



## Poverty alleviation and agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa: The Nigerian experience

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### Abstract

Poverty is one of the most important phenomenal issues and unfinished tasks of this century. Poverty, though as old as the history of the world, has assumed multifarious dimensions in recent times; and has therefore attracted stentorian comments as well as several definitional essays. Like wealth, poverty is not shared equally around the world. Income poverty, like poverty, is also not equally shared. There is no gain saying that agricultural growth is a catalyst for broad based economic growth and development in most low-income countries and that economic growth is strongly linked to poverty reduction. Absurd as this may seem, the questions being asked are: Can agriculture reduce poverty? If so, how and under which conditions? Again even if poverty were viewed simply as an issue of material wealth, would it not be naïve to think that agriculture's contribution to reducing poverty should be restricted only to growing more food. Of several other countries in the sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria holds the unenviable record of having about 85 million of her 120 million people living in poverty. To control this scourge, several Nigerian governments have adopted and implemented various poverty alleviation programmers, dating back to the oil boom era of the 1970s and spanning up to the late 2002. Somewhat paradoxically, however, despite the large financial and material resources invested in the various initiatives, the number of the poor in both the rural and urban areas of Nigeria has continued to increase. Poverty is not only about income, but also about access to all basic needs. For this reason, simply growing more food will not reduce poverty. In considering the issue of poverty reduction and agriculture, agriculture should be seen simply as a means to an end, not an end in itself. In devising agriculture sector strategies for poverty alleviation in Nigeria, a combination of Growth First with Poverty First strategies could be most beneficial, but only if the wealth created by growth is channeled appropriately. A stable polity, restoration of public confidence in government and strong bottom-up transaction of the combined growth first and poverty first strategies, supported by progressive lateral transactions are inescapable prerequisites for the people, especially the poor, to participate in an accountable and transparent manner for successful reduction of poverty in Nigeria.

**Key words:** Poverty reduction and agriculture, Sub-Saharan Africa, Nigerian initiatives, Growth first and Poverty first strategies.

### Introduction

Poverty is a phenomenon, as old as the history of the world, but which in recent times has assumed multifarious dimensions. Consequently, the term has attracted stentorian comments as well as several definitional essays, so many of them qualitative and quite a few quantitative. According to Sen <sup>10</sup>, poverty is defined as the lack of certain capabilities such as being able to participate with dignity in the society. Some years later, Lipton and Ravallion <sup>8</sup> and Sen <sup>11</sup> modified the definition as a living condition in which an entity is faced with economic, social, political, cultural and environmental deprivations laced with vulnerability (high risk and low capacity to cope) and powerlessness. Elsewhere, poverty has been defined as the inability of any individual or a family to command sufficient resources to satisfy basic needs <sup>4</sup>; and recently as the threshold level of income needed to satisfy basic minimum food and non-food requirements <sup>2</sup>. Poverty, like many other multidimensional concepts can be defined in relative and absolute terms, providing simple measures of income, which enable comparisons between persons, groups, countries and regions. When it is viewed from absolute poverty perspective, it is seen as a lack of physical minimum requirements for a person or household for existence. On the other hand, relative poverty is comparable, as it refers to a situation where a person or household is with provision of goods and services, which is

lower than that of other persons or group. It is not surprising therefore that in today's economic parlance; poverty has come to be viewed as a situation whereby anybody lives on an income of less than \$1 per day. Whichever way it is viewed, poverty implies inadequate income, malnutrition, and lack of social services, lack of social and political status and lack of self-esteem. It implies also a state of existence of person(s) in conditions of lack of amounts of a specified "medium of exchange" that are too small to provide the basic necessities of life - food, shelter and clothing. A meeting point in the multifarious dimensions of poverty inter-alia is the encompassing definition of poverty as "a state where an individual is not able to cater adequately for his/her basic needs of food, clothing and shelter, etc., meet his/her social and economic obligations; lacks gainful employment, skills, assets and self-esteem, and has limited access to social and economic infrastructure such as education, health, potable water and sanitation, and as result has limited chance(s) of advancing his/her welfare to the limit of his/her capabilities" <sup>3</sup>. According to the International Fund for Agricultural Development report <sup>6</sup>, poverty includes eight elements: material deprivation, lack of assets, isolation, alienation, dependence, lack of decision-making power, vulnerability to external shocks, and insecurity. Several other factors associated with the poverty dimension <sup>2</sup> include poor farmers and small farm systems, the

landless, socioeconomic environment, resource endowments and externalities.

