

INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT MILIEU OF POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMMES IN EDO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

In line with worrisome picture painted by scholars of pervading poverty situation in the country, this study examined how inclusive development could make a difference in the life of the populace. It discusses the challenges of corruption, lack of visionary leadership and weak institutional framework and others. It acknowledged that various ministries and agencies saddled with responsibility of poverty alleviation have utterly failed in their responsibilities with nothing tangible to show for their efforts. The study showed that existing policy approaches could not achieve expected results due to existing top-down approach in policy formulation thus implying a lack of participation from the general public. The study therefore explored the veracity of policy approach called 'inclusive development' in equitable and sustainable livelihood. The position of this paper is that, an inclusive development planning will make a difference as a veritable tool for the alleviation of poverty in Nigeria.

Keywords: Poverty Reduction, Inclusive Development, Institutional Mechanism

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's economy is typical of a developing country in the lower-middle income bracket, with the economy's productive base being weak, limited, and externally focused. Agriculture and mining and quarrying (including crude oil and gas) make for around 65 percent of the country's actual gross output and over 80 percent of government income. Primary production activities provide over 90% of foreign exchange profits and employ 75% of the workforce (Eze *et al.*, 2010, Asaju, 2017). Secondary businesses such as manufacturing and construction only account for just 4% of total production in spite of their larger potential for extending the productive base of the economy and providing sustainable foreign exchange profits and government revenues (Afolabi and Laseinde, 2019). Around 30% of total production is made up of services or tertiary activities that rely on wealth created by the productive sectors to operate. As a result, socio-economic terrains have mostly stagnated, resulting in a continuous rise in poverty levels in the country (NBS, 2015a, UNDP, 2015, Okonkwo, 2018, NBS, 2020).

Though poverty is a global phenomenon, it has become increasingly prevalent in Nigeria as a result of the country's dire economic circumstances. According to data on Nigeria's poverty profile, the rate of poverty increased from 27.2 percent in 1980 to 46.3 percent in 1985, then dipped to 42.7 percent in 1992 before rising significantly to 65.6 percent in 1996. This declined to 54.4 percent in 2004. In 2010, it was also reported that a whopping 112 million Nigerians, or 69 percent of the country's population, lived in poverty (NBS, 2013). By 2011, the percentage had risen to 71.5 percent, but what's remarkable is that poverty is increasing at a time when the GDP growth rate is estimated to

be 7.75 percent (NBS, 2015b, Chukwuemeka, 2022). Despite being the world's sixth largest oil producer, Nigeria was placed 152nd out of 187 nations in the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Index with a HDI value of 0.514 (UNDP, 2018).

With such a deplorable scenario and an ever-increasing degree of poverty across the country, a poverty alleviation programme becomes a means of making life more bearable for the general public (Etim and Ukoha, 2010, Owolabi *et al.*, 2019, Olagunju, 2020). This initiative is rapidly being recognized as a key engine of economic growth, creating jobs, stimulating innovation, and reducing poverty through empowering young men and women (UNCTAD, 2010). In Nigeria, Babangida Military regime endeavored to alleviate poverty at the grassroots level through his wife (Maryam Babangida)'s pet project (Better Life for Rural Dwellers). General Abacha era initiated poverty-relieving initiatives such as the Family Economic Advancement Programme after assuming control of Nigeria (FEAP). Obasanjo government equally created the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) as its own commitment to reducing hardship and poverty in the country under the democratic system in 1999 (Babayo *et al.*, 2019, World Bank Group, 2020). In the efforts to appreciate the effects of this on the life of the citizenry, this study is focusing on initiatives of the previous Nigerian administrations in the fight to reduce poverty in the country.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Edo State is one of the 36 States of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It was created on the 27th of August, 1991 as a result of the split of the defunct Bendel State into Edo and Delta States. Edo State is located in the heart of the tropical rain forest and lies between longitude 5.15°E and 6°45'E of the Greenwich meridian line and Latitude 5°45 and 7°30'N of the Equator. Edo State has a total land area of 19,281.93 square kilometers and a population of 3,218,332 at the 2006 census and projected to 4696,625 in 2018. Edo State has 18 Local Government Areas which was subdivided into three senatorial districts such as Edo Central, Edo North and Edo South. Two Local Government areas were purposively sampled from each of the three senatorial districts in order to accommodate both the urban and rural Local Government Areas. The chosen Local Government Areas include; Igueben, Esan South East, Akoko Edo, Etsako Central, Oredo and Egor.

