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POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA: A CRITICAL OVERVIEW AND THE WAY FORWARD

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ABSTRACT

In spite of numerous initiatives aimed at alleviating poverty over the decades, Nigeria remains entrenched in a state of pervasive poverty. This paper offers a thorough analysis of the diverse initiatives implemented by the Nigerian government to combat poverty, tracing the evolution from early rural development programs to contemporary poverty reduction strategies. Utilising empirical evidence derived from academic sources, this examination delves into the strategies, impacts, obstacles, and constraints associated with these initiatives. The study revealed that although certain programs have achieved moderate success, their overall impact remains constrained, frequently attributable to inadequate implementation, insufficient sustainability, pervasive corruption, fragile institutional capacity, policy volatility, and the enduring structural challenges that sustain poverty within the nation. Moreover, an excessive dependence on oil revenue, coupled with rapid population growth, inequality, insecurity, and the impacts of climate change, intensifies the issue of poverty. This overview posits that a fundamental transformation is essential, transitioning from ephemeral, disjointed methodologies to a comprehensive and enduring strategy. This encompasses the enhancement of governance and accountability, the promotion of economic diversification, the investment in human capital, and the encouragement of community participation. By tackling these systemic challenges and embracing a more inclusive and equitable framework, Nigeria can lay the groundwork for substantial and enduring poverty alleviation initiatives.

Keywords: Poverty Alleviation; Programmes; Overview; Way Forward

Introduction

Notwithstanding its extensive human and natural resources, Nigeria has contended with a chronic and widespread poverty issue since achieving independence in 1960. Recent statistics indicate that more than 40% of the population lives below the national poverty threshold, positioning Nigeria among the most impoverished nations globally (Olasode et al., 2022; Okunola & Ojo, 2019; Jaiyeola & Choga, 2021).

Poverty is particularly acute in rural regions, where social services and infrastructure are scarce or absent. The majority of those residing in rural regions are impoverished and rely on agriculture for sustenance and revenue. The Federal government's apprehension with the rising poverty levels among Nigerians and the imperative for its elimination has resulted in the formulation of numerous poverty eradication and alleviation policies and programs. Subsequent administrations have instituted numerous poverty

alleviation initiatives, intending to elevate millions from the clutches of poverty. The programs have included direct cash transfers, social safety nets, agricultural development projects, education, and microfinance (Jamaluddin & Hanafiah, 2020; Salam et al., 2020). However, despite these initiatives, poverty persists as a stark reality for a substantial segment of the Nigerian populace (Solomon, 2018; Kolawole, 2021) This prompts essential enquiries regarding the efficacy, sustainability, and inclusiveness of these programs. The overview explores the poverty alleviation landscape in Nigeria, analysing the historical context, primary program approaches, and persistent challenges. This analysis seeks to provide a nuanced picture of poverty reduction initiatives in Nigeria by critically assessing both successes and weaknesses, while also identifying alternative avenues for more effective and lasting solutions.

Literature Review

A substantial body of scholarly work has been developed regarding poverty alleviation initiatives in Nigeria, encompassing a range of disciplines and viewpoints. This review integrates essential themes and findings from the literature, establishing a basis for a discerning overview.

Concept of poverty

Poverty represents a complex and multifaceted issue, characterised by insufficient access to fundamental resources including food, clean water, healthcare, and education (Onah et al., 2018). The United Nations defines poverty as "a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity" (Solomon, 2018). Some academics perceive poverty as a lack of fundamental resources, abilities, options, safety, and authority necessary for a person to attain a respectable quality of life and engage significantly in societal activities (Waglé, 2002; Muktiali, 2018).

Furthermore, poverty represents a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that transcends mere financial deficiency. While insufficient financial resources represent a significant factor, poverty, as articulated by Traustadóttir and Rice (2012), Devicienti and Poggi (2011), and Pinilla-Roncancio and Alkire (2021), comprises multiple dimensions, including: Income Poverty: This denotes the inadequacy of financial resources to satisfy fundamental requirements such as nourishment, housing, and apparel. Poverty according to aforementioned authors is frequently assessed through the use of poverty lines, which differ from one country to another and depend on specific contexts. Research indicates that income poverty constitutes the primary dimension of poverty in Nigeria (Aminu & Onimisi, 2014; Shaba et al., 2018), particularly impacting the Northern region most severely (Shaba et al., 2018). According to Aminu & Onimisi, (2014), income poverty is exacerbated by disparities, malfeasance, and fiscal misgovernance. Closely related to the income poverty is Human Capital Poverty. The concept of human capital poverty pertains to the deficiencies encountered in the realms of education, health, and nutrition. It constrains individuals' potential to engage comprehensively in societal affairs and to enhance economic development. This dimension of poverty as examined by Aminu and Onimisi (2014) and Olowa (2012) is intricately associated with