Various pictures have also been painted of the nature, extent and dimensions of poverty. According to Senator Sartaj Aziz, former finance minister of Pakistan and a member of the international advisory committee for IFPRI'S 2020 Vision Initiative, "Poverty is one of the most important unfinished tasks of this century. It is atrocious that there are still over 1 billion people living in poverty, half of them in conditions of extreme poverty, and an estimated 700 million people who lack enough food to eat"<sup>16</sup>. Yet in a lead article, titled "Poverty Reduction and Agriculture"<sup>12</sup>, the descriptions were succinctly put as follows: "Poverty is an insult. Poverty stinks. It demeans, destroys the body and the mind... if not the soul. It is the deadliest form of violence, Mahatma Gandhi asserted earlier this century. Worst of all poverty persists and outlives even the most imaginative strategies to alleviate it"... Further, according to Pinstrup-Andersen and Pandya-Lorch<sup>9</sup>, the extent and depth of poverty in the developing world is a disgrace; and not surprisingly therefore, poverty is the most serious threat to the environment in developing countries: lacking means to appropriately intensify agriculture, the poor are often forced to overuse or misuse the natural resources base to meet their basic needs... Poverty is anti-development and an outcome of anti-development could be poverty. The alleviation of poverty can advance human development and create opportunities for sustainable growth and a better future. Although a world without poverty is a vision, contemporary discourses, debates, policies and efforts appear to have produced a less than adequate thrust to meet the challenges of deprivation and poverty in societies. As we watch the gaunt faces on television, we wonder why, who or what should we blame, and what can be done about poverty? As researchers and policymakers work to answer these questions, they have found that poverty, for most part, is to blame. But poverty is complex, and its solutions lie in its causes, which vary from one locality to another. Only after these causes are examined can solution be developed. This paper is part of the on-going examination of the various dimensions of poverty, the poverty situation in Africa, and the efforts so far directed at alleviating poverty in Nigeria and what could be done to eradicate poverty in the country.

#### **Poverty Lines, Income Poverty around the World and Poverty Trap**

Like wealth, poverty is not shared equally around the world. This fact led to the development of several indices for international comparisons of poverty and the use of various methods of determining incidence, intensity and severity of poverty worldwide<sup>5</sup>. The 'head count' method was popularly used to assess the poverty lines in peoples and nations<sup>2</sup>. This method was, however, not sensitive to changes in the level and distribution of incomes among the poor. Poverty lines have also been determined based on consumption. Consequently, the poverty line set at \$1 a day per person, following the 1985 Purchasing Power Parity as expressed in US\$ - (1985 PPP\$) is used by the World Bank for international comparison. A poverty line of \$2 (1985 PPP\$) a day is suggested for Latin America and the Caribbean. For Eastern Europe communities, a poverty line of \$4 (1985 PPP\$) has been used. For comparison among industrial

countries, a poverty line corresponding to US poverty line of \$14.40 (1985 PPP\$) a day per person has been used. On the other hand, the concept of national poverty lines has been developed by some developing countries employing generally the food poverty method of assessment. These lines indicate insufficiency of economic resources to meet basic minimum need in food. Three major approaches to measuring food poverty include the cost-of-basic-needs method, the food energy method and the food share method. All three approaches are sensitive to the price level used to determine the cost of the bundle; and all three concentrate mainly on calories or dietary energy rather than protein<sup>13</sup>. Income poverty, like poverty, is also not equally shared. According to available global statistics on the problem of poverty, not less than 1.25 billion people (or about 20% of the world's population) live in poverty<sup>16</sup>. Of this, 25% live within the sub-Saharan Africa. In East Asia and the Pacific, economic growth actually reduced the total number of the poor from 182 million in 1985 to 169 million in 1990. Over the same period, in sub-Saharan Africa, the number rose from 184 million to 216 million, which represents half the population. In some countries, declines in average income led to a disproportionate increase in poverty. In Cote D'Ivoire, average per capita income fell by 13% between 1985 and 1988, but the proportion of the poor climbed from 30% to 46%. Nigeria holds the unenviable record of having about 85 million of her 120 million people living in poverty. This is considering the fact that at an official exchange rate of #126 to the dollar; the minimum wage is about \$56 (#7,500) per month for federal government employees and about \$43 (#5,500) for state government employees. Obviously this is far less than the minimum \$1 per day requirement to breast the poverty tape. But income is just one of the many other factors that aggravate poverty. Access to education, housing, health, safe drinking water, sanitation, and a clean environment cannot be excluded and this is why Nigeria is caught in the poverty trap<sup>13</sup>.

