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**Examination of Poverty Menace in Nigeria**

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**ABSTRACT**

Nigeria is a country faced with enormous challenges of which the issue of poverty is one of them. GDP per capita in Nigeria was among the in the world during the 1980s and 1990s, costing its decades of development. Annual GDP per capita remained stagnant in the 1990s, and it grew just 2.2 % between 1999 and 2003- far lower than the 4.2 percent per capita growth needed to significantly reduce poverty in the country. With GDP of about \$45 billion in 2001 and per capita income of about \$300 a year, Nigeria has become one of the poorest countries in the world. The growing incidence and the dynamics of poverty in Nigeria have stratified and polarized Nigerian society between the haves and the haves not, between the north and the south, between the educated and the uneducated, male and female, urban and rural etc To address the issue, different policy measures have been put in place by both government and non-governmental organizations through initiation and implementation of poverty alleviation programs.

**Key words:** poverty, poverty alleviation, economic growth, Nigeria.

**INTRODUCTION**

Nigeria is a developing country faced with multi-dimensional challenges ranging from high rate of poverty, unemployment, violence and insecurity of life and properties to high mortality rate, hunger, malnutrition, child labour/ child abuse, rapid population growth and what of you. Chamber (1995), sees poverty as lack of necessary physical assets and income. He went further to state that poverty is a sub-set of the general condition of deprivation whose dimensions include social inferiority, isolation, physical weakness, vulnerability, powerlessness, and humiliation. Therefore, it is not difficult to recognize the poor, as they are those who are unable to obtain adequate income, find stable job, own property, have decent shelter, or maintain healthy conditions of living. They also lack adequate level of education and cannot satisfy all their health needs. Thus, the poor are often illiterates, in poor health condition, and have short life span, (World Bank, 1995). They also lack skills and have very few or no economic assets, (Olayemi 1995). The poor often lacks the capacity to escape from his situation by himself. This characteristic is what causes the social conditions of extreme poverty to persist and to be transmitted from one generation to another.

Using World Bank definition of the dollar per day, as of September 2013, about 1.2 billion people are living in extreme poverty across the globe (World Bank, 2013). Since mid-1990s, there has been a steady decline in both the worldwide poverty rate and the total number of extreme poor. In 1990, the percentage of the global population living in extreme poverty was 43.1% but in 2010, it was found to be 20.6% (USAID,2013). This reduction in extreme poverty took place most notably in *China, Indonesia, India, Pakistan and Vietnam*. These five countries accounted for the alleviation of 715 million people out of extreme poverty between 1990 and 2010 which is more than the global net total of roughly 700 million (UN, 2013). However, the number of people living in extreme poverty rose from 290 million to 414 million over the same period. This halving of the extreme poverty rate falls in line with the first Millennium Development Goal (MDG1) proposed by the former UN-Sectary General Kofi Annan, who called on the international community to “ halve the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015”(Annan,2000). He further explained that while there have been improvement in extreme poverty reduction across the world; poverty rate remained high in other countries especially in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

## CONCEPTUALIZATION

Poverty is a very complex phenomenon that is multidimensional in nature. It goes beyond economic spheres and includes ones inability to participate in political and social life. It affects people in various depths and levels, at different times and phases of existence (Oyeyomi, 2003). The multidimensionality of poverty has been stressed and succinctly expressed in the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development in the following manner:

“Poverty has various manifestations, including:

- (i) lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihoods;
- (ii) hunger and malnutrition;
- (iii) ill health;
- (iv) limited or lack of access to education and other basic services;
- (v) increased morbidity and mortality from illness
- (vi) homelessness and inadequate housing;
- (vii) unsafe environments; and social discrimination and exclusion
- (viii) lack of participation and exclusion.
- (ix) lack of participation in decision-making and in civil, social and cultural life”,(World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 1995).