This study used both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data were sourced through in-depth interview method while the secondary data were sourced through Library search for the existing literature. The interview sessions were held with the identified 5 Academics across the Universities within Edo State who specialized in the area of 'Development', the officials of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and two (2) key officials selected from each of the relevant Ministries and Departments of the Edo State Government Service of Nigeria. The Ministries included Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Ministry of Budget, Planning and Economic Development, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Ministry of Energy and Water Resources, Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, Finance, and Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, Rapid Response Agency, Ministry of Youth and Sports Development.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Exploration of Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Nigeria

There were various notable poverty alleviation programs implemented in Nigeria, some of which were offshoots of previous ones. The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Free and Compulsory Primary Education (FCPE), Green Revolution (GR), and Low-cost Housing Scheme (LCHS) were all launched by the Obasanjo-led military regime in 1977. The Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) and Green Revolution (GR) programmes were created to increase agricultural productivity and enhance the agriculture sector's overall performance. Agricultural Development Programme (ADP), National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA), Peoples Bank, Community Banks, Agricultural Development Programme (ADP), Directorate of Foods, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure are some of the programmes mentioned (DFRRI), The National Directorate of Employment (NDE), the Rural Employment Promotion (REP), the Small Scale Enterprises Scheme (SSES), the Vocational Skill Development (VSD), the Special Public Works (SPW), the Better Life Programme (BLP), the Family Support Programme (FSP), and the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) are some of the organizations that work in the field of employment (Hussaini, 2014, Olagunju, 2020).

The Directorate of Foods, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) had a wide range of responsibilities and considered all of Nigeria's rural areas to be its constituency. It was a large-scale initiative launched by the federal government with the goal of not only opening up rural regions but also improving the living conditions of the impoverished. State and municipal governments were expected to be engaged in the programme's implementation (Owolabi *et al.*, 2019). The mandate of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) is to create jobs as a means of eliminating poverty, hunger, and increasing incomes. In March 1987, the Federal Government initiated the NDE programme to reduce unemployment in the country in order to attain these goals. To achieve this, initiatives such as self-employment training, self-improvement, and the usage of labour-intensive projects have been developed. For the achievement of its goals, the NDE established four well-defined programmes: Rural Employment Promotion (REP), Small Scale Enterprises (SSE), Vocational Skill Development (VSD), and Special Public Works (SPW). The Rural Employment Promotion (REP) programme was created to help graduates and non-graduates who want to work in agriculture find self-employment. Beneficiaries were given loans to start their own arable, livestock, or agro-allied ventures under this programme. The Small-Scale Enterprises Scheme (SSES) was created to encourage Nigerian youths to work for themselves by instilling in them the values of self-employment, innovation, and self-reliance. Beneficiaries of the programme receive training before being given money to start their own small-scale businesses.

The Vocational Skill Development (VSD) programme was created in response to the fact that a high percentage of jobless Nigerian youngsters lack marketable skills. Youths are taught in one of the many available skills under this programme, and upon completion, some of them are given resettlement loans to start their own enterprises. The Special Public Works (SPW) programme was created as a stopgap solution for recent graduates and school dropouts who are actively looking for work. Participants in this programme work on building projects that require a lot of manual labour. The Better Life Programme (BLP) was a gender-specific initiative aimed at improving rural women's lives. The programme's main goal was to tap into the potential of rural women in order to strengthen their economic activities and increase their earnings. This initiative received a large amount of funding. However, the programme's objectives were not met.

