduates of Business Education in Kano state from 2016-2019. Primary and secondary sources were the means through which data were generated for the paper and the results analysed and presented in simple percentages.

In their contribution to the dialogue on NSIP and reduction of poverty in Nigeria, Lamidi and Igbokwe (2021) in a paper known as "Social Investment Programme in Nigeria: Impact and Challenges" assess how far NSIP has addressed the problems of youth unemployment, poverty and hunger since inception in 2016. The paper relied on secondary sources for data and decried some challenges like delayed payment of allowances of beneficiaries in some states, including missing of names of some beneficiaries from payment vouchers of their allowances.

In all, NSIP which is rooted in human resource development perspective believes that human beings should be the centre of all efforts to develop and reduce poverty in society (as means and end). It equally argues that once man's basic needs are, met, he can drive development to unimaginable heights and his level of poverty will reduce. This approach expectedly leads to sustainable development and by extension, sustainable reduction of poverty. It is therefore expected that the works on SIP/NSIP should have stressed this dimension by applying capability theory as a guide in their presentation and since they did not, this paper is then prompted by the necessity to fill this gap.

Theoretical Framework

A variety of theories such as basic human needs, class, neoliberalism including Public Policy implementation have been employed to explain/assess performances of poverty reduction programmes in Nigeria, especially NSIP. However, due to their weaknesses, this paper utilizes capability as the preferred alternative.

Amartya Sen (1990) in his work titled "Development as Capability Expansion" joined the conversation on development and poverty reduction by attacking orthodox thinking on economic development which emphasizes increase in income, gross domestic product, industrialization and technological advancement as the main pre-occupation of all development efforts. Sen argues that important though, such indices are not people-centred as they do not indicate the extent to which people benefit therefrom. As a matter of fact, he opines that so long as they (the indices) cannot expand and improve the living conditions that people have, they cannot be regarded as such (development). After all, Sen further opines, the usefulness of wealth lies in the things that it allows people do/value. Development therefore means capability enhancement so long as people are allowed to do or choose what they desire in order to live. His assertion is rooted in the belief that all human beings across the world are endowed with great and unimaginable potentials which if put to use through favourable opportunities provided by way of quality education, enabling law, health services and nutritionally balanced food including voice in affairs of where they belong, they can contribute meaningfully to development therein and benefit therefrom.

According to him, capability is of two types – freedom and functionings. By freedom, he refers to the real opportunity that people have to pursue or accomplish what they desire/cherish. In other words, it means a life of free choice, not compulsion. Such a latitude enables the poor shape their destinies as they desire by way of engaging in economic activities that they choose and are able, associating with people that they like as well as participating in socio-political activities of where they belong and so on. Freedom to him, is broken into two parts of opportunity and process.

Functioning on the other hand means those things that people value and have reason for doing them. Expressed differently, Sen sees functioning as achievements of people, that is what they manage or succeed to do or be. These include; being well nourished, healthy, well clothed and housed. Others include being literate, happy and taking active part in the life of community and so on. In summary, Sen says that to attain development and reduce poverty in society,

conscious efforts ought to be made to remove obstacles that 'hinder the poor from exercising their freedom so as to achieve what they desire (functionings). So, to develop, there is the need to combine freedom and functioning. It is therefore crystal clear that while freedom represents the tools/means, functioning represents ends/things to be achieved. Another equally important contribution to the capability discourse is that of United Nations through her publications titled Human Development Report (HDR) which began in 1990. Like Sen, the Report begins by attacking mainstream economic thinking which sees development as quantitative increase in national income, gross domestic product and technological advancement and so on. Though, important, the Reports further opine that so long as those improvements do not promote the welfare of people, they cannot be regarded as development. At best, they translate to growth only. Little wonder, the HDR (1998 cited in Umo, 2003) defines capability or human resource development as "a process of expanding human choice by enabling people enjoy long, healthy and creative lives". In effect, it means that development must be seen to promote human welfare by expanding opportunities or freedom for all to contribute thereto and benefit therefrom; empower people to actively participate in affairs of where they belong; promote and or sustain their identity in addition to giving them life long skills, attitudes and ideas for sustainable progress and poverty reduction.