#### **Poverty Reduction and Agriculture**

There is no gain saying that agricultural growth is a catalyst for broad based economic growth and development in most low-income countries. Agriculture's linkages to the non-farm sector alone generate considerable employment, income and growth in the rest of any economy. In fact very few countries have experienced rapid economic growth without agricultural growth either preceding or accompanying it. Economic growth is strongly linked to poverty reduction. However, agriculture is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Agriculture is simply humanity's way of meeting its nutritional needs. Yet, agriculture has grown into an economic activity that has become so distorted that as Mahatma Gandhi would have said, it meets some people's greed but not everyone's need. As a result most efforts have been focused on bolstering agriculture itself. But even if robust agricultural growth rates are achieved, it can be argued that, farming alone cannot support and sustain the rising number of young people who each year join Africa's rural labour forces. Absurd as this may seem, the question being asked is: Can agriculture reduce poverty? If so, how? Again even if poverty was viewed simply as an issue of material wealth, it would be naïve to think that agriculture's contribution to reducing poverty is restricted to growing more food. Obviously, it is imperative to grow more food, and fast, because food production in most

sub-Saharan countries grows at such slower rate than their populations. But, it is not just a question of what to do, but how to do it and under which conditions?

### **Rural Poverty and Agriculture**

Poverty is a rural dilemma and continues to be a persistent multidimensional complex. Most of the world's poor are rural-based, suggestive of traditional or primary societies; or people living in the countryside, which may be remote, or isolated by any imaginable geographical description. Rural poverty is common in most of the developing world, especially in the low-income developing countries. The rural poor make up more than 75% of the poor in many sub-Saharan African and Asian countries. Latin America's high urbanization rates have led to a higher prevalence of urban poverty, but even in that region the majority of the poor are rural-based. In rural communities, amenities and other infrastructure such as medical facilities, pipe-borne water, and electricity are simply not there, and where they exist, they are in a deplorable state of disrepair. Rural roads are usually rough and narrow making it almost impossible for vehicular movements of any kind and completely difficult to ply during the rainy seasons. Hospitals are nonexistent, and even where a few are found, they are usually grossly ill equipped and basic health facilities are completely lacking. The lack of basic life pleasing facilities in rural areas makes the place very unattractive. Public personnel, medical personnel and school personnel out-rightly reject postings to the rural areas. The few who accept such postings because of the absence of sovereignty of choice, exhibit high level of disenchantment penchant for truancy. The effects are that the sick die in their numbers untreated, and pupils and students from rural schools are usually intellectually poor and backward in both oral and written test in most subjects in public examinations. These show the level of detestability of rural areas compared with the urban areas. Most of the world's poor are rural-based dwellers whose main occupation is subsistence farming, and even when they are not engaged directly in their own agricultural activities, they rely on non-farm employment and income that depend in one way or another on agriculture. Such non-farm activities are important and span a wide range of activities. Women often engage in food processing, cloth dyeing, weaving, baking, pottery making, hair-dressing, retail trading, while men predominate as blacksmiths, carpenters, leatherworkers and repairers of simple farm tools including bicycles and wheel barrows. Such non-farm activities serve to boost households' cash income and may be more important than commonly thought.

### **The "Grow More Food" Logic and the Challenge**

Matter-of-factly, agricultural growth is the key to poverty alleviation in low-income developing countries. Very few countries have in real terms experienced rapid agricultural growth without agricultural growth either preceding or accompanying it. The foregoing facts have actually given credence to the "grow more food" paradigm. Elizabeth Dowdeswell, Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), explains the conditions: "Humankind's traditional endeavour throughout history has been to coax more food from the earth. The logic has been that if we bring more land under the plough, intensify labour and refine techniques, the supply of food will grow

commensurately. But this logic of mankind has not been the logic of the environment. The losses of biodiversity, salinization, soil erosion and desertification have all gradually reduced the productive capacity of agricultural lands. In some cases these processes have been irreversible. Every ton of fertile topsoil washed away, every hectare of land claimed by desert sands, every reservoir filled with silt, further drains world productivity and spells higher costs for future increases in output." In other words, the "Grow! Grow!" logic has made the future even more expensive.