Apparently, the multidimensional nature of poverty is what has given rise to the plurality of definitions and for now; the conceptualization of definition of poverty is still in progress.

The first conceptual approach to poverty is expressed in terms of household income or consumption. By this definition, people are considered poor if and only if they do not have sufficient income to enjoy a certain level of well-being. In the operational sense, a person is considered poor if his income or consumption is below a predetermined poverty line, which will be explained shortly.

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Another definition, developed by UNICEF identifies certain basic needs, such as food, clothing and shelter that must absolutely be fulfilled to keep people out of poverty. Poverty, in this sense, is defined as deprivation in the material requirements for minimally acceptable fulfillment of human needs, including food. This deprivational concept goes far beyond a lack of private income: it includes the need for basic health and education and essential services that must be provided by the society to prevent people from falling into poverty.

According to Awosika (2001), “poverty is not just a word; it is a way of life. It is multi-dimensional and multi-directional. It is about joblessness, intellectual deprivation, powerlessness, denial of human rights and uncertainty” It is complex and cannot be wished away by executive or administrative fiat. Tackling it therefore requires objective analysis of the various phases of the phenomenon, and the strategies mapped out to tackle it must take into consideration the structural and fundamental issues involved. According to World Bank, poverty is an economic condition in which individual lacks sufficient income to obtain certain minimal levels of health services, food, housing, clothing and education generally recognized as necessary to ensure adequate standard of living. Thus, it can be seen as a pronounced deprivation in well-being which takes many dimensions. It also includes low income and inability to acquire the basic goods and services necessary for survival with dignity. Poverty also encompasses low levels of health and education, poor access to clean water and sanitation, inadequate physical security, lack of resources and insufficient capacity and opportunity to better ones life. While according to United Nations, poverty is the inability of getting choices and opportunities as well as the violation of human dignity. It therefore means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in the society. It also means not having enough to feed a school or clinic to go to; not having the land on which to grow ones food or job to earn ones living and not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, householders and communities. It also means susceptibility to violence, fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation.

In most cases, poverty is defined either in absolute or relative terms. Absolute poverty measures poverty in relation to the amount of income that is necessary to meet the basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter. Hence, the concept of absolute poverty is not concerned with broader quality of life issues with the overall level of inequality in the society. The concept therefore fails to recognize that individual have important social and cultural needs. This and other criticism, led to the development of the concept of relative poverty.

Relative poverty views poverty in relation to the economic status of other members of the society; people are poor if they fall below prevailing standards of living in a given societal context. An important criticism of both concepts is that they are largely concerned with income and consumption. Thus, the concept of social exclusion emerged largely in reaction to this type of narrow definitions of poverty. It has contributed significantly towards including multi-faceted indicators of ill-being into the conceptual understanding of poverty. To further develop the definition of the concept of relative poverty, or relative deprivation, three perspectives are relevant; the income perspective, the basic needs perspective and the capacity perspective. The income perspective indicates that a person is poor only if his or her income is below the

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country's poverty line (define in terms of having income sufficient for a specified amount of food), the basic needs perspective goes beyond the income perspective to include the need for provision of the basic social services necessary to prevent individuals from falling into poverty; and finally the capability or empowerment perspective suggest that poverty signifies lack of some basic capability to function well in the society.

Social scientists' understanding of poverty on the other hand, is critical of the economic idea of free choice models where individuals control their own poverty rather than being interested in its measurement. Sociologists generally study the reasons for poverty such as the roles of culture, power, social structure and other factors largely out of the control of the individual. Accordingly, the multidimensional nature of poverty in particular social aspects such as poor housing, poor health and educational services need to be understood first in order to create more effective programmes for poverty alleviation. Hypothesis that typically play a role in sociological theories of poverty are based on the idea that individuals are influenced by the physical and cultural context in which they live, and it gives importance to gender and household structure. Thus, one cannot consider only the economic part of poverty because poverty is also social, political and cultural. Moreover, it is considered to undermine human rights – economic (the right to work and have an adequate income), social (access to healthcare and educational services), political (freedom of thought, expression and association) and cultural (the right to maintain one's cultural identity and be involved in a community's cultural life).