In 1994, the Family Support Programme (FSP) was established to replace the Better Life for Rural Women initiative (BLRWP). Its main goal is to make good use of the family as a tool for national development. The initiative attempted to improve the Nigerian family's social and economic status, as well as to eliminate or reduce destabilizing elements like as poverty, infant mortality, unemployment, and rural-urban migration. Drug misuse, cultism, marital crises, indiscipline, and detrimental traditional behaviors were also highlighted as parts of the mission of the initiative. The Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) was established in the 1997 Federal Government budget to give the impoverished a new way to get cheap loans for productive activities.

In the course of lofty objectives of various programmes thus established to tackle poverty in the country, this study is analyzing the inherent beauty of the 'inclusive development' context of these programmes. This becomes imperative going by the exposition of the vision and missions of successive poverty alleviation programmes and the reality that poverty is still ravaging the entire Nigerian society. This study is examining the inclusive development context of poverty alleviation programmes adopted in Nigeria, specifically in Edo State. Edo State in Nigeria was chosen as the study's subject for logistic reason and accessibility to data. The study strives to comprehend the inclusive development milieu of the poverty alleviation programmes, institutional mechanisms applied and the challenges these mechanisms face.

Poverty Alleviation in Edo State

In an effort to alleviate poverty, the Edo State government tapped into the Federal Government of Nigeria's Poverty Alleviation Programmes, which were established by previous governments. To successfully combat poverty, most of the Poverty Alleviation programmes established at the national level were repeated at the state level as well. This was accomplished by customizing and implementing these poverty-relieving methods to match Edo State's unique environmental conditions. Since 1991, when Delta State was created from the former Bendel State, which gave rise to both Delta and Edo States, a variety of policies and programmes aimed at alleviating poverty in Nigeria have been duplicated in the state. These policies and programmes included, Directorate for food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) that had the main aim of providing feeder roads at the rural level; provision of electricity, portable water and toilet facilities for rural dwellers.

A National Directorate on Employment (NDE) was also established with the goal of fighting widespread unemployment. Better Life Programme is another programme (BLP) that was concerned with self-help and rural development programmes, as well as skill acquisition and health care. Community Banks (CBs) were also founded to give micro-enterprises to rural inhabitants in metropolitan regions. There was a Family Support Programme (FSP) that focused on health care, child welfare, and youth development, among other things. The Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) was established to supplement FSP by providing finance to stimulate the formation of cottage companies and supporting Nigerians in low-income groups in subsistence agriculture.

The Poverty Alleviation Programme launched by the Obasanjo government in the year 2000 has the goal of discovering long-term solutions to the issues of growing unemployment and criminality, especially among youngsters, as well as to create jobs for them. Under this government, the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) was created as a supplement to the current programme. NAPEP's goal is to eradicate poverty in Nigeria by the year 2019 (Aibieyi and Dirisu, 2010, Aiya and Arowoshegbe, 2014). The Jonathan administration equally developed the Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P). The fundamental goal of this initiative was to reduce the immediate impact of the withdrawal of petroleum subsidies on the Nigerian people, speed economic reform, and build a national safety net programme.

Nigeria's commitment to sustainable growth and poverty alleviation is highlighted in the 2004 National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). NEEDS, in its current form, is a medium-term strategy (2003-2007) that stems from the country's long-term goals of poverty alleviation, wealth building, job creation, and value reorientation. NEEDS is built on three pillars as a nationwide coordinated framework of action in close coordination with state and municipal governments and other stakeholders. These pillars are: (a) empowering people and increasing social service delivery; (b) encouraging economic growth, particularly in the non-oil private sector; and (c) boosting government effectiveness and efficiency while strengthening governance. State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (SEEDS) and Local Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (LEEDS) are the State and Local Government equivalents of NEEDS. The NEEDS, in cooperation with the SEEDS, will organize people behind the NEEDS and SEEDS' basic beliefs, principles, and programmes. Both programmes will be implemented in a coordinated manner to eliminate unemployment, poverty, and establish a solid basis for long-term growth (Ehisuoria and Aigbokhaebho, 2014, Odalonu and Obani, 2018).

Edo State administration, like every other state in Nigeria, has been doing everything necessary to ensure that these programmes are fully implemented throughout the state. Complementary entities within the Ministry were similarly empowered through policies to ensure the execution of these programmes at the grassroots level, ensuring the successful realization of the aims of these programmes. Despite these efforts over the year, Edo State's poverty remains prevalent due to low per capita growth (Ogwumike, 2001).