As stakeholders, our tasks today should be (a) to prove that agriculture is the key to poverty alleviation, (b) to show that investments in agricultural research and technological improvements are crucial to increased agricultural productivity and returns to farmers and farm labour, thereby reducing poverty and meeting future food needs at reasonable prices without irreversible degradation of the natural resource base, and (c) to design "win-win" agricultural policies that are not disadvantageous to any one, provide sustainable food security, and reduce poverty. These are the enormous challenges posed by a world whose grain reserves are estimated as being secure for less than 50 days, and whose population of poor people is growing by more than 150,000 each day. They are also the challenges compounded by the situation in the sub-Saharan Africa where there are only 42 agricultural researchers per million economically active persons in agriculture compared with 2,458 in industrialized countries, and where poor funding has stifled agricultural research and technology-development to a halt and most importantly where overall agricultural policies are not only mostly the top-down oriented, but also more often honoured in breach than in observance. The questions again are "why and how do we approach the problem of poverty through agriculture?" Pinstrup-Andersen and Panda-Lorch<sup>9</sup> posit that agricultural growth and development must be vigorously pursued in low-income developing countries for at least four reasons: (a) to alleviate poverty through employment creation and income generation in rural areas; (b) to meet growing food needs driven by rapid population growth and urbanization; (c) to stimulate overall economic growth, given that agriculture is the most viable lead sector for growth and development in many low-income developing countries; and (d) to conserve natural resources. Poverty is the most serious threat to the environment in developing countries where, owing to lack of means to appropriately intensify agriculture, the poor are often forced to overuse or misuse the natural resource base to meet basic needs. Agriculture must be in the forefront of the national and international agenda to eradicate poverty in low-income developing countries, as failure to significantly expand agricultural research in the country and failure to invest in agricultural development will contribute to making the poverty alleviation initiatives of the Nigerian governments elusive and white elephant projects.

### **Poverty in Africa and the Paradox of Plenty in Nigeria**

Poverty is a comprehensive socio-economic virus that constitutes one of the greatest afflictions of mankind. Generally in Africa and in Nigeria, poverty appears endemic and at least its reduction has remained an inextricable part of the policy and development process. The World Bank<sup>17</sup> reported that sub-Saharan Africa was

the world's poorest region in the context of both real income and access to social services and that about 45% of the approximately 590 million people live below poverty line, the minimum level necessary to meet basic individual needs. In 1993, it was estimated that 40% of the people lived on less than one United States dollar per day and that at least 59% of the poor lived in five East-African countries and Nigeria. In pressing for urgent action, the United Nation's International Fund for Agricultural Development<sup>6</sup> maintained that standard poverty-reduction strategies, such as structural adjustment programmes and trickle-down economics, which regard the poor as passive beneficiaries of eventual economic success, have been a striking failure. This is because they have often channeled resources to urban areas and large producers, viewing aid to the poor people and small farmers as costly acts of charity. Somewhat ironically, it has been the negative and devastating impact of the structural adjustment programmes on the majority of the people in general and on the poor in particular that has necessitated the focus of attention put on alleviation of poverty in the region. Countries such as Ghana had to introduce a special programme of action to mitigate the Social Cost of Adjustment (PASCAD), while Uganda had to put in place the programme for the alleviation of poverty and the social costs of adjustment (PAPSCAD). All the above special programmers testify to the conspicuous failures of the so-called 'trickle-down' economics.

Nigeria is indisputably an agrarian nation as more than 70% of her population are involved and earn their livelihood directly or indirectly from agriculture and agro-allied activities. The agricultural sector, therefore, remains a pivotal factor in the nation's economy, sharing a special relationship with the rest of the economy - industry, manufacture, construction, energy, transportation and other services, including educational services. Before 1960, Nigerian agriculture was basically intended to be of colonial pattern - geared towards the export of raw materials to the metropolitan capitalist countries and the import of manufacture goods - and so it was. The exports were produced in individual peasant farms using primitive tools and methods or produced in expatriate capitalist cash-crop plantations. Somewhat paradoxically, today, Nigeria still suffers from the hangover of yester-years colonization, since it still depends essentially on individual small-scale peasant farming for export goods and for meeting internal raw material needs of essentially foreign firms or multi-purpose companies.

