

Poverty alleviation policies and elitist approach in Nigeria: An assessment

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Abstract: Poverty, as a phenomenon, remains an obstacle to global sustainable development. Although a universal malaise, it is more prevalent in underdeveloped countries, including Nigeria. However, because of its devastating impacts on the Nigerian economy, such as increasing death rates, high crime rates, insecurity difficulties, threats to national cohesion, and so on, successive administrations have implemented poverty alleviation programs to mitigate the consequences of this disease. Worryingly, despite a multiplicity of projects and massive human and natural resources invested to match global standards, Nigeria remains impoverished. The curiosity at how these programs fail, either because of implementation hiccups or because elites' wealth and power influence these programs spurred the paper to assess poverty alleviation policies and elitist approaches in Nigeria. The study employed the desk study approach, as it examined secondary sources such as books, journals, articles, and magazines. Its theoretical underpinning was the elite theory. The paper discovered that several factors such as corruption, the elitist nature of the policies which in disguise reflect public interests, lack of continuity, lack of coordination and monitoring system, misappropriation of public resources, and others, led to the poor performances of government in alleviating poverty in Nigeria. The paper concludes that, while the rate of poverty index in Nigeria rises year after year, poverty alleviation efforts in Nigeria have had little or no influence on the Nigerian economy, since most of these projects are purely reflective of the elites' interests rather than the masses. Therefore, the paper recommends that for there to be a reduction in poverty incidence in Nigeria, a holistic developmental approach should be adopted, the policies formulated and implemented should sync with the needs of the citizens, and quality and viable programs should be sustained and financed irrespective of change in government; public accountability should be instilled; proper coordination and monitoring system should be domesticated, etc.

Keywords: elite; development; poverty; poverty alleviation; public policy

1. Introduction

The bulk of societal problems facing both developed and developing societies of the world and the continuous pursuit of solving these problems to create an enabling environment have proved the efficacy of policymaking globally. Thus, Ideobodo et al. (2018) assert that the efficiency and effectiveness of the government could be determined by the planning, formulation, execution, and evaluation of its public policies. By implication, the stability and legitimacy of any government in any organized country are solely dependent on its public policy. Therefore, public policy is seen as any purposive course of action undertaken by governments in solving political, economic, environmental, and societal problems. However, among the major problems facing the nations of the world is the plague of poverty; as its scourge transcends beyond the border of a nation.

Poverty is a malaise that has been and still poses a threat to the generality of the human race. It is perceived as one of the key problems confronting the underdeveloped and developing countries of the world, and Nigeria is not an exception. According to the World Bank's recent estimate of global poverty, 9.2% of the world, or 689 million people live in extreme poverty on \$1.90 or less per day, World Bank Group (2021) reveals that about 100 million were added to the existing numbers of people globally living in poverty because of the pandemic in 2020. However, the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics (2020) reported that 40% of the total population in Nigeria, or almost 83 million people live below the country's poverty line of 137,430 naira (381.75) per year. This means that more than half of Nigeria's population lives on less than a dollar (N360) a day. Thus, emphasized in their data that the number of poor Nigerians exceeds the total population of South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho, Mauritius, and Eswatini combined.

The review of extant literature reveals that lack of strong institutional framework, poor execution of government policies, lack of unemployment, bad governance, corruption, inadequate education, inadequate social infrastructures, poor leadership, and others are regarded as the causes of poverty in Nigeria. Consequentially, high death rates due to hunger, high crime rates in different dimensions, political instability, insecurity issues, a threat to national integration etc. have become the imminent order of the day (Aderounmu et al., 2021; Anigbogu and Ndubuisi-Okolo, 2019; Addae-Korankye, 2014; Chukwudi et al., 2024; Tijani, 2019; Van Der Vossen and Brennan, 2018). That is why poverty is described by Anigbogu and Ndubuisi-Okolo (2019) as a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabric of the developing countries of the world. Thus, to arrest the menace of poverty and its consequential effects, Ukwede et al. (2019) aver that governmental leaders across the globe are relentlessly worried and are devoting all efforts towards arresting its consequential effects on the political and economic development of Nigeria and all nations globally. Specifically in Nigeria like every other country, different policies have been formulated and executed over the years, but rather than poverty to reduce, however, its increasing rate annually is appalling and devastating.

Nigeria, a pluralistic nation that has had both military and civilian governments since its independence and is blessed with immense natural resources adequate to feed a big population, is ranked among the world's poorest countries. Although successive governments have over time been in the race to alleviate poverty due to its disastrous effects on the citizenry and the nation at large, and huge public funds and efforts have been deployed to various internal programs or policies, the poverty level in Nigeria rather than diminishing is undoubtedly increasing and devastating.