The concept of well-being is frequently used as a metaphor for the absence of poverty, with a focus on how impoverished people themselves see their position. UNDP devised the concept of human development, which is defined as 'the denial of chances and choice... to live a long, healthy, creative life and to enjoy a reasonable standard of living, independence, dignity, self-esteem, and the respect of others.' The World Bank currently uses a figure of US\$2 per day for measuring absolute poverty (World Bank Group, 2017, Afolabi and Laseinde, 2019). The alternative has been to define poverty as relative deprivation, for example as half mean income, or as exclusion from participation in society. As a result, the European Union has concluded that 'the poor' refers to 'individuals, families, and groups of individuals whose resources (material, cultural, and social) are so restricted that they are unable to participate in the minimum acceptable way of life.' In Nigeria, the government and NGOs have used a variety of strategies, methods, and policies, including citizen involvement, to alleviate poverty. For a better understanding of this, historical and current poverty alleviation programmes have been evaluated from the viewpoints of state inhabitants.

Voices on existing Institutional Mechanisms for Poverty Alleviation

The legislation that established various poverty alleviation programmes have built-in capabilities to make them work toward achieving the goals for which they were intended. As a result, they were given the title of 'institutional mechanism' for poverty alleviation programmes. In Edo State, they are made up of federal, state, and local government entities that work together to ensure that the programmes run well. The River Basin Development Authorities (RBDA), the Agricultural Development Programme (ADP), the Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme (ACGS), the Rural Electrification Scheme (RES), and the Rural Banking Programme may all be classified in this way (RBP). Institutional

methods include the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) and State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (SEEDS). In Edo State, these programmes were created to identify poverty concerns in accordance with cultural differences in order to achieve goals like job creation, increased agricultural production and income, and halting the flow of rural-urban migration, all of which had an impact on poverty alleviation. The participants in this study, on the other hand, supplied information on their perceptions of the success or failure rate of these institutional processes and their poverty alleviation programmes. According to an official of one of the Ministries in Edo State, there are pockets of poverty alleviation programmes organized by the government such as adult education programme in our areas. Efforts were made to ensure that the literacy rate in the state is enhanced through capturing of the adults who have in one way or the other missed the opportunities of going to formal schools in the early parts of their lives (Female official of Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Ministry of Energy and Water Resources, Benin City, Edo State).

Another insight was provided thus, “in terms of eradication of poverty in Edo state, I can boastfully say the state government has been contributing immensely to bring down the rate of poverty in the state through different programmes such as: free education including payment of WAEC fee for the SS3 students, facilitating of international NGOs poverty eradication projects in the state as well as contribution to the health sector and other sectors (Female Official of Ministry of Budget, Planning and Economic Development, Benin City, Edo State). A graduate of Ambrose Alli University who was also involved in this study reported that, I myself, am a living witness of the youth empowerment programme organized by the Minister for Youth and Sport in the State. The programme is an annual programme which aimed at empowering the youth as well as to enhance the standard of living of the populace through different skill acquisitions, business enlightenment and more” (Male/Resident of Awuyemi-Okpella Community in Etsako LGA, Edo State).

Private Organization (Non-Governmental Organizations)

As previously said, both the government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are responsible for poverty alleviation in Nigeria, notably in Edo State. Many private organisations also contributed to the state's poverty eradication, with some of these NGOs classified Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as a means of promoting development and eradicating poverty. In the words of one of the participants in this study, “there are some NGOs in Edo state who also adhere and support the state in militating against poverty, possibly as it may, such a Lift Above Poverty Organisation (LAPO) and others have been established to as a measure to eradicate poverty in the State” (Male/Project Manager, LAPO, Benin City, Edo State). Lending credence into this, another participant opined that. “multinational companies in the state also support in the poverty alleviation in the state through different means such as scholarship, sponsorship of poverty alleviation programme, employment creation and donations and supporting towards poverty alleviation programme” (Female/Official of Development and Charity Organisation, Benin City, Edo State).