Ordinarily, Nigerians should have no business with poverty, on the premise that ours is a country of the lush, the plush and the lavish. But the truth is that as far as wealth is concerned, Nigeria is a paradox. At a glance, the Human Development Report (HDR) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) shows that Nigeria is at the 151<sup>st</sup> position out of 174 countries surveyed for the annual Human Development Index (HDI), making Nigeria about the 25<sup>th</sup> poorest nation in the world<sup>14</sup>. By the year 2004, two years later, Nigeria moved only three steps to the 154<sup>th</sup> position<sup>15</sup>, still a very precarious position among the poorest nations. By these reports in which the Nigerian nation fared worse than low-income countries like Madagascar, Togo, Sudan, Cameroon, Kenya, Namibia and Gabon, Nigerians constitute a significant proportion of the most impoverished humans in the world. This points to the fact that poverty is a serious challenge in Nigeria today with very serious implications

for social, political and economic development. Statistics from the United Nations further reveal that about 55 million Nigerians (48% of the population) live below poverty line (at less than \$1 per day). Worse still, over 20 million Nigerians (16.2% of the population) constitute the core poor who are faced with the economic condition in which they lack sufficient income to obtain minimal levels of the essentials of life such as health services, food, housing, clothing, education and other things necessary to guarantee good standard of life<sup>16</sup>. Admittedly, there are wealthy Nigerians whose level of opulence and affluence is so high that they can afford to be profligate, yet it is undeniable that everywhere one turns in the country today, there is hunger, joblessness, crime, ignorance, high infant and maternal mortality, generally low life expectancy and other indices of poverty. From the elderly to single mothers and their children, poverty breeds poverty. From the disabled and their dependents to the able-bodied with very large families or families in which the principal wage earner is either unemployed or works for low wages or others with lower-than-average ability to earn income, poverty has not only become a way of life but a handicap passed from one generation to another. Is it surprising, therefore, that the euphoria of the early 1960s, when Nigeria gained independence, has since given way to a more or less persistent gloomy picture of the nation's immediate or future prospects for significant alleviation (or reduction) of poverty by simply growing more food?

#### **Programmes of Nigerian Governments on Poverty Alleviation (1970-2000)**

In Nigeria, poverty and its excruciating impact are pervasive and palpable on the people, especially the rural dwellers. With the projections made by the World Bank that poverty in Nigeria will increase by two-thirds, with the possibility of 60% of the population living below the poverty line in ten years, the Government of Nigeria adopted the concept of poverty alleviation as a major thrust of its annual budgets since 1996. At the same time, it entrenched this focus as a long-term development objective in the National Rolling Plan. The government also intends to pursue the goal of reducing poverty by 40 to 20% as against the current level of 60%. In order to raise the standard of living of the people and instill in the poor people some sense of belonging, several Nigerian governments have adopted and implemented various poverty alleviation programmers, dating back to the oil boom era of the 1970s and spanning up to the late 2002 (Table 1). The National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), which commenced in the year 2000, is briefly discussed here (but not evaluated) for emphasis. The overriding objective of NAPEP was to eradicate absolute poverty in Nigeria by the year 2010. The philosophy behind this target is based on the commonly accepted socio-economic profile of Nigerians, which indicates that about 70% of Nigerian live below the poverty line and live in the rural areas. NAPEP was therefore viewed as a direct response to the goals and targets enunciated in the National Policy on Poverty Alleviation. The four-year targets of NAPEP were identified as follows: (a) increasing adult literacy from then current 51 to 70% by 2003; (b) provision of primary health care from then current 40 to 70% by the year 2003; (c) provision of free medical treatment for the diseases of the poor by year 2000; (d) training and settlement of at least 50% of graduates of tertiary institutions