The examination of the various programs such as The Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) of 1978, the Green Revolution of 1982, Better Life for Rural Women of 1987, the Family Economic Advancement Programme of 1997, Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) of 2000, National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) of 2001, N-Power of 2016, among others have made many curious if these governmental policies are rightly fulfilling the essence of its formulation. However, these various policies in outlook seem to be people-oriented and purposive, notwithstanding, poverty alleviation remains myopic and proving impossible, as the poor are getting poorer, even those in the average/middle class have fallen to the level of poor. Women

and civil society groups have also contributed to the development of their different societies (Chukwudi and Ojo, 2023; Chukwudi et al., 2023). Moreover, study shows that lack of continuity, lack of monitoring and supervision, insufficient involvement of beneficiaries, and corruption, among others, have posed great challenges to the success of these policies, as these schemes have overtime become channels for embezzling public funds by the politicians and the public officials saddled to carry out these schemes (Hussaini, 2014; Kolawole, 2021; Nwaobi, 2019; Olagunju, 2020; Ozoh et al., 2020; Taiwo and Agwu, 2016).

Therefore, divergent opinions abound in the quest to determine how best to implement public policies, particularly those aimed at reducing poverty, effectively and efficiently. That is if mass-oriented or elitist policies are pursued by the government. This style of leadership is very necessary for the success of every society (Abasilim et al., 2019). The elitist approach to public policy subsumes that in every society there exists a small minority group, consisting of members of the economic elite and policy planning networks holding the most power to direct the affairs of the society. It proposes that power is concentrated in the hands of a few elites who formulate and implement policies to their advantage to the detriment of the masses (Pokharel, 2019). Meanwhile, Ikeanyigbe and Imhanlahimi (2006) suggest that a policy may be considered unrealistic and possibly ineffective if it is elitist and has no significant impact on the common man. In contrast, Ideobodo et al. (2019) also opine that even if public policies are people-oriented, there is usually a problem of policy implementation in Nigeria- lack of coordination and supervision.

Therefore, the nature and challenges facing the various poverty alleviation policies in Nigeria, the increasing influence of elites in wealth and power, and the continuous increase in poverty level and its reverberation effects on the masses, arouses the interest of this paper to examine the correlation between poverty alleviation policies and elitist approach in Nigeria.

2. Conceptual clarification

Poverty, policy, and poverty alleviation

Although poverty is a general word used at random by every man globally, it lacks a definite or universally acceptable definition. The concept has been elusively defined by different scholars and authors from different backgrounds and perceptions. However, what poverty means in different countries also differs. How poverty is qualified within the developed countries is different from how it is in the developing countries. Specifically, some authors equate poverty to a lack of sufficient food, clothing, and shelter. Kazeem (2018) in his analysis of the poverty level in Nigeria advances that people living in poverty, are those who can't afford the essentials of life such as food, shelter, and clothing. Hussaini (2014) poverty can be regarded as a condition in which an individual is unable because of his social, political, economic, and psychological inability, to fend for himself and his family the barest necessities of life. Thus, the World Bank in their view of poverty proposes a certain amount of money to describe absolute poverty; the World Bank (2020) defines poverty as a condition in which people are said to be living on less than \$1.90 a day.

Poverty could also be seen as a condition of relative deprivation, for example as

half-mean income, or as exclusion from participation in society. Thus, the European Union has decided that ‘the poor shall be taken to mean persons, families, and groups of persons whose resources (material, cultural, social) are so limited as to exclude them from the minimum acceptable way of life. More inclusive is the definition that sees poverty as a deficiency and degraded human material conditions that hinder the optimal realization of basic human needs such as food, shelter, and clothing (Anigbogu, and Ndubuisi-Okolo, 2019). Ozoh et al. (2020) perceive poverty as the lack of salary earnings or lack of assets; the lack of competence, confidence, and disempowerment, among others.

Policy on the other hand is a general statement of actions of individuals, groups, or government on a particular issue. Policy is a plan of action, agreed mostly based on certain, designed to administer, manage, and control access to resources. Pokharel (2019) conceives policy as a purposive course of action taken or adopted by those in power in pursuit of certain goals or objectives. These definitions reflect that policies are time-bound, that is, they are not infinite, and they exist to fulfill a particular purpose within a given period. However, what makes government policies different from other policies is the “publicness” in them. Thus, public policy was defined by Khare and Agarwal (2020), as how a government maintains order or addresses the needs of citizens. This regards both the actions, reactions, and inactions of government; to facilitate a change in the society.