### **CAUSES OF POVERTY**

There are several causes of poverty; however, the basic ones are as follows:

- (i) Inadequate access to employment opportunities: unemployment is a major cause of poverty because gainful employment is important for individual to earn income and escape from poverty. When majority of the members of any given society are not employed, poverty will be the end result because poverty and unemployment are closely related.
- (ii) Corruption also serves as a cause of poverty in a country. According to World Bank corruption is the abuse of public office for private gain. When there is high level of corruption in a country, incidence of poverty will be high also and many people would be affected by poverty.
- (iii) Poor governance is another possible cause of poverty. This is when government has failed to discharge its basic responsibility of providing social services like health care and education services, water supply, good transport system and security to lives and properties to its people.
- (iv) Natural disaster like earth quake, flooding and drought could also result to poverty. When these calamities occur, people living in the affected areas would be subjected into poverty. For example, whenever drought or flooding occurs, the productivity of the agricultural sector would be affected which in turn would lead to scarcity or shortage of food supply in the affected area and other areas that get their supply of food commodities from the affected area.
- (v) Poverty would also occur as a result of overpopulation, a situation used to be characterized by large size of population with small or little economic resources that can be used to take care of the population.
- (vi) Poor distribution of societal resources is another cause of poverty. When income and other resources are not fairly distributed among members of the society, inequality would be inevitable

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and those who are not favoured in the distribution process would be poor because they would have access to very little resources.

Still on the causes of poverty, Johnson (1974) came up with two conceptual sources namely: - Factors that make the number of individuals in the consuming units, larger in relation to the amount of productive services the unit is able to supply i.e. when there is excessive family size in relation to income. And factors which make the value of the productive services the household can supply low relative to the household needs or physical incapacity and discrimination in terms of age, sex or race.

The Federal Office of Statistics' Social and Economic Profile of Nigeria 1996 includes the following as causes of poverty in Nigeria: inadequate access to market for the good and services that the poor can sell, inadequate access to education, health, sanitation and water services and the destruction of natural resource endowments which leads to reduced productivity of the agriculture and fisheries. Obadan (1997) has identified many factors as the causes of poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa which include: Inadequate access to employment opportunities, inadequate physical assets such as land, capital and minerals, lack of access by the poor to credit facilities even on small-scale basis, low endowments of human capital and inadequate access to assistance for those living at the margin and those victimized by transitory poverty.

Gbosi (1998) observed five causes of poverty which include bad educational planning, bad economic policies, global economic crisis, rapid population growth and political instability.

The CBN poverty assessment and alleviation study (1999) summarized the causative factors of poverty as the stage of economic and social development: even when a country's export earnings is abundant, situation of economic underdevelopment might pose a constraints on absorptive capacity or use of funds for developmental projects which are either not available or not properly designed. These factors include:

(i) Low productivity: in this case, the consuming unit (individual households) is unable to earn enough income which will enhance them to maintain adequate living standards. This would result from the low initialization or low acquisition of human skills due to low education, poor health or physical incapacity and inadequate access to productive assets which lead to unemployment and underemployment. Market imperfections: these are factors which through institutional distortions would not allow equal access and introduce form of discrimination that prevent the advancement of people. These factors could arise from ignorance, culture, sex, race and so on. Market imperfections also arise from distortions in the employment (labour) market, and skewed income distribution structure that favours some classes in the society and renders the less favoured class poor.

(ii) Structural shift in the economy: This results from inadequate macroeconomic management policies in which undue concentration is given to a particular sector of the economy to almost total neglect of others. In Nigeria's case, from independence (1960-1970), her major export commodities were cocoa, palm produce, rubber and groundnut (agricultural goods) which provide jobs for rural poor. But during 1970's, Nigeria's structural shift occurred in favour of crude oil due to its greater foreign exchange earnings. As such, the country becomes a mono-

export country such that agriculture suffered a setback and mass poverty becomes the lot of the rural sector.