**Table 1.** Institutional initiatives of federal government on poverty alleviation (1970-2000).

Federal agency/institution	Responsibilities
The operation feed the nation programme (renamed Green revolution)	Participatory cultivation of food by all for increased food.
The universal primary education scheme	Provision of basic primary education for all Nigerians
The low cost housing schemes	Provision of basic shelter requirements for all Nigerians.
The rural banking schemes	Taking banking services and credit to the rural areas.
The directorate of foods, roads and rural infrastructures(DIFRRI)	Responsible for financing construction and rehabilitation of rural infrastructure (roads, water supply, earth dams and rural electrification).
The National Directorate of Employment (NDE)	Responsible for vocational skills development and small scale enterprises programmers designed to combat unemployment.
The National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA)	To encourage smallholder farmers to bring more land under cultivation and thereby improve agricultural output.
River Basin Development Authorities (RBDA's)	To raise agricultural productivity as well as the living standards of the rural areas.
Strategic Grains Reserves Programme (SGRP)	To achieve stable prices for food grains, storing and releasing them from during off-seasons and emergencies.
Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs)	To stimulate increased food production and enhance income of the rural population.
Mass Mobilization for Social and Economic Reconstruction (MAMSER)	To encourage the participation of rural people in their development.
National Economic Reconstruction Fund (NERFUND)	Provides long-term loan at concessionary interest rates to promote small and medium scale industrial projects.
Community Action Programme for Poverty Alleviation (CAPPA)	Improvement of the living conditions, productivity and nutritional status of the poor people through food security and health practices.
Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP)	Established to complement CAPPA above.
Peoples' Bank and Community Bank Programmes	To make banking services more accessible and extend credit to the poor.
Better life Programme/ Family Support Programme	Alleviation of rural poverty, particularly among women.
Primary Health Care Scheme	Providing at least one health center in every local government area.
Expanded Programme of Immunization	Immunization for infants (BCG,DPT 3, OPV 3, etc) and for pregnant women (Tetanus toxoid).
The nomadic Education Programme	Making primary education available to nomadic children, while sustaining pastoralism as an occupation.
National Urban Mass Transit Programme	To ease problem of transport congestion for workers in the urban centers.
Oil and Mineral Producing Areas Development Committee (OMPADEC)	Providing special aid to the oil-producing areas.
Social Development Programme for Disadvantaged Group	Rehabilitation programmers for the disabled, beggars, children, the aged and juvenile delinquents.
The National Poverty Alleviation Programme (NAPEP)	For Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES), Rural Infrastructures Development Scheme (RIDS), social Welfare Services Schemes (SOWESS), Natural Resources Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS).

**Table 2.** Main and sub-component schemes of the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP).

The Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES)	Capacity Acquisition Programme (CAP) Mandatory Attachment Programme (MAP) Micro-credit Programme (MCP)
The Rural Infrastructures Development Scheme (RIDS)	Rural Transport Programme (RTP) Rural Energy Programme (REP) Rural Water Programme (RWPS) Rural Communications Programme (RCP)
Social Welfare Services Scheme (SOWESS)	Special Education Programme (SEP) Primary Healthcare Programme (PHP) Social Services Programme (SSP)
Natural Resources Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS)	Agricultural Resources Programme (ARF) Water Resources Programme (WRP) Solid Mineral Resources Programme (SMRP) Environmental Protection Programme (EPP)

**Table 3.** Proposed principles and actions for poverty reduction in sub-Saharan Africa.

A. Core principles
Poverty reduction is good economics and good politics. It must therefore be at the heart of any economic and social development strategy.
Government commitment is essential for reducing poverty.
Economic growth is necessary, but not sufficient, for reducing poverty in the long run.
Improvement of human capital should be part of any programme.
Design and implementation of efforts to reduce poverty must be guided by the needs of the poor as identified by the poor.
Poverty is a gender issue because women are particularly vulnerable to the social and economic effects of poverty.
Poverty is also an environmental issue because it can lead to resource degradation.
B. Actions by governments
Governments should demonstrate their commitment to poverty reduction through public statements and actions and through ownership of the policies and strategies for reducing poverty. This commitment could take many forms, depending on country circumstances, but the following actions are among the most important:
-Foster efficient macroeconomic and sectoral policies for sustained growth and poverty reduction.
-Establish a forum for poverty reduction at which stakeholders discuss, evaluate, and coordinate efforts to reduce poverty. In particular, establish opportunities for listening to the poor. Such a forum should lead the dialogue with government departments and donors in designing and implementing a strategy for reducing poverty.
-Carry out regular reviews of public expenditure as a basis for a pro-poor public investment programme that can be supported by donors.
-Shift actual expenditures on social services from urban to rural areas.
-Decentralize government decision-making, especially on public expenditures; promote community participation in the design, implementation and monitoring of programmers that are essential for successfully reducing poverty.
-Monitoring poverty to assess the difficulties faced by both men and women and to evaluate the progress being made.