Therefore, poverty alleviation refers to measures and strategies aimed at reducing the level of poverty in a population. Scholars have defined and approached the concept of poverty alleviation in various ways. Narayan (2002) in her view argues that the act of enabling the poor to participate in decision-making processes and gain control over their lives is crucial for sustainable poverty alleviation. Her perception captures the empowerment role of any poverty alleviation program implemented in any society. Similarly, Alkire and Foster (2011) remarked that poverty alleviation is an effort adopted to address multiple deprivations that people face in health, education, and living standards. Sachs (2006) also opines that the investments in health, education, and infrastructure to enable poor countries to escape the poverty trap are regarded as poverty alleviation programs.

Therefore, to this paper, poverty alleviation refers to actions, efforts, programs, or policies formulated and implemented by the government to improve the standard of living of the people, reduce the poverty rate, and facilitate economic growth in each state.

3. Theoretical perspective

Elitist approach/elite theory of public policy

Elite theory is a theoretical tool used in analyzing society regarding its inherent power structure. The major proponents of the theory are Gaetano Mosca, Vilfredo Pareto, and Roberto Michels, whose focus was not only on the assumption that every society is characterized by a lopsided distribution of political power but also investigates who wields the power, how, on which ground, for what reasons, with which justification, and how power shifts from one small group to another. Thus, the theory was established as an alternative to the ideology of pluralism, which conceives

that socioeconomic and political power is broadly distributed in society. In the words of Mariotti (2020), elite theory projects society as divided between the ruling minority and the masses, in which the political power, that is, the power to make and impose decisions is vested in the former. By implication, every society, however, has a composition of mass and elite groups. The elites of society remain at the apex and deceitfully, tactically, and often coercively occupy the decision-making process, they direct and instruct the masses as well as administrators and drag the power into their own hands. Elites manipulate public policies, mass opinion, and sentiments, and accrue all advantages and benefits of society to themselves at the detriment of the masses (Pokharel, 2019).

In consonance with the theorists of elite theory, Nigeria like every other society comprises some group of people who hold power in the major spheres of the society, make the major decisions that affect the general populace, and do all that it takes to retain the consent of the people to remain in power. Diah (2017) asserts that even though most of the elites have come to power through democratic political processes, Nigerian elites are often portrayed as ‘lacking political will’ that is, lacking attention or the willingness to fight for a common good, instead focusing on their interests. Thus, Pokharel (2019) avers that public policy does not reflect the demands of the majority, but rather the preferences and values of Nigeria’s governing elite shape mass opinion on policy issues more than how the masses shape elite opinion. Affirmatively, the poverty alleviation policies that have been formulated in Nigeria, have been faulted by all and sundry in outlook reflecting masses’ interests, but the actual practices over the years have revealed that these programs serve as a conduit pipe for siphoning public funds and enriching the elites’ purse at the detriment of the masses who ought to be the primary beneficiaries of the policies (Olagunju, 2020).

However, despite the relevance of the theory in explaining the power structure of society, the theory also fails to underpin other challenges that confront public policymaking even when the policies formulated are in the mass’s interest.

4. Poverty alleviation in Nigeria

4.1. Measures in addressing poverty in Nigeria Fourth Republic: A review of poverty alleviation policies since 2000

Due to the drastic effects of poverty on the socio-political and economic structure of the country, thus, the fight against poverty becomes an inevitable task for every successive government in Nigeria. Ozoh et al. (2020) assert that the battle against poverty is one of the key features of the development of any country; therefore, both the military and civilian governments in Nigeria over the years have enacted policies and measures to curb the menace of poverty in the country. Hussaini (2014) in his summary of the objectives of the various poverty alleviation policies implemented so far in Nigeria, asserts that the focus was more on growth, basic needs and infrastructures, and rural development. More so, the United Nations Development Programme stated that the objectives also include creating a strategy that projects at shunning or curbing the level of poverty; and facilitating the delivery of development necessities to support the alleviation of poverty (Olagunju, 2020; World Bank Group,

2017).

Therefore, concerning these objectives, from 1960 till date, several poverty alleviation policies and programs have been created, such as Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Free and Compulsory Primary Education (FCPE), Green Revolution (GR), Low-Cost Housing, River Basin Development Authorities (RBDA), National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA), Agricultural Development Programme (ADP), Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme Strategic Grains Reserves Programme (SGRP), Rural Electrification Scheme (RES) and Rural Banking Programme (RBP), Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Better Life Programme (BLP), People’s Bank of Nigeria (PBN), Community Banks Programme, Family Support Programme (FSP) and Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) among others (FGN, 2018; Hussaini, 2014; Ozoh et al., 2020).

Table 1. A tabular representation of the poverty alleviation programs in Nigeria between 2000 and 2017 and their achievements.