As a matter of fact, the Reports expand(ed) the concept of capability by introducing various metrics for measuring poverty and welfare of people within and among nations, classes, ages, and sexes. These include Human Poverty Index (HPI), Gender Development Index (GDI), including Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). Like Sen and UNDP, Haq (1997) begins his contributions by disagreeing with orthodox thinking on development which equates statistical indices like Gross Domestic Product, national income etc with development. To him, such amount to growth so long as they do not improve the quality of lives of people. He then asks how anybody will talk of development in society where production and distribution of goods and services concentrate on luxury items of the few affluent to the utter neglect of basic needs of the majority? He (Haq) further asks how a society that commits disproportionate part of her resources to procurement of military weapons can be said to promote human welfare. Haq then argues that what the society needs most is human security founded on human dignity. This is because, once they feel secured and have a sense of dignity, they will be at their best and the society will experience monumental progress and poverty among them will reduce sustainably (Haq, 1997). In spite of the good insights of capability, it is faulted on the following grounds, viz:

Weaknesses of Capability theory

One apparent weakness of capability theory is the absence of governance as a veritable tool for inducing, sustaining and even promoting poverty reduction programmes, NSIP inclusive. In a hostile governance environment, all efforts made to ensure success of NSIP are bound to suffer hitches if not situated in a friendly governance setting. Example when governance is good, transparent and accountable, all policies and laws made in support of NSIP will be appropriate. Moreover, those found to engage in acts capable of undermining the programmes will be punished accordingly. But, where otherwise, corruption and other vices will frustrate realization of the poverty reduction programmes as obtains in Nigeria at the moment. The theory is equally weak in the area of not stressing the issue of meeting the basic needs of the poor like food, shelter, clothing and health services before they can ply the ideas, skills and creativities they have acquired. This is clearly consistent with Oche's observation (1983) that basic needs serve as propellant base which must be met before development is pursued. In other words, the poor must be alive today before they ply their trade tomorrow. This largely explains why so many poor ones that are given working tools like sewing machines, grinding machines et cetera to start their trades/vocations often sell them so as to feed their families or resolve basic health issues/ challenges after which they relapse into further poverty and never stretch to use, the various skills or knowledge they acquired earlier.

The theory is further faulted for emphasizing capability of individuals instead of people or communities. Once groups are made capable, they overcome poverty easier than if it is an individual.

Results and Discussion

Relevance of the theory

Above weaknesses of capability theory notwithstanding, it is relevant to the paper on the following grounds:

Sustainability: Central to the theory is the issue of sustainability. If at all poverty must be reduced continuously over a long period, then the poor must possess ideas and skills with which they will ply their trades and earn income. With such incomes, they will stop depending on others or their benefactors for hand outs which can cease any time. This theory is therefore relevant and appropriate as it promotes the idea of teaching the poor various skills that will enable them survive on their own without necessarily depending on others for hand outs as indicated above.

The theory is equally relevant to this conversation because, it potentially generates harmony among people (poor and rich) in society. Once the poor can ply their trades and generate income, it will reduce frustration and anger that accompany poverty, the tension, frustration and anger usually associated with rising poverty will reduce sustainably and the pace of development will expectedly rise in society with relevance of the theory articulated, let's now discuss the components/suites of NSIP.

Suites of National Social Investment Programme (NSIP)

It is a bundle/collection of initiatives/schemes introduced by the Buhari government in 2016 to reduce poverty, fight hunger and contribute to general socio-economic well being of Nigerians thereby promoting social inclusion and participation in affairs of the country. NSIP covers issues in health, education/ skill acquisition, economy and so on. The programme is domiciled in the office of the Vice President and is chaired by the National Coordinator. Broken into four suites, it is Nigeria's version of Social Investment Programme (SIP) worldwide which was put in place across the globe, following the inception of neoliberalism in the 1980s (Onah and Olise, 2019; Lamidi and Igbokwe, 2021). Details of the suites are:

1. **N-Power**

It is one of the pack of NSIP introduced in Nigeria to help young Nigerians within 18-35 years bracket, skilled and unskilled in or out of school acquire life long skills that will assist them become great and innovative players in both domestic and global markets. Beneficiaries thereof are usually placed on a monthly stipend of thirty thousand naira (₦30,000) for a period of two years after which it elapses. The suite is divided into two main groups of graduate and non graduate categories (Onah & Olise, 2019).

(a) Graduate category

This category is sub-divided into several arms which are;

- **N-Power Agro**: Beneficiaries offer advices to farmers and as well assist Federal Ministry of Agriculture disseminate knowledge and skills on matters concerning extension service.
- **N-Power Health**: Beneficiaries under this arrangement assist pregnant women, children and other vulnerable members of society that require help in terms of advices.
- **N-Power Tech**: Enrollees are deployed to primary schools as assistants to teachers to provide basic education in both primary and basic secondary schools.