(iii) Political instability: failure to successfully actualize political transition programmes results in social and economic unrest within the economy of the effected country. Thus productive ventures are unable to flourish on that economy with a restricted investments and insecure jobs and the general citizenry would face economic insecurity.

(iv) Corruption: in an attempt to measure corruption, a non-governmental organization – Transparency International developed the perception of corruption in the countries of the world on a scale of 1-10, where a score of 10 implies that a country is free of corruption, and a score of 1 implies that a country is completely corrupt in terms of its damaging impact on human development. Corruption here means the “rush to share the national cake” in which public funds are collected and spent inefficiently for no particular purpose except to reward its recipients.

## **MEASURES AND INDICATORS OF POVERTY IN NIGERIA**

Economists have differed as to whether poverty should be measured in absolute sense. In this case, they defined poverty as a condition in which income level of an individual falls below some fixed minimum income or consumption level; or whether it should be defined in relative terms, so that poverty means inability to afford what average people have. Poverty line is a basic measure and an instrument for identifying and measuring income poverty. It is defined as an arbitrary income measure, usually expressed in constant dollar (e.g. \$1 per day), used as a basis for estimating the proportion of a country’s population that exists at bare level of subsistence. Based on household income or consumption, poverty lines quantify absolute poverty in monetary terms and characterize people in terms of their monetary income or consumption, particularly of food. Thus, a poverty line is just a cut-off line (or threshold) used to distinguish between “poor” and “non-poor” households

Setting a poverty line permits the calculation of the following poverty indicators:

- (i) poverty rate or incidence of poverty;
- (ii) depth of poverty or poverty gap;
- (iii) severity of poverty.

The poverty rate or incidence of poverty is simply an estimate of the percentage of people living below the poverty line. The depth of poverty is measured as the average distance below the poverty line, expressed as a percentage of that line. It is also called the poverty gap as it shows the average distance of the poor from the poverty line. The severity of poverty is measured as a weighted average of the squared distance below the poverty line, expressed as a percentage of that line. The weights are usually given by each individual gap. Since the weights increase with poverty, this measure is sensitive to inequalities among the poor. One final measure of poverty, credited to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in its 1997 Human Development Report, was introduced against the background of dissatisfaction with the dollar per day. As articulated in the Report. “Poverty has many faces. It is much more than low income. It also reflects poor health and education, deprivation in knowledge and communication, inability to exercise human and political rights and absence of dignity, confidence and self-respect”(UNDP Report, 1997). Hence, in place of the World Bank’s notion of income poverty,

the UNDP developed a measure of human poverty – that is, human poverty index (HPI). The HPI constructed is a multidimensional measure of poverty, incorporating three key deprivations in respect of survival, knowledge, and economic provisions. The deprivation in longevity (survival) is measured as the percentage of people not expected to survive to age 40, and the deprivation in knowledge is measured by the percentage of adults who are illiterate. The third deprivation, economic provisions, relates to a decent living standard. It is represented by a composite of three variables, namely the percentage of people without access to safe water, the percentage of people without access to health services, and the percentage of malnourished children under five.

The measure, HPI, provides a quantitative and more comprehensive poverty indicator when compared to income poverty index. Income poverty, no doubt, needs to be measured, but income alone is too narrow a measure. Thus, HPI developed by UNDP, provides a more robust and broad measure of poverty indicator, summarizing the extent of poverty along several dimensions. The index makes possible a ranking in relation to a combination of basic deprivations and also serves as a useful complement to other measures of poverty and human deprivation-including income poverty. A shortcoming of HPI, however, is that it is somehow aggregative as it is not possible to associate the poverty incidence with a specific group of people or number of people.