Year	Poverty Alleviation Programs	Achievements
2000	National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP)	Provision of microfinance and micro-credit to small and medium enterprises (SMEs); provision of vocational training, skills acquisition, and job placements for young people, which enhance their employability; provision of KEKE NAPEP which makes transportation affordable and efficient, and the improvement of the access to basic amenities such as clean water, health care, and education in rural areas.
2004	National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS)	Introduction of privatization and deregulation of key sectors of the economy; introduction of measures to reduce public sector corruption and improve governance such as the establishment of EFCC and ICPC; improved access to and the quality of education and healthcare services in the country; and establishment of microcredit schemes and social safety nets targeted at vulnerable populations.
2012	Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P)	Creation of public works and internship program which generated employment for thousands of Nigerians; establishment of MCH program which contributed to improved maternal and child health services; and funded several critical infrastructure projects, including the rehabilitation of major roads, which facilitated better transportation; investments in health facilities, equipment, and healthcare personnel training.
2016	National Social Investment Programme (NSIP)	It established N-Power which facilitated the engagement of hundreds of thousands of young Nigerians in sectors such as education, health, agriculture, and technology; It also implemented a financial scheme called “GEEP” which particularly was effective in reaching marginalized groups who traditionally lack access to formal financial services, It supported local agriculture by sourcing food from local farmers, thereby creating a sustainable link between education and local economies; and was instrumental in encouraging poor families to invest in their children’s education and health, thereby breaking the cycle of poverty.

Source: Authors’ Compilation.

The above **Table 1** depicts poverty alleviation programs formulated and implemented from 2000 to 2020. The section examines these programs; their objectives and achievements.

4.2. The National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP)

The National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) was launched in Nigeria in 2000 with the ambitious goal of alleviating poverty through targeted interventions across various sectors. This program was launched in the year 2001 under the leadership of President Olusegun Obasanjo for not only reducing but eradicating poverty in Nigeria.

The sole responsibility of NAPEP was to coordinate and monitor the activities of the core poverty eradication ministries and agencies in achieving efficiency and effectiveness from the local to the national level, such as health, education, power and steel, water resources, work, and housing, among others (Bello et al., 2009; Hussaini, 2014; Olagunju, 2020).

Strategically, the NAPEP implemented a range of programs and projects targeting different facets of poverty. These included the Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES) aimed at providing vocational training, entrepreneurship development, and microcredit facilities to unemployed youth (Okonkwo and Anyanwu, 2018), Rural Infrastructure and Development Scheme (RIDS) which focused on the provision of basic infrastructure such as roads, water supply, and electricity in rural areas (Onyenekenwa and Onyechi, 2017), Social Welfare Service Scheme (SOWESS) aimed at offering social welfare support to vulnerable groups including orphans, widows, and persons with disabilities (Ihugba and Anagwu, 2019), Mandatory Attachment Programme (MAP), Capacity Acquisition Programme (CAP), and Natural Resources Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS). Thus, to achieve this laudable purpose of its establishment, the sum of the #6b Naira budget was approved for it in 2001.

However, the program recorded several achievements, these include the provision of microfinance and micro-credit to small and medium enterprises (SMEs). This initiative helped many entrepreneurs to start and expand their businesses, thereby creating jobs and improving incomes. For instance, NAPEP's Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) program targeted the most vulnerable groups, providing them with financial support to improve their living standards (Arogundade et al., 2011). Secondly, NAPEP implemented various programs aimed at empowering the youth, such as the Capacity Acquisition Programme (CAP) and the Mandatory Attachment Programme (MAP). These programs provided vocational training, skills acquisition, and job placements for young people, which helped to reduce youth unemployment and enhance their employability to some extent (Ezeh, 2012). Thirdly, the introduction of tricycles, popularly known as "Keke NAPEP," was another notable achievement. This initiative provided affordable and efficient transportation while simultaneously generating employment. Thousands of tricycles were distributed across the country, creating jobs for drivers and mechanics, and improving transportation infrastructure (Nwagboso, 2011).

NAPEP also worked on improving access to basic amenities such as clean water, health care, and education in rural areas. Programs like the Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS) focused on building and rehabilitating essential infrastructure to enhance the quality of life for rural dwellers (Olukotun, 2008). The program included various social welfare initiatives aimed at reducing the vulnerability of the poor. These included the distribution of free medical supplies and the establishment of community-based organizations to support the needs of the disadvantaged (Akinola, 2017).

Despite these achievements, NAPEP faced several criticisms, including issues related to inadequate funding, corruption, and inefficiencies in program implementation. Consequentially, the poverty rate in Nigeria increased even more. Specifically, the poverty rate increased from 54.6% in 2004 to 70.1% in 2007 (Babayo

and Adamu, 2019). Additionally, Nigeria as of 2003 ranked 54th on Human Poverty Index (HPI), and among the 20 poorest countries in the world with 70% of the population living below the poverty line, (Bello et al., 2009; World Development Report, 2005).

4.3. The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS)

The failure