Source: United Nations Development Programme.

then estimated at 130,000 per annum; (e) improved job creation and access to income and (f) provision of micro-credit etc. NAPEP had four main components (each with three or four sub-components), which were all designed for the interest of the poor (Table 2). The listed programmes cut across almost every sector; while some dealt with food and agricultural production, others were devoted to mass mobilization of the populace, participation in national development and skills development for self actualization and self reliance. A good number of the above national initiatives and programmers had at their disposal large sums of seed-money or take-off grants, but these monies were either misused or misappropriated. Some were even “wasted”. The Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), which for example, had an initial total sum of #7.0 billion from crude oil proceeds, did not make any appreciable impact on the poverty and unemployment landscape of Nigeria. Similarly, the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) of the Obasanjo civilian regime (1999-2007), the precursor to the present NAPEP, started with an initial fund of #10 billion from government coffers, but the impact is yet to be felt.

From the foregoing measures it could be seen that Nigeria is not short of strategies, policies and programmers for alleviating poverty, nor even of rhetorics (poverty reduction, poverty alleviation, poverty eradication, etc.) about the imperative of poverty phenomenon. Somewhat paradoxically, however, despite the large financial and material resources invested in the various initiatives, the number of the poor in both the rural and urban areas of Nigeria have continued to increase and with the spiraling inflationary trends the rich continues to get richer while the poor became poorer daily. No one any longer disputes the statement that “the structural adjustment measures of the various Nigerian governments have, on the whole, resulted in deteriorating economic and social conditions of millions of Nigerians, as they have for the people of many other African countries that have implemented similar programmers.” The question now is “Why this paradox”. What is difficult to see is the actual contribution of the various programmers of the governments to the poverty question?

Perhaps the greatest flaw in nearly all the programmers has been the “in-built rhetorics” in the various strategies. In most of the programmes, the formulation, development, and the implementation of measures are executed exclusively by government officials who, on paper put the poverty-stricken rural dwellers as target-beneficiaries, but in their minds and practice, themselves as target beneficiaries. In other words, the formulation, development and implementation of the strategies are usually non-inclusive of the target-beneficiaries. Where, exceptionally, programmes and strategies are focused on the poor, they are, more often than not, vague and generalized in terms of implementers and methods of operations; usually providing lee ways for maneuvering and manipulations by the government officials. Once funds are released, the officials descend on the funds, requesting for all sorts of operational facilities, ranging from additional official and domestic cars, vehicles, air-conditioners, new furniture to office materials such as wash-hand towels and office pins, all at inflated price quotations. Unrestricted advances are requested to enable officers undertake tours, even their home communities to identify potential beneficiaries, to organize workshops on why, what and how of

the implementation of programme objectives as if the government officials are missionaries.

A second problem with most of the poverty alleviation strategies is their “top-down design and method of operation”. Nearly all the strategies are usually top-down federal government-initiated rather than bottom-up community-based effort in which the target people not only play a central role in putting them together but are also pivotal in their implementation. When the federal authorities have taken all the initiatives, the state and local government officials were usually reduced to mere implementing “labour” rather than “partners”. Even where the state and local government officers are recognized as “partners” their areas of maneuver were extremely limited, as autonomous federal agencies manned by people with limited relevant experiences were usually immediately ‘contracted’ to execute tasks. The third major flaw is that of imposition of poverty alleviation policies on the perceived beneficiaries. The involvement and participation of the supposed beneficiaries both in the designing, planning and implementation of programmers were usually ignored. Because of the above reason, the poverty alleviation programmers are perceived by the unassuming public as being anti-poor, as the strategies have not only been designed at levels far removed from the people or the poor but that they have also been executed by contractors or government mercenaries with little or no involvement of the local communities. And worse still, so many of the projects, usually shoddily executed, suffered frequent breakdowns no sooner than they were commissioned.