insufficient access to social services and infrastructure. This represents a significant obstacle to human advancement, as it limits individuals' knowledge, abilities, and well-being, thereby diminishing their productivity and potential for income generation. Another dimension of poverty is referred to as "Asset Poverty". This denotes the absence of access to productive assets, including land, housing, and credit, which can confine individuals within a cycle of poverty and impede their capacity to participate in economic activities and build wealth (Caner, & Wolff, 2004; Carter & Barrett, 2006). Recent empirical evidence indicates that asset poverty exhibits greater persistence and intergenerational characteristics than income poverty, serving as a significant contributor to chronic poverty and the intergenerational transmission of poverty in Nigeria (Kolawole, 2021; Fagbemi et al., 2024).

Furthermore, poverty frequently results in social exclusion, wherein individuals or groups find themselves marginalised and deprived of access to the opportunities and services that are accessible to others. This facet of poverty is associated with an absence of social capital, systemic discrimination, and a constrained political voice and representation (Killean, 2003). Research underscores the significant social exclusion and marginalisation experienced by impoverished populations in Nigeria, particularly among women, children, and marginalised ethnic and religious communities (Oyekale & Oyekale, 2013). A study conducted by Jayeola and Choga (2020) indicates that social exclusion poses a considerable obstacle to poverty alleviation efforts in Nigeria. This is due to its exclusionary nature, which restricts the underprivileged from engaging comprehensively in the social, economic, and political spheres of their communities, thus sustaining their impoverished conditions. Poverty also takes a dimension of vulnerability (Chambers, 2006). The state of being vulnerable is exacerbated by poverty, which heightens susceptibility to various shocks and stresses, including economic downturns, natural disasters, and health crises, thereby entrenching individuals deeper into impoverishment. Research indicates that susceptibility to shocks presents a significant issue in Nigeria, where the impoverished population is deprived of social safety nets and insurance systems necessary to manage unforeseen circumstances(Shehu & Sidique, 2015). Comprehending the complex and multifaceted aspects of poverty is essential for formulating effective strategies aimed at alleviating poverty, which must consider not just the lack of income but also the interrelated elements that sustain its existence.

Key determinants of poverty in Nigeria

There are a number of circumstances and variables related to Nigerian government policies that may be the reason why the country's enormous wealth and resources have not resulted in a significant decrease in poverty. Primarily, research indicates that corruption and poor governance serve as primary catalysts for poverty in Nigeria, as pervasive corruption and the appropriation of state resources by elites significantly hinder the execution and efficacy of poverty alleviation initiatives (Ogunleye, 2010; Olowa, 2012; Jaiyeola & Choga, 2021). The persistent prevalence of corruption in Nigeria has significantly obstructed economic advancement and the efficient allocation of public resources

aimed at alleviating poverty. Earlier works of research indicates that corruption diminishes household income by approximately 5% and elevates the poverty headcount by roughly 2.6 percentage points in Nigeria (Abiloro et al., 2019; Njideka & Chukwuebuka, 2014). Furthermore, the dependence on crude oil exports, coupled with the disregard for the agricultural sector, has exacerbated inequality and constrained economic diversification (Salai-Martin & Subramanian, 2013). The excessive reliance on oil exports has resulted in the oversight of alternative productive sectors, particularly agriculture, which engages a significant portion of the workforce (Adenugba & Dipo, 2013). This has led to an imbalanced economic structure, wherein the advantages of oil wealth have been concentrated in the hands of a select few, leaving the larger populace in a state of poverty. Studies indicate that the reduction in agricultural productivity and the constrained diversification of the economy significantly contribute to the prevalence of poverty in Nigeria (Atanda & Nyong, 2018; Uma et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the excessive focus on the oil sector has contributed to the emergence of the Dutch disease syndrome, which has subsequently hindered the growth of alternative sectors and exacerbated income inequality. The phenomenon known as Dutch disease pertains to the detrimental impacts on the manufacturing sector that may arise from a significant surge in a nation's foreign earnings, often triggered by the discovery of a valuable natural resource (Mendez, 2020). Additionally, the swift increase in population and accelerated urban development has surpassed the availability of fundamental services and economic prospects, thereby sustaining the cycle of poverty. Numerous studies indicate that rapid population growth, especially when it surpasses economic development, can intensify poverty as the resources at hand become progressively insufficient to satisfy the expanding demands of the populace (Kolawole, 2021; Brief, 2023; Merrick, 2002). The annual population growth rate in Nigeria exceeds 2.6%, and this, alongside swift urbanisation, has exerted considerable pressure on the delivery of essential services and job prospects, resulting in the expansion of slums and the escalation of urban poverty (Agbodike, 2011; Pontianus & Oruonye, 2021).