Public Institutions (Ministries and Parastatals)

Through the participation and assistance of governmental institutions in Edo State, various sectoral programmes were directed to reduce poverty in the state. These were set up in the fields of agriculture, finance, and education, among other things. Agricultural Development Programme (ADP), National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA), Youth Empowerment Scheme, and others are among these programmes. A participant asserted on this further that, “there is Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) in the state with the aim which is to stimulate increase in food production and enhance the income of the rural population by providing greater and improved assistances to rural farmers. Some activities of ADP in the state included the provision of water pumps and drilling of boreholes for the rural communities, other objectives of the programme include; planning, monitoring and evaluation of project activities as they affected agricultural production, income and well-being of small holders in the agricultural sector” (Male officials of Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Benin City, Edo State).

Another participant corroborated the above with position that “Community banks (now known as Microfinance Bank) was also established in order to provide access to credit to the poor who would not obtain loan from the conventional banks to engage in productive activities, the Bank was established to give out loans to petty traders, food sellers, tailors, weavers, electricians, etc. this was to empower the poor to pull out of poverty. These banks promote rural activities in areas such as agriculture, commerce, arts/crafts, agro and mineral based cottage and small-scale

industries, vocational and skills, transportation and other rural economic activities” (Female official of Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, Finance, Benin City, Edo State).

Assessment of Attainment of Objectives behind these Programmes

In line with general economic performance in Nigeria, another participant discusses the performance of these programmes further. In her words, “the economic performance could be rated as remarkable given that there was economic growth rate of an average of 6 percent since 2014. Though several observers and other Economists have assessed the performance as obtainable with the context of economic and political reforms characterized by prudent macroeconomic management and a return to political pluralism. However, the poverty alleviation rate was slow compared with the remarkable GDP growth” (Academic/Female/Development Economist, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria). Another submission noted that, “despite some significant degree of success made by some of these programmes most of them were abandoned mid-way. The rural banking programme (RBP) and the Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme (ACGS) failed to deliver the desire credits for agricultural and rural transformation because a lot of savings mobilized in the rural areas were diverted to urban areas in form of credits/investment” (Academic/Male/Rural Development and Extensionist/University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State).

It was equally submitted that, “in all the programmes set up by the government at all levels, there is glaring lack of targeting mechanisms for the poor and the fact that most of the programmes do not focus directly on the poor. Not only that, there is political and policy instability have resulted in frequent policy changes and inconsistent implementation which in turn have prevented continuous progress” (Academic/Male/Development/Rural Sociologist/Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State). Another opinion on this showed that, “inadequate coordination of the various programmes has resulted in each institution carrying out its own activities with resultant duplication of effort and inefficient use of limited resources. Overlapping functions ultimately led to institutional rivalry and conflicts” (Academic/Female/Development Psychologist/Benson Idahosa University, Benin City, Edo State). Further submissions centered on economic management and the likes. For example, a participant noted that, “severe budgetary, management and governance problems have afflicted most of the programmes, resulting in facilities not being completed, broken down and abandoned, unstaffed and equipped. Lack of accountability and transparency thereby making the programmes to serve as conduit pipes for draining national resources” (Academic/Male/Development Economist/University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State).

Project specific assessment on attainment of objectives behind poverty alleviation from a participant revealed that, “overextended scope of activities of most institutions, resulting in resources being spread too thinly on too many activities. Examples are DFRRRI and Better Life Programmes which covered almost every sector and overlapped with many other existing programmes. Absence of target setting for Ministries, Agencies and Programmes also affected the attainment of objectives behind these poverty alleviation programmes” (Social Worker Expert/ Development Consultancy Organisation, Benin City, Edo State). Further assessment revealed that, “inappropriate programme design reflecting lack of involvement of beneficiaries in the formulation and implementation of programmes. Consequently, beneficiaries were not motivated to identify themselves sufficiently with the successful implementation of the programmes” (Male/Retired Civil Servant- Opinion Leader/Oghedaivbiobaa Community, Egor LGA., Edo State).