**Table1.** Incidence of poverty in Nigeria, selected years

<b>FACTOR</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1985</b>	<b>1992</b>	<b>1996</b>
<b>National</b>	<b>28.1</b>	<b>46.3</b>	<b>42.7</b>	<b>65.6</b>
<b>GEOPOLITICAL ZONES</b>				
<b>Northeast</b>	<b>35.5</b>	<b>54.9</b>	<b>54.0</b>	<b>70.1</b>
<b>Northwest</b>	<b>37.7</b>	<b>52.1</b>	<b>36.5</b>	<b>77.2</b>
<b>North Central</b>	<b>32.2</b>	<b>50.8</b>	<b>46.0</b>	<b>64.3</b>
<b>Southeast</b>	<b>12.9</b>	<b>30.4</b>	<b>41.0</b>	<b>53.5</b>
<b>Southwest</b>	<b>13.4</b>	<b>38.6</b>	<b>43.1</b>	<b>60.9</b>
<b>South-south</b>	<b>13.2</b>	<b>45.7</b>	<b>40.8</b>	<b>58.2</b>
<b>SECTOR</b>				
<b>Urban</b>	<b>17.2</b>	<b>37.8</b>	<b>37.5</b>	<b>58.2</b>
<b>Rural</b>	<b>28.3</b>	<b>51.4</b>	<b>46.0</b>	<b>69.3</b>
<b>GENDER OF HEAD OF THE FAMILY</b>				
<b>Male</b>	<b>29.2</b>	<b>47.3</b>	<b>45.1</b>	<b>66.4</b>
<b>Female</b>	<b>26.9</b>	<b>38.6</b>	<b>39.9</b>	<b>58.5</b>

Source: NEEDS, 2005

## APPROACHES TO POVERTY ALLEVIATION

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According to Obadan (1997), approaches to poverty alleviation can be classified into two major groups; Economic growth and Non-Growth Strategies. The economic growth strategies focus on those macro and micro economic policies and programmes that would ensure rapid growth of an economy. It sees economic growth as crucial and driving force for job creation, income generation, and inequality/poverty reduction. The non-growth strategies encompass a wide variety of social policies and strategies aim at human capital development, safety nets provision, basic social services, and basic need provision, rural development, employment; and public works programmes, good governance, local development institutions development etc. Another view of the approaches grouped poverty reduction strategies into four classes (Ogwumike, 2002) based on the methodology adopted for poverty reduction. These four approaches are: -

1. **Economic growth approach:** This approach focuses on ensuring growth especially through increased focus on human capital formation via education, health, nutrition, housing needs of the labour force. Taiwan, Malaysia, South Korea and China all have used the approach. These are countries known to have strong government called a hard state or development state. The states have the will and authority to create and maintain policies that lead to long term development to help their citizens.
2. **Basic needs approach:** This approach emphasizes on the need for the provision of basic needs such as food, shelter, water, sanitation, health care services, basic education etc. China and India are example of the countries known to have used this approach of poverty reduction.
3. **Rural development approach:** This approach considers that poverty is mainly a rural phenomenon and that traditional measures of poverty reduction may not work in the rural areas because of its peculiarities. The approach thus recommends a multi-dimensional, multi-pronged, integrated approach to programmes that provide basic needs and creates income generating opportunities for rural dwellers in general and the poor in particular. Example of the country that used this approach in fighting poverty is China. It is done by increasing government investment in rural areas particularly on areas of infrastructure, irrigation and other social services. Supportive policies including agricultural tax exemptions, subsidies for agricultural producers and expansion of social security coverage were used in the country to create a balanced and prosperous society through social development.
4. **Targeting Approach:** This favours directing poverty alleviation programmes to specific groups especially women, the disabled, youth, etc. within the society. Thus, it emphasizes social safety nets, micro credit provision, targeted food etc. Thailand is an example of a country that used this approach whereby loans were given to farmers to enable them buy equipments or seeds. Street vendors were also given loans to acquire inventory to sell or help others to set small scale businesses.

## POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA

Various policies and programmes were implemented by successive governments in Nigeria in order to directly reduce/eradicate poverty or indirectly affect it. The policies formulated can be

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divided into two: general development policies with some poverty bias, and policies that are specifically aimed at poverty reduction. The first category involves various set of development plans and programmes with some elements of poverty reduction attached to them. Some of these programmes were sector specific while others were multi sectoral in nature. Examples of multi sectoral programmes include the establishment of the National Directorate of employment (NDE) in 1986, Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructures (DFRRI) in 1987, Better Life Programme for Rural Women (1985), Family Support Programme and later Farming Economic Rural Electrification Scheme, etc. while the sectoral policies include those aimed at Agriculture; National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA), Strategic Grain Reserve, Accelerated Crop Production Schemes (ACPS), Development of Artisan Fishery and Small Ruminant Production, Pasture and Grazing Scheme (FOS 1996).

Attempts to improve the condition of the poor were also made the core of the National Health Policy which consequently led to the emergence of the Primary Health Care (PHC) System. PHC is purely protective, promotive and preventive. Its major components are child and maternal health e.g. Family Health Education and Immunization, control of local endemic diseases, mental health, provision of essential drugs and promotion of food supply and proper nutrition Programmes for the eradication of guinea worms and yellow fever were also launched. In spite of all these efforts, the health system in the country is still very precarious. Education: efforts have been made since 1986 to increase the level of literacy in Nigeria. Nomadic and Adult Education Programmes were thus established to assist in eradication of illiteracy which was found to be a major cause of poverty (FOS 1996). Since then, several educational programmes which focus on women, handicapped, and rural farmers were launched just to re-emphasize the desire for the total eradication of illiteracy in the country. Transportation: in order to cope with the rapidly deteriorating transport services in some major cities and towns, government decided to vigorously pursue the programme of Mass Road Transportation with particular references to the enhancement of available passenger buses.

Egware (1997) contends that the Federal Government acquired 930 buses including spare parts and workshop equipment for contribution to the State Governments and some educational institutions on soft loan basis. Banks and other financial institutions were made to provide packaged financial schemes to facilitate the rehabilitation of old commercial vehicles and purchase of new ones. In addition, new life was put into vehicle assemblage and components fabrication industry through large orders and model standardization. It was however noted that the demand for public transportation in many urban centers of the country continued to outstrip supply. Industry: several studies have confirmed that cottage and small-scale industries dominate the Nigerian manufacturing sector. Characteristically, the poor predominate in the sub-sector, and government efforts have been very tremendous in the past years in the sector. Many credit institutions have been established to cater for the operators of the small-scale industries and those that already are in existence were mandated to offer assistance to the sub-sector. Notable among the initiatives are: the setting up of Industrial Development Agency, Peoples' Bank, Microfinance Banks, etc. In the second category are the various poverty reduction programmes that government was more or less forced to implement starting from the mid 1980's as mitigating forces to counter the adverse effect of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) which has

been described as the single most important cause of poverty in the history of Nigeria. Before the advent to SAP in 1986, government only showed concern for poverty reduction indirectly by adopting poverty-related natural objectives in the various short and long term development plans formulated (Adebayo, 2008). The poverty related objectives of the given SAP era were those to be actualized via several development programmes relating to rural, agriculture and later industrial development. Despite some initial successes recorded, most of those programmes could not be sustained and with time, many of them lost their focus and ultimately failed (Ogwumike, 2002).