Moreover, as articulated by Olasode et al. (2022) and Shaba et al. (2018), the prevalence of inequality in Nigeria elucidates the inadequacy of economic growth and the country's abundant resources in alleviating poverty. While a nation may achieve considerable affluence and witness substantial economic expansion, the failure to equitably distribute the gains and resources derived from such growth among its populace may render the anticipated alleviation of poverty elusive. As noted by Iradian (2005) and Olasode et al. (2022), disparities exacerbate poverty and hinder economic development, thereby obstructing the equitable distribution of national resources to the underprivileged. Consequently, it is plausible that poverty will persist in nations characterised by significant income disparities (Fosu, 2008). In the vein, a primary challenge confronting the Nigerian populace is the issue of inequality. A significant share of the nation's wealth is concentrated among a select group of individuals. Research

indicates that the wealthiest 10% of Nigeria's populace possesses approximately 49.3% of the nation's total income (Musa & Idris, 2019), highlighting a significant disparity in income distribution among its citizens. Inequality manifests in various forms and dimensions in Nigeria, encompassing political, social, economic, geographic, and gender disparities (Olasode et al., 2022; Omoruyi & Omoyibo, 2014).
In a comparable manner, elevated rates of unemployment, especially among the youth, play a significant role in perpetuating poverty (Edame et al., 2014). According to Olasode et al., (2022), nearly twenty-one percent of Nigeria's working-age population was considered underemployed in 2018. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2018), there were 24.5 million young people in the labour force, with 11.3 million being underemployed and 13.1 million being unemployed. This equates to a combined underemployment and unemployment rate of 55.4% (Olasode et al. 2022). This situation arises as individuals find themselves devoid of opportunities to generate income, thereby hindering their ability to enhance their living conditions and overall economic welfare (Atan & Effiong, 2020; Ogunleye, 2010; Olowa, 2012). This demographic predominantly consists of youth who struggle to secure meaningful employment, posing a considerable obstacle to initiatives aimed at alleviating poverty.

The phenomenon of climate change constitutes a significant element in the pervasive issue of poverty in Nigeria. The deterioration of the environment and the ramifications of climate change further intensify poverty in Nigeria, adversely affecting the agricultural sector, which serves as a vital source of sustenance for numerous Nigerians. The adverse effects of environmental degradation and climate change are felt most acutely by impoverished populations, undermining agricultural productivity and heightening their susceptibility to various shocks (Bukari & Aluko, 2023; Olowa, 2012). Recent studies suggest that climate change has markedly diminished agricultural yields and exacerbated food insecurity in Nigeria, disproportionately impacting the impoverished population. The desertification of extensive areas in northern Nigeria for example, has resulted in diminished agricultural productivity, compelling numerous farmers into a state of poverty (Adetayo et al., 2023; Bamiro et al., 2020; Ifeanyieze et al., 2016; Ikhuoso et al., 2020; Okunola & Ikuomola, 2010; Olayide & Alabi, 2018). Furthermore, two distinct studies carried out concurrently reveal that the recurrent floods and droughts affecting various regions of the nation have resulted in considerable declines in agricultural productivity, thereby exacerbating the impoverishment of rural communities (Ayanlade et al., 2018; Olayide & Alabi, 2018). In a comparable manner, the occurrence of oil spills and the pervasive environmental pollution within the Niger Delta region have severely undermined the livelihoods of fishing communities, thereby ensnaring them in a cycle of poverty (Eronmhonsele & Norris, 2021; Ojimba, 2014; Ikehi et al., 2014).

Furthermore, the absence of fundamental infrastructure, including access to clean water, healthcare, and education, constrains individuals' capacity to transcend poverty (Aminu & Onimisi,

2014). Documented reports have shown that, the limitations in social services hinder the advancement of human capital and sustain the cycle of intergenerational poverty (Harper et al., 2003). However, numerous research indicates that investments in infrastructure and social services can profoundly influence poverty alleviation in Nigeria (Olubayo-Fatiregun & Aderonmu, 2010; Aderogba & Adegboye, 2019; Oyekale & Oyekale, 2013). Nonetheless, in Nigeria, the disproportionate allocation of fundamental services among various regions has resulted in significant disparities in human development, thereby exacerbating poverty in specific locales (Oyekale & Oyekale, 2013; Olasode et al., 2022). Finally, a notable element contributing to the worsening of poverty in Nigeria throughout the years is the prevalence of conflicts and insecurity, especially in the northeastern and northwestern regions of the nation (Jaiyeola & Choga, 2021, Ayegba, 2015). According to empirical studies, the aforementioned conflicts have significantly hindered economic activities, resulted in the displacement of populations, and caused extensive damage to infrastructure, culminating in the loss of livelihoods and heightened vulnerability (Jaiyeola & Choga, 2021; Olowa, 2012; Iheagwam et al., 2021).