It was equally noted that, “absence of effective collaboration and complementation among the three tiers of government. This eventually led to absence of agreed poverty alleviation agenda that can be used by all concerned – Federal Government, State Governments, Local Governments, NGOs, and the International Donor Community. The end-result of this is that most of the programmes lacked mechanisms for their sustainability” (Male/Community Leader/Okpameri Community, Akoko Edo LGA., Edo State). Relying on the past experience as an administrator and community leader, a participant noted that, “failure of some of these poverty alleviation programmes was not a product of institutional mechanisms that are meant to transform the idea behind poverty alleviation, rather it was the fact that these mechanisms could not garnered the needed clout for the success of their objectives. The issue is that most of the ideas packaged into these poverty alleviation programmes did not come from the people they were meant for. They have no input into the programme hence their inability to understand the noble objectives behind them and how to give support for their success” (Male/Community Leader/Ewohimi Community, Esan South East LGA, Edo State).

The Need for Inclusive Development as a Panacea for Poverty Alleviation

The findings of the study revealed that Edo State Government had made efforts at alleviating poverty through its various programmes but the impacts of these had not been felt by the populace. This supported the findings of a prior research conducted in Enugu State, Nigeria, by Okonkwo (2015), who found that most poverty alleviation programmes were not specifically designed to fulfill the needs of the most vulnerable poor. This shortcoming was exacerbated by the lack of an efficient coordination mechanism between the three levels of government. Despite this lovely presentation, it was clear that poverty alleviation programmes, like others arising from government policies, were almost always top-down, implying a lack of participation from the general public. According to the World Economic Forum (2018), there is a need for inclusive development, which is possible where the public's input is allowed in developmental programmes. This has the potential of ensuring long-term inclusive economic growth through entrenched public-private partnership. With all this, what is so unique in inclusive development?

How will Inclusive Development Approach make a difference?

A society that will not embrace inclusive development may experience perverse growth. Perverse growth may lead to the exclusion of some people, the concentration of wealth, and segmented labour markets. Inclusive development therefore advocates for direct democracy (the exercise of civil, civic, and political rights) and the equal distribution of public goods (such as health, education, and infrastructure) so that everyone benefits.

Development can be 'inclusive' as a result of state policies and/or the nature of the growth process, which would indicate growth, i.e. a bigger cake, with a different distribution that includes previously marginalized groups (Pouw and Gupta, 2017, Dörffel and Schuhmann, 2022, Woldegiorgis, 2020). The emphasis on inclusive growth signals a departure from the 'trickle-down' model, which claimed that even if growth causes inequality, the benefits of expansion will eventually trickle down to those who were previously excluded from the development process (Ashwini, 2013). Gender equality must also be promoted, as well as the protection of everyone's rights and the promotion of progressive social tolerance. Governments must be sincere in their implementation of programmes, show respect for human lives and ambitions, and treat everyone equally. Rather than focusing on engaging a small group of likeminded national actors, as is often the case, public institutions should make genuine efforts to actively engage with traditionally marginalized and neglected groups or those who are less amenable to democratic transition and development discourse.

Steps towards Inclusive Development

An inclusive developmental strategy is similar to investing in people and areas that have been left behind in order to give equitable possibilities for long-term growth. Such investment could be attained and sustained through the outlined approaches provided by OECD (2018). The approaches are as stated hereunder:

- (a) Encouraging lifelong learning and skill development through high-quality beginning education and training systems that may be applied from early infancy through schooling and beyond. To be effective, the government, business, and employees must agree on innovative strategies to encourage and fund skill development throughout their careers. Continuous reskilling and adaption to fast technological change might be the emphasis of life-long learning initiatives. This might be supplemented by well-designed social welfare programmes that promote labour while also safeguarding people and families against unforeseeable hazards.
- (b) Increasing social mobility to guarantee that individuals are on an equal footing can enhance inclusive development. By eliminating obstacles to labour mobility and minimizing prejudice, this might begin in childhood and continue throughout one's life. Equal opportunities for children through health, education, and family policies; giving youth the right start in the labour market; ensuring access to lifelong learning, especially for the least skilled; promoting career mobility; assisting people returning to work when needed; support through the tax and benefit system; and reducing spatial segregation, improving housing support, and transportation are all part of the process.
- (c) Improving health and expanding affordable housing options are equally needed here. This might involve increasing preventative spending directed at important risk factors (such as health, pollution, accidents, and crime) and demographic segments, particularly children. It might also need housing and land use regulations that promote network infrastructure to facilitate access to affordable homes and broader economic growth in disadvantaged areas.
- (d) Promoting regional catch-up in order to overcome regional inequities that are widening. Policies that focus on productivity-enhancing changes are needed if lagging areas are to attract and retain investment. To leverage and