During the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) period (i.e. post 1986), a deliberate focus on poverty reduction in the country emerged. This cross from the awareness of the fact that SAP gave rise to many unintended negative consequences that worsened the living conditions of the people and aggravated the incidence of poverty among the vulnerable groups (Obadan, 2003 and Ogwumike, 2002). Thus, the Better Life Program, Family Economic Advancement Programme, Poverty Alleviation Programme etc. were instituted with the aim of reducing the incidence, depth and or severity of poverty in the country. Also, with return to democratic rule in 1999, a renewed focus was placed on poverty reduction given increased local and international awareness of the nation's precocious human development indicators. Two major actions were taken that directly had the issue of poverty reduction as their main focus. These are the launching of a Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) in 2000, the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) and the development of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper for the country. As a result, a number of important conclusions can be derived from the above review on the issue of poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria. First of all, anti poverty policies in Nigeria have focused mainly on three strategies viz; economic growth, basic needs and rural/agricultural development approaches. The policies of the 1960s and 1970s were mainly growth and development oriented. In the 1980s, efforts were focused on ensuring that people have access to basic needs for survival.

However, despite the abundant human material resources used by previous administrations to reduce poverty in Nigeria through different institutions, the programmes which were put in place have failed to produce the desired positive impact on the poor due to several factors including policy inconsistency and poor governance, uncoordinated sectoral policy initiatives and lack of involvement of social partners and other stakeholders in planning, implementation and evaluation of the programmes (Olu, 2002). As a result, many of the poverty alleviation programmes planned by the government in Nigeria have failed to achieve the objectives for which they were established and were scrapped. One of such programmes that suffer from this fate was community banking and in its place the microfinance banking scheme has been instituted recently in the country.

## **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Poverty eradication is one of the major goals which many countries of the world especially the developing ones have been trying to achieve over the years in an attempt to improve the standard of living of their people. Available statistics indicate that poverty rate in Nigeria had increased

from 27% in 1980 to about 66% in 1996. By 1999, it was estimated that more than 70% of the country's population lived in poverty. Life expectancy is 54 years, infant mortality (77 per 1000), and maternal mortality (704 per 100,000 live births) are among the highest in the world. Only about 10% of the population has access to essential drugs. There are fewer than 30 physicians per 100,000 people. Rural households spent an average of 1.5 hours a day collecting water and fuel wood, with household members walking an average of one kilometer a day to collect water and fuel wood.

Qualitatively, poverty in Nigeria has many manifestations and dimensions including joblessness, over indebtedness and economic dependence, lack of freedom, inability to provide the basic needs of life for self and family, lack of access to land and credit, and inability to save or own assets. Poor people tend to live in dirty localities that put significant pressure on the physical environment, contributing to environmental degradation. Nigerian poor, especially farmers perceive their economic circumstances to be fraught with uncertainty, affected by events over which they have no control such as primary commodity prices, the volume of rainfall, changes in soil conditions, and social conflicts. The major factors hindering the success of government efforts to reduce poverty in the country include:

1. Poor coordination
2. Absence of a comprehensive policy framework
3. Excessive political interference
4. Ineffective targeting of the poor, leading to leakage of benefits to unintended beneficiaries.
5. The unwieldy scope of programmes, which caused resources to be thinly spread across too many projects.
6. Overlapping functions, which led to institutional rivalry and conflict
7. Absence of sustainability mechanisms in programmes and projects
8. Lack of involvement of beneficiaries in project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

In order to address the poverty issue in Nigeria, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Accessibility to education and educational services to poor Nigerians especially those living in the rural areas should be increased to enhance their general life condition.
2. Creation of more employment opportunities in the country to absorb those people who unemployed with the view of lifting them out of poverty.
3. Establishment of more industries that could help in providing more jobs to many Nigerians.
4. War against corruption should be intensified at all level for enhancement of economic growth and development in the country.
5. Ineffective poverty alleviation programs currently used in the country should be totally scrapped and be replaced with more efficient poverty ones that could yield positive results by reducing the number of people living with poverty in Nigeria.

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6. More Policies should be established with the view of revamping the agricultural sector and making it more lucrative to attract more investors in the sector.

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