Poverty profile in Nigeria

Nigeria, classified as a lower-middle-income nation (Corral, et al., 2019), boasts a population exceeding 200 million, thereby establishing itself as the most populous country on the African continent (Geck, 2017; Oyekale & Oyekale, 2013; Olusegun & Eke, 2019). In spite of its considerable economic potential and rich natural resources, poverty remains a prominent social and economic challenge confronting Nigeria in contemporary times. The escalating prevalence of poverty is becoming increasingly concerning. In the early 1970s, Nigeria was positioned among the 50 wealthiest nations; however, it has since experienced a significant decline, now ranking as one of the 30 poorest countries globally (Olasode et al., 2022). The poverty headcount ratio in Nigeria, as indicated by national measures, shows that 46% of the total population languish in conditions of poverty (Aghaulor, 2020; Uma et al., 2017). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) says that around 1.3 billion individuals experience multidimensional poverty, characterised by deficiencies in health, education, living conditions, and economic prospects (UNDP, 2018). According to the latest estimates from the World Bank, around 734 million individuals exist below the poverty threshold of $1.90 per day (World Bank, 2020).

The national poverty rate is determined in relation to the prevailing living standards within Nigeria. According to Olasode et al. (2022), this indicates that 46% of Nigeria's total population resides beneath the average standard of living within the nation. In absolute terms, 53.5% of Nigeria's total population resides beneath the poverty threshold of $1.90 per day (Orji et al., 2020; Kolawole, 2021; Jaiyeola & Choga, 2021). The data presented by Olasode et al. (2022) further reveals that over fifty percent of Nigeria's population, approximately 110 million individuals, exist in conditions of extreme poverty. In addition, as noted by Olowa (2012), the prevalence of poverty in Nigeria is striking, with nearly half of the

population enduring extreme poverty. This condition leaves approximately 50% of Nigerians with inadequate income to satisfy fundamental necessities, including food, shelter, clean water, education, and healthcare, all of which are deemed essential for a basic standard of living. As noted by Ogunleye (2010), Uma et al. (2017), and Jaiyeola and Choga (2021), the poverty profile in Nigeria includes various significant dimensions. The disparity between rural and urban regions reveals a stark reality: poverty is markedly more pronounced in rural locales, where the availability of fundamental services and economic prospects remains severely constrained. Variations Across Regions: The northern regions of the country, especially the Northeast and Northwest, exhibit markedly elevated poverty rates in contrast to the southern regions. The gender dimension also reveals that poverty has a disproportionate impact on women and households led by females, characterised by a greater prevalence and severity of impoverishment. Demographic Factors: According to Jaiyeola and Choga (2021), there exists a significant correlation between poverty and household size, suggesting that larger households are more prone to experiencing poverty.

Recent studies and the information presented indicate that poverty is significantly more pronounced in rural regions than in urban settings (Okosun et al., 2023; Oyebamiji et al., 2023). Oyeranti and Olayiwola (2005) assert that numerous efforts by both non-governmental and governmental entities to advance rural development in Nigeria have consistently yielded unsatisfactory results over the years. As reported by Johnson and Ifeoma, (2018), and Ibrahim and Sule (2020), the period from 2000 to 2019 witnessed a significant rise in rural poverty, escalating from 28.3% to 52.1%. In contrast, urban poverty experienced a modest increase of merely 2%, moving from 16.2% to 18%. This report indicates that the incidence of poverty in Nigeria is escalating at a more pronounced rate in rural regions compared to urban centres. This phenomenon, nonetheless, may be attributed in part to the constrained access to social services and public infrastructure prevalent in rural regions (Monyei et al., 2018; Anyanwu, 2005). The initial viewpoint uncovers a disparate allocation of poverty throughout Nigeria. The northern regions, especially the Northeast and Northwest, exhibit markedly elevated poverty rates, frequently surpassing 70%, in contrast to the southern regions (Shaba et al., 2018). This intricate poverty profile underscores the urgent necessity for thorough, focused, and contextually relevant strategies for poverty alleviation in Nigeria.

Historical Context and Evolution of Poverty Alleviation Programmes

The body of literature underscores a protracted history of initiatives aimed at alleviating poverty in Nigeria, tracing back to the colonial period. Initial initiatives frequently concentrated on the advancement of rural areas and the provision of agricultural extension services. In the aftermath of independence, a series of governments undertook numerous initiatives, primarily aimed at enhancing agricultural practices, facilitating access to credit, creating employment opportunities, and fostering the growth of small-scale enterprises (Ibrahim & Sule, 2020; Ogunleye, 2010). The various poverty reduction programs and initiatives can be categorised into

three distinct phases: the pre-structural adjustment program (SAP) phase, the structural adjustment program (SAP) phase, and the post-structural adjustment program (SAP) phase.