- **N-Power Tax**: Those involved are to work as community Tax Liaison Officers alongside Tax Authorities by creating awareness concerning payment of taxes.

(b) N-Power Non-Graduate Category

- N-Power knowledge is designed to train young ones in technology, selected skills/incubation.
- N-Power build engages in training young Nigerians in acquiring skills as technicians and craftsmen.

2. **National Home Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP)**
   It is an initiative designed to improve enrolment in primary school, consequent upon high dropout rate in primary schools due to hunger and poverty. The problem of poor nutrition occasioned by poverty which affects learning ability of children is another aim of NHGSFP. Boosting local food production and improving income of farmers in addition to creating more jobs for the unemployed (National Social Investment Office, 2017) equally explains other reasons for introduction of the scheme.
3. **Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT)**
   CCT is designed to provide little sum of money of five thousand naira (₦5,000) every month to each beneficiary for five million Nigerians so as to lift them out of absolute poverty. By the plan, every years 30% of people in the lowest poverty bracket are supposed to be moved out of poverty, while in the second and third years, 50% and 20% respectively are to be lifted out of poverty as well (Onah and Olise, 2019).
4. **Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP)**
   This is a window introduced to provide little sum of money to petty traders, women cooperatives, women entrepreneurs, artisans, farmers including enterprising youths. According to Onah et al (2019), the basic aim of GEEP is to achieve productive employment and decent work for all men and women and disabled people with loans of between ₦10,000.00 and ₦100,000.00 without interest and collateral. The loans could be accessed through market moni, farmer moni and trader moni. Let us assess how NSIP has fared since 2016.

NSIP and Poverty Reduction in Nigeria

NSIP was incepted to fight and reduce poverty, hunger, unemployment as well as promote social inclusion and active participation of the poor in the socio-political affairs of their communities and Nigeria in general since the above constituted the indices of poverty. After many years of existence, it is appropriate to find out

how far or assess the extent to which it (NSIP) has achieved the ideals which brought it into existence and thereafter, highlight the challenges which confront her. Details as captured below.

Establishment of Data Base and Policy Framework: Central to the operation and success of NSIP or any related programme is the creation and management of relevant information base about the potential beneficiaries thereof. These include number of poor people, incidence of their poverty, occupation, their level of education/skill holding, income level and so on. Such data are necessary to facilitate fashioning of appropriate intervention schemes to help the poor. Onah and Olise (2019) commend NSIP for establishing a National Social Register about the poor which is domiciled with the Federal Ministry of Planning and Budget. NSIP equally started the Modules and Operational Manual that guide implementation of N-Power scheme in addition to putting up an online portal for all desiring unemployed youths to log in.

While it is true that NSIP put the necessary infrastructure in place to help the unemployed in Nigeria access more job opportunities, unemployment has kept increasing in the country. Naushad et al (2020) say that the phenomenon (unemployment) rose from 23.1% in 2018 to 35% in 2020. Of what use are the data base and N-Power programmes/ on this score? NSIP cannot be said to be succeeding. What sense does it even make if out of over thirty million Nigerians that are unemployed, less than one million are offered jobs that are temporal on a very paltry allowance for a period of just two years at most?

Offering of employment. National Social Investment Office (2018) cited in Onah and Olise (2019:25) says that between 2016 and 2018, various streams of NSIP employed 520,000 jobless youths (N-Power) while National Home Grown School Feeding Programme generated jobs for 96,972 persons/cooks in those schools.

Feeding of pupils/students: Onah and Olise (2019) submit that as a result of NHGSFP, pupils/students of basic primary schools numbering 9,300,932 were fed across all public primary and junior secondary schools in Nigeria since 2016 at the cost of ₦70.00 per pupil. Given the number of pupils in public primary schools in Nigeria, how can the programme claim to have done well? Moreover, given the rate of inflation in the country, how can the cost of meal per pupil be put at ₦70.00? Equally disturbing are reports of irregular feeding of the pupils. So, how can it be claimed that the NHGSFP has succeeded in feeding pupils so that they stay back in their schools to read?