efficiently manage physical capital, knowledge-based capital, and natural capital through efficient allocation between regions, an integrated and predictable approach to investment policy-making may be required.

- (e) Investing in the well-being and social capital of communities is necessary. This is important in order to motivate local communities to take action and develop a sense of common purpose, as outlined in the national inclusive growth strategy. The process of fostering better connections between people and increasing their sense of civic engagement, as well as equal access to key public services and amenities like health, education, nutrition, utility services (e.g. water, energy, and transportation), and access to nature and green areas, are all likely to be part of this.

CONCLUSION

The discussion and data thus far imply that practically all development programmes could not succeed due to systemic failure, absence of accountability and widespread corrupt practices. This therefore corroborated the position of Page and Okeke (2019) on how Nigeria's quest for sustainable development becomes a 'stolen dream'. This study also established that various developmental programmes in Nigeria as well as in Edo State have succeeded in isolating or excluding the majority from the resources or opportunities that the programmes were designed to provide. On this premise, what we have is growth without development, which always breeds exclusion since a small number of individuals control resource allocation. It is clear that approaches to poverty alleviation have failed to benefit individuals at the grassroots. Things were skewed in favour of those in positions of power, while citizens are impoverished and marginalized in all ways. The only way to break free from this impasse is to promote an inclusive approach for all effective outcome of policies that affect the poor and oppressed. Because this strategy encourages grassroots engagement, it will also help to promote unity among the governed and the rulers.

The position of this study is that different poverty alleviation programmes implemented by successive Nigerian administrations, particularly in Edo State, could not succeed due to their top-down orientation. This top-down strategy has succeeded in enabling only the administration's top executives to formulate policies that are intended to benefit the general public. The approach emerged based on the recognition of generalizable policy advice and consistent patterns in behaviour across different policy areas. In corroboration of Cerna (2013) position, the policy designers were the central actors who concentrated their attention on factors that can be manipulated at the central level when designing the programmes for the populace. Practically all of these poverty-relief programmes were unsustainable because they gave individuals at higher levels of government full power and privileges. The other stakeholders who were beneficiaries were denied the opportunity to participate in the policy-making process. This explained why policies are always changing when administrations change, hurting the implementation process. Wishes of the beneficiaries could not be successfully accommodated while the implementation is ongoing without contradicting the intended objectives of the programmes hence their moribund status and eventual death. The foregoing thus pointed at what Matland (1995) referred to as ambiguity-conflict model of policy implementation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the recommendations generated to assist the study:

- (a) A long-term poverty alleviation plan should include asset redistribution and incentive structures that improve the rate and pattern of economic growth.
- (b) Government poverty-relief programs must devote sufficient attention to agriculture, particularly rural farmers.
- (c) These farmers should be addressed through rural cooperatives at the ward level in order to successfully eliminate rural poverty and the prevalent 'contractor-farmers' phenomenon. These contractor-farmers whose acres of land and plantations are only visible on letterhead documents use their positions in government to sabotage state allocations and incentives intended for the (unorganized and misinformed) rural poor.
- (d) In order for beneficiaries to actively engage in the implementation, monitoring, and maintenance of such programmes, targeted and participatory poverty alleviation programmes should be prioritized.
- (e) The proposed Poverty Alleviation Trust Fund is a good idea and an important part of the poverty alleviation process. It should be decentralized so that it can serve as a reliable source of conditional grants for states and local

government councils to alleviate poverty in their areas through effective social expenditure programmes under the supervision of this agency.

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