Pre-SAP Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Nigeria

The period preceding SAP spanned from 1960 to 1985. The initiatives implemented by the governments during this timeframe primarily concentrated on enhancing rural development, ensuring the fulfilment of fundamental needs, and fostering economic advancement. The primary objective of this period was to construct and rejuvenate the Nigerian economy (Olasode et al., 2022). In pursuit of these aims, Ugwukah (2022) underscored the importance of enhancing agricultural output through elevating the awareness among Nigerians regarding self-sufficiency in food production. Although the primary objective of development planning during this period did not centre on poverty reduction, various programs nonetheless played a significant role in indirectly fostering poverty alleviation.

A selection of the programs that had been introduced encompasses: Farm Settlement Scheme (FSS); National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP); Operation Feed the Nation (OFN); River Basin Development Authorities (RBDA); Green Revolution Programme (GR); and Agricultural Development Projects (ADP) (Kolawole, 2021). The architecture of these initiatives was intended to augment agricultural output through the optimisation of land resources, the provision of essential farm inputs, the facilitation of credit access for farmers, the supply of fertilisers and pesticides, and the establishment of institutional support (Obadan, 2001; Olasode et al., 2022). For example, the implementation of FSS in 1960 sought to secure land for smallholder farmers and ensure their access to essential infrastructure and agricultural resources. This initiative sought to establish and settle farmers across various regions of the country, aiming to enhance agricultural production and increase the incomes of rural farmers (Kolawole, 2021). The inception of NAFPP in 1972 was designed to enhance food production through the provision of superior seeds, fertilisers, and extension services. The emphasis was placed on enhancing food production via the implementation of advanced agricultural technologies.

The OFN program aimed to elevate domestic food production, strengthen food security, and augment farmers' incomes (Solomon, 2018). The objective was to motivate Nigerians, particularly those in urban areas, to engage in agricultural practices and achieve food self-sufficiency (Onah et al., 2018). The inception of RBDA in 1976 was intended to improve the management of land and water resources for agricultural applications. The initiative sought to develop irrigation systems, promote fishing activities, and enhance rural development processes. Secondly, the objective of initiating GR in 1980 was to attain self-sufficiency in food production through the application of enhanced production methodologies, resources, and infrastructure. The Agricultural Development Programs, initiated in the 1970s, sought to enhance agricultural productivity and elevate the incomes of small-scale farmers by offering essential inputs, extension services, and rural infrastructure development. The

design of these programs seeks to augment agricultural production through the strategic utilisation of land resources, the provision of essential farm inputs, the extension of credit facilities to farmers, the supply of fertilisers, and the establishment of institutional support (Kolawole, 2021; Olasode et al., 2022). The government posited that advancements in the agricultural sector could significantly bolster food production, augment food security within the nation, and, consequently, elevate the standard of living for farmers. As noted by Olasode et al. (2022), these objectives resulted in the creation of a national credit institution alongside a specialised agricultural development initiative that utilised both financial and managerial cooperation. Although certain programs realised limited successes in the immediate term, they ultimately did not foster enduring progress in food production and poverty alleviation over the long haul (Dakyes & Mundi, 2013; Kolawole, 2021). The factors frequently referenced regarding the constrained effectiveness of these initiatives encompass insufficient funding, ineffective coordination and execution, inadequate infrastructure, and the inability to tailor programs to the specific contexts and requirements of local communities and smallholder farmers (Kolawole, 2021). Olasode et al. (2022) highlighted that the programs failed to address the needs of the impoverished, instead benefiting powerful individuals who secured agricultural lands for their own personal and financial advantage.

SAP Era (1986-1993) Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Nigeria

The era of the Structural Adjustment Programme represented a significant shift in Nigeria's strategy towards addressing poverty alleviation. The economic crisis of the early 1980s, intensified by the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programs, illuminated the issue of poverty with remarkable clarity. Olasode et al. (2022) assert that the period of Structural Adjustment Programs (1985–2000) was marked by a deterioration in Nigeria's socio-economic landscape and a decline in the quality of life for its citizens, stemming from the profound economic crisis that afflicted the nation in the mid-1980s. Consequently, the government undertook deliberate initiatives to combat and mitigate poverty via the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) (Kolawole, 2021). The SAP era witnessed a significant increase in poverty alleviation initiatives, notably the establishment of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) in 1986. This organisation aimed to tackle unemployment, especially among the youth, by providing skills training, job creation programs, and fostering entrepreneurship development (Kolawole, 2021; Dakyes & Mundi, 2013). Directorate of Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) sought to enhance rural infrastructure, elevate agricultural output, and generate employment prospects in rural regions. The Better Life Programme (BLP), initiated in 1987, aimed to enhance the living standards of rural women by promoting cooperatives, facilitating skills acquisition, and providing access to microcredit (Ogunleye, 2010). The distinction of BLP from earlier rural development initiatives lies in its focus on gender and the empowerment of women. The Family Support Programme (FSP), established in 1994 as a successor to the Better Life Programme, has maintained its emphasis on the empowerment of women

and the alleviation of poverty. Nonetheless, in spite of the widespread implementation of these programs, their effectiveness in alleviating poverty and inequality has been constrained, as indicated by the enduringly elevated rates of poverty and inequality during the SAP period (Ogunleye, 2010, Dakyes & Mundi, 2013).