On the **Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT)** initiative, 297,973 extremely poor Nigerians as reported by Onah and Olise (2019) benefited therefrom between 2016 and 2019. Naushad et al (2020) put the percentage of extremely poor in

Nigeria at 42.8% in 2020 from 40.1% in 2018 using purchasing power parity of $1.90 per day. This means that the number of extremely poor Nigerians as at 2020 stood at over 80 million. How can anyone then ascribe success to the CCT for granting a miserable sum of five thousand naira (₦5,000) monthly stipend to such ones, considering even the value of Nigerian currency? What can this amount (₦5,000) do to families to reduce their poverty sustainably?

Onah and Olise (2019) similarly report that under the Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP), 317,212 and 1,061,592 persons secured loans from trader moni and market moni respectively, just as 4,084 cooperative groups enjoyed patronage from GEEP as well. Considering the number of traders across Nigeria, the number of beneficiaries therefrom appears quite little/low for GEEP to claim any measure of success.

With respect to the index of inclusion and participation in the affairs of their respective communities and Nigeria, their interests in such also waned. In other words, given the rising wave of lack of accountability in governance by both legislative and executive officials of government at all levels, coupled with electoral violence, political apathy among the poor rose in Nigeria as indicated by these statistics. This can be observed from the number of Nigerians that participated in elections over time. Example, by 2015, the percentage of voters at presidential election was 43.65. However, by 2019 during the same type of election, the percentage of those that voted dropped to 35.66 (INEC Presidential Elections Reports, 2019; 2015).

The limited successes attained by NSIP result from several challenges which are highlighted below, viz:

a. Corruption is one factor given by many scholars (Onah and Olise, 2019; Akujuru and Enyioko, 2019; Lamidi and Igbokwe, 2021) for misappropriation of NSIP finances, poor quality of jobs executed and abandonment of some projects. This worsens the situation of inadequate funding facing the scheme already.
b. Another challenge that faced the programme during the period in view was the absence of accountability and transparency. Generation and management of records, including application of finances thereof left a lot to be desired. Example is given by Onah and Olise (2019) whereby officials of GEEP went into market places and distributed ₦5,000 to each recipient as Trader moni without recourse to due process just before the 2019 general elections. Due to this research, appropriate information needed of intended beneficiaries such as the true condition of the abject poor, as well as vulnerable and

financially excluded in society were not generated. As a result, the benefits leaked to unintended beneficiaries.

c. Politics and primordial considerations as presented by Jebbin and Osu (2016); Taiwo and Agwu (2016); Holness, Akim Musi, Morgan and Buck (2011) cited in Onah and Olise (2019) affected performances of previous poverty reduction progrmmes in the past as benefits were and are still skewed in favour of party loyalists, tribesmen of officials of programmes and so on without regard to their eligibility.

d. **Poor funding**: From inception of NSIP in 2016 to 2021, release of funds appropriated by the National Assembly has always been a problem. Often times, what is released appreciably falls short of amounts appropriated in budget. Example, National Director of NSIP cited in Onah and Olise (2019) lamented how the programme received only ₦300,000,000,000.00 out of the (₦1.5 trillion budgeted in three years. There are equally allegations that finances were not released to cooks/vendors regularly. So, there were several occasions that food items were not supplied to pupils/students in many states of the federation. Above all, the ₦70.00 per pupil per day was quite unrealistic as such did not reflect inflationary trend in the country.

Conclusion

This paper was prompted by the desire to assess the performances of NSIP with respect to reduction of poverty, unemployment, hunger and political apathy in Nigeria. Upon investigation, it has been revealed that the package (NSIP) attained only minimal positive impact on the poor, given records available. As a matter of fact, the above listed challenges rose consistently (sustainably) and exponentially from 2016-2021. To arrest the situation, promote economic development and reduce poverty in the country sustainably, it is recommended thus:

Recommendations

i. Civil Society and Community Based Organizations including other stakeholders should step up their efforts in mobilizing poor Nigerians to acquire skills in various trades so as to earn incomes even in the absence of paid employment. In this regard, efforts be further made to equip existing skill acquisition centres and make them more functional.

ii. Poor Nigerians be encouraged to participate more actively in politics so as to elect leaders at all levels who are people of integrity and hold them to account for their actions regularly.

iii. Government be made to ensure that critical infrastructure like electricity and water among others be provided regularly and at affordable charges.

iv. All persons found that are corrupt in handling resources of NSIP be banned from holding any public office for life.

v. More aggressive campaigns be embarked upon sustainably to dissuade/discourage Nigerians from seeking for employment by others (Government or private) as a do or die affair. Rather, they should be encouraged to acquire skills to be self-employed.

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