#### **Considerations and the Way Forward**

Poverty is not only about income, but also about access to all basic needs. For this reason, simply growing more food will not reduce poverty. In considering the issue of poverty reduction and agriculture, agriculture should be seen simply as a means to an end, not an end in itself. Again, agriculture should be seen simply as humanity’s way of meeting its nutritional needs, not all humanity’s needs. Nevertheless, in poverty alleviation, as in the overall economy of any nation, agriculture has very crucial roles to play. For the Nigeria’s growing economy, Amalu <sup>1</sup> reported that agriculture provides more than 70% of the food requirements of the population and the major source of livelihood, generating employment for more than 70% of the labour force. It also creates markets for suppliers of industrial products, equipment, other goods and services sold to agricultural workers. It supplies adequate raw materials for the growing industrial sector. It generates substantial foreign exchange earnings from exports products. It provides the main source of substantial monetary savings, which both farmers and banks could readily mobilize for investment.

The persistence of poverty in Nigeria, it is evident, is not the absence of sound and effective policies and programmers or strategies aimed at its reduction; it is rather the result of the improper blending of policies and combination of strategies. The most effective blend of policies or combination of strategies for poverty alleviation will always depend on local factors and follow some basic principles (Table 3). Suggestions have been made <sup>12</sup>, that where poverty is concentrated amongst the landless, there should be a combination of policies for absorbing labour, for helping poor households diversify their livelihoods, and, some

might add, for land reform. Where poverty is among smallholders, policies should maximize small-scale strategies. Then again, where poverty is largely urban, the policies should address the need for cheap food supply. Some concerns are common to all: priority should be given to households headed by women; environmental losses should not be tolerated. In devising agriculture sector strategies for poverty alleviation in Nigeria, three main strategies are possible: (a) the Food First strategy, which concentrates on maximizing food output in the short term, at the expense of cash crops or long-term research options; (b) the Growth First strategy, which focuses on high-return crops, whether food or other crops and (c) the Poverty First strategy, which enables poor people to acquire food through production, price regulation, and income generation. The food first approach would probably have the least impact on poverty and be short-lived. Poverty First approach could protect the poor and empower them in that order. A combination of Growth First with Poverty First strategies could be most beneficial, but only if the wealth created by growth is channeled appropriately<sup>12</sup>.

The four major schemes of NAPEP (Table 2), comprising agricultural growth initiatives, public-sector investments, poverty reduction and natural resource protection measures seem to have been informed by “the combination strategy”. For Nigeria and her people, only a little more commitment in implementation and more effective applications of the lessons already learned (if any?) in the first four-year (2000-2004) implementation of NAPEP schemes will ensure as well as justify the effectiveness and efficacy of the combination strategy. But tough policy measures will also be required for poverty alleviation strategies to succeed. First and foremost, the opening up of the political process to accommodate freedom of opinion, tolerate differences and search for consensus on issues and policies is an imperative for a successful realization of programmes for poverty alleviation (Table 3). Growth must be made pro-poor. Policymakers must reach the poor directly, by investing in health, nutrition and education. For the poor to participate in growth, land must be distributed relatively equitably; agricultural research must focus on the problems of small farmers as well as large; new technologies must be scale-neutral and profitable for all farm sizes. Efficient input, credit, and products markets must ensure that all farms have access to needed modern farm inputs and receive similar prices for their products. The labour force must be able to migrate or diversify into rural non-farm activities; and policies must not discriminate against agriculture in general and small farms in particular. A second imperative is the restoration of public confidence in the ability of government to deliver promptly and unfailingly whatever it promises as well as the return of government to the long-established culture of making its budgets practicable and operational rather than utopian instruments, honoured more in the breach than in observance. Finally, government must strive, once again, to make its transactions transparent and accountable with the budgets as its effective tool for social engineering and instrument for providing public services. Strong bottom-up transaction of the combined growth first and poverty first strategies, supported by progressive lateral transactions (between and among government agencies, non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, informal sector, etc.) are inescapable prerequisites for the people, especially the poor, to participate in an accountable and

transparent manner for successful reduction of poverty in Nigeria. The Nigerian society has by now accumulated sufficient experience and wisdom, over so many years, to know that if these premises are not taken into consideration, then we shall all continue to be spectators, or even players, in the collapse of hopes of helpless Nigerians and their replacement by failures of unimaginable proportions.

## References

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