Democratic Era Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Nigeria

The reinstatement of democratic governance in 1999 instilled a sense of optimism regarding the alleviation of poverty in Nigeria. This period witnessed the persistence of established programs alongside the emergence of novel initiatives designed to tackle the issues of poverty and inequality. The commencement of this period was marked by the initiation of the Poverty Alleviation Program (PAP) in the year 2000. The PAP sought to generate employment opportunities, facilitate microcredit access, and enhance the capabilities of the impoverished through skill development initiatives. As noted by Kolawole (2021) and Olasode et al. (2022), the PAP was established as a provisional measure to combat poverty, with the objectives of alleviating unemployment and enhancing economic productivity. The program was designed with the objective of generating employment opportunities for 200,000 individuals currently without jobs, enhancing the adult literacy rate to 70%, and instituting a credit supply system to facilitate farmers' access to credit resources (Olasode and colleagues (2022). The National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), designed to harmonise all initiatives addressing poverty within the nation (Dakyes & Mundi, 2013; Ogunleye, 2010), followed subsequently. The NAPEP underscored the necessity for a comprehensive, cohesive, and enduring strategy for poverty alleviation—advancing past mere job creation and microcredit to tackle concerns such as infrastructure, education, and health (Oladimeji & Said, 2012).

National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS): Launched in 2004, represented a comprehensive economic reform initiative designed to foster economic growth and alleviate poverty by promoting private sector development, investing in infrastructure, and enhancing governance (Olusoji & Oloba, 2014). Moreover, during the tenure of the late president Umar Yar'Adua, the government initiated the Seven-Point Agenda in 2007 to tackle pressing issues including power, food security, wealth creation, land reform, security, education, and the Niger Delta crisis (Ajiboye, 2022; Iheanacho, 2010). In the same vein, recently, the government has launched additional initiatives such as N-Power, a program aimed at job creation and skills development, alongside the Social Investment Programme, which encompasses cash transfers, school feeding, and support for enterprises (Ogbette et al., 2019). Nevertheless, there is a paucity of evidence regarding the immediate or even the enduring effects of these recent initiatives on poverty alleviation. It is essential to recognise that the effects of these programs have been inconsistent, demonstrating some achievements in domains such as youth empowerment and microcredit provision, yet exhibiting minimal overall advancement in reducing national poverty levels.

Methodology

This critical assessment, consistent with Hendren et al. (2023), employs a qualitative research methodology, utilising an extensive study of current literature and data to examine poverty alleviation efforts in Nigeria. The study literature review: The review encompasses scholarly articles, books, and research papers that examine the history, design, execution, and impacts of poverty alleviation projects in Nigeria. Policy Documents: Government reports, policy papers, and program assessments detailing policies and measures for poverty alleviation. Documentation from domestic and global entities: Organisations such as the National Bureau of Statistics, the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program, and other pertinent entities published data and analyses regarding poverty and development in Nigeria. Grey Literature encompasses reports, working papers, and evaluations produced by non-governmental organisations, think tanks, and development practitioners that offer insights into poverty alleviation initiatives and captured in various works of literature cited.

The analysis concentrates on identifying key themes, trends, and patterns in poverty alleviation strategies, evaluating program efficacy and sustainability, and emphasising problems and potential for enhancement. This overview seeks to offer a comprehensive and critical analysis of Nigeria's development and the effects of poverty alleviation initiatives by synthesising information from many sources.

Results and Discussion

Notwithstanding decades of poverty alleviation initiatives, Nigeria persists in contending with pervasive poverty. This section analyses the strategies, themes, patterns, and impacts of poverty alleviation programs in Nigeria, along with the problems and causes obstructing poverty reduction efforts, based on findings from the literature review.

Approaches and impacts of poverty alleviation programmes

The pre-SAP period was marked by a hierarchical, state-driven development strategy (Kolawole, 2021). The Nigerian government was pivotal in the formulation and execution of initiatives, frequently with minimal input from the target recipients. The emphasis was on extensive projects and economic development, predicated on the premise that advantages will cascade to the impoverished (Atairet, 2020; Orluwene, 2014). The Operation Feed the Nation program, initiated in 1976, sought to enhance agricultural output and national food security but inadequately addressed the requirements of smallholder farmers and rural communities (Anger, 2010). The top-down strategy was predominantly accountable for this.

The effects of the pre-SAP poverty alleviation initiatives were varied. Kolawole (2021) and Olasode et al. (2022) indicate that although certain programs, such as the FSS, exhibited initial promise, they frequently encountered sustainability challenges; numerous programs failed to sustain their impact over time due to insufficient funding, ineffective management, and a deficit of community ownership (Kolawole, 2021). A top-down approach also frequently led to programs that did not effectively engage the most marginalised communities (Scheirer,

2005). Dakyes and Mundi (2013) and Aminu and Onimisi (2014) have ascribed this to insufficient coordination and ineffective monitoring and evaluation procedures. Moreover, Aminu & Onimisi (2014) emphasised that political motivations, rather than authentic poverty alleviation objectives, occasionally shaped development projects, resulting in an inequitable distribution of gains and inefficiencies. During pre-election seasons, politicians frequently employed poverty alleviation projects as a political instrument to secure votes, rather than confronting the root causes of poverty (Akanmidu, 2004)
In summary, the pre-SAP period exhibited attempts to combat poverty; nonetheless, these initiatives frequently lacked targeted objectives, encountered implementation difficulties, and yielded minimal effects on poverty alleviation. Research indicates that these first programs had no effect on alleviating poverty and inequality, as they frequently overlooked the fundamental causes of poverty and disregarded the demands and priorities of the impoverished (Ahmad, 2014; Olasode et al., 2022; Kolawole, 2021). The centralised model of poverty alleviation employed during this period was ineffective and unsustainable, as indicated in the literature (Olasode et al., 2022).

While, the Pre-SAP era employed a top-down approach, the SAP era transitioned to a more multi-sectoral strategy encompassing government agencies, NGOs, and international organisations. Nonetheless, numerous programs throughout that period adhered to a supply-driven strategy, emphasising the provision of resources and services instead of tackling the fundamental causes of poverty (Bhatt, 1991; Olasode et al., 2022). Furthermore, the Structural Adjustment Programme era witnessed a transition to a more market-oriented paradigm, characterised by an increased involvement of the private sector and a diminishment of direct governmental action. Heidhues and Obare (2011) argues that the expenditure-centric strategy of the SAPs resulted in reductions in public investment in social services, infrastructure, and assistance for the rural impoverished, hence intensifying poverty and inequality in numerous Nigerian communities. Empirical findings indicate that although the SAP era introduced certain beneficial innovations, like enhanced private sector participation and a more decentralised methodology, the overall effect on poverty alleviation was minimal (Olasode et al., 2022). Specifically, although several projects, like the NDE, successfully generated employment possibilities, they faced obstacles concerning the following: Financial Limitations: The economic crisis constrained the government's capacity to sufficiently finance these projects, affecting their scope and viability. Insufficient Coordination: The proliferation of initiatives resulted in redundant efforts and inadequate coordination among executing agencies. Corruption and mismanagement, like in other periods, impeded the efficacy of certain programs. According to Dakyes & Mundi (2013), this may have contributed to the limited effectiveness of these programs in alleviating poverty, prompting a transition towards more targeted and participative strategies in later decades. Consequently, the experiences of this period underscored the necessity for a

more durable, participative, and focused strategy for poverty alleviation in Nigeria.

The Democratic era witnessed a transition to a more populace-focused strategy for poverty reduction (Olubayo-Fatiregun & Aderonmu, 2011). Kolawole (2021) asserted that there was an increased focus on community involvement: programs progressively aimed to engage communities in the formulation and execution of poverty alleviation measures. The poverty alleviation programs during the Democratic era in Nigeria, in contrast to prior initiatives, prioritised decentralisation by executing programs at the state and local government levels and actively engaging communities in their design and implementation (Anyanwu, 2013). Empowerment: The emphasis transitioned from only distributing aid to enabling individuals and communities to achieve self-sufficiency. There was an increasing acknowledgement of the necessity for programs to maintain sustainability in the long run (Kolawole, 2021; Adesida & Okunlola, 2015).

Notwithstanding these favourable developments, Nigeria's poverty alleviation initiatives during the Democratic era persisted in encountering obstacles. These obstacles include: Policy Inconsistency: Frequent alterations in governmental and policy priorities frequently obstructed program execution and hindered sustained advancement (Ajiboye, 2022). Corruption and Absence of Transparency: Corruption persisted as a substantial obstacle, redirecting money from the intended recipients (Kolawole, 2021). Research indicates that corruption diminishes the effectiveness of poverty alleviation initiatives and constrains their accessibility to the most disadvantaged groups (Ogunleye, 2010). Instances of political capture of the programs have been observed, with non-poor and politically connected individuals often being the principal beneficiaries, as noted by Danaan (2018) and Mtapuri (2014). Monitoring and assessment are also insufficient. The absence of comprehensive monitoring and evaluation systems hindered the assessment of program efficacy and the implementation of requisite modifications. Consequently, numerous initiatives were devoid of the requisite data and evidence to inform policy decisions and resource distribution. (Kolawole, 2021) Anyanwu, 2013)

Despite the democratic post-SAP era adopting a more participative and people-centred approach to poverty reduction, obstacles like as policy inconsistency, corruption, and inadequate institutional capacity persisted, obstructing progress (Olasode et al., 2022). Recent studies indicate that the effects of democratic-era programs have been limited (Kolawole, 2021), and poverty rates persist at elevated levels in numerous regions of the country, underscoring the necessity for more extensive and enduring initiatives to tackle the multifaceted character of poverty in Nigeria.

In summary, Nigeria's experience with poverty alleviation programs over the last decades has been characterised by a spectrum of approaches and strategies from the centralised, top-down models of the pre-SAP era to the more decentralised, multi-sectoral strategies of the SAP and Democratic periods. Although many programs have attained limited success, their overall effect on poverty alleviation

has been little, as seen by the consistently elevated poverty rates in the country (Dakyes & Mundi, 2013; Kolawole, 2021).

The summery of the study's analysis of the key themes, trends, and patterns in poverty alleviation techniques across different historical periods in Nigeria are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Key themes, trends, and patterns of Poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria

Era	Key Themes	Trends	Patterns
Pre-SAP Era			
	Centralized Planning	State-led initiatives	Top-down approach
	Import Substitution Industrialization	Focus on large-scale projects	Limited community participation
SAP Era			
	Market Liberalization	Privatization and deregulation	Reduced state intervention
	Export-Oriented Growth	Emphasis on private sector-led growth	Conditional lending and austerity measures
Democratic Era			
	People-Centered Approach	Decentralization and community participation	Focus on empowerment and sustainability
	Multi-sectoral Strategies	Emphasis on good governance and accountability	Recognition of the multidimensional nature of poverty

The Way Forward

After identifying and critically evaluating the causes that impede effective poverty alleviation in Nigeria, as well as the shortcomings of previously implemented policies and efforts, several major recommendations and areas for future emphasis are essential. A multifaceted strategy is essential. Addressing poverty necessitates confronting its interrelated elements, encompassing income, health, education, and empowerment.

There is an increasing focus on community engagement and ownership. Effective programs must engage local communities in the design, execution, and evaluation of interventions to guarantee responsiveness to local needs and settings. Furthermore, it is essential to enhance institutional capacity and governance. This entails enhancing openness, accountability, and the efficacy of governmental institutions, which is essential for the successful execution and sustainability of poverty alleviation initiatives.

Comprehensive anti-corruption strategies and improved oversight are essential to combat corruption, which remains a substantial obstacle. Effective and enduring poverty alleviation cannot be accomplished through well-intentioned policies or initiatives until the core issues of corruption, inadequate governance, and insufficient openness are addressed. No number of benevolent policies or initiatives can effectuate significant and enduring poverty alleviation without confronting the core issues of corruption, inadequate governance, and insufficient openness.

Targeted and evidence-based therapies are essential. Rigorous research and data must guide poverty reduction initiatives, ensuring they effectively target the most vulnerable communities and satisfy their distinct requirements. Ultimately, sufficient funding for poverty alleviation programs must be obtained and the effective distribution of resources to the intended recipients must be ensured.

Conclusion

Nigeria's efforts to combat poverty have evolved in response to shifting economic and political conditions, achieving various levels of success. The initial post-independence period exhibited a centralised, top-down approaches that was mainly ineffectual in alleviating poverty. Funding constraints, inadequate coordination, and corruption hindered the effectiveness of poverty alleviation throughout the Structural Adjustment Programme era, despite a transition to a more market-oriented strategy. The Democratic Post-SAP era included more participative and decentralised initiatives; yet, challenges like as policy inconsistency, corruption, and inadequate institutional capacity persisted, undermining their efficacy. Furthermore, the shift from the pre-SAP to the SAP era exemplifies a global pattern of transitioning from state-controlled economies to market liberalisation. This study has identified enduring issues. Despite changes in strategies, issues such as corruption, inadequate institutional capacity, and insufficient sustainability continue to impede the efficacy of poverty reduction initiatives in Nigeria. The shifts indicate an acknowledgement of the necessity for more lasting and focused interventions; yet, the paper concludes that the overall effectiveness of poverty alleviation efforts has been constrained, as seen by the enduringly high poverty rates in the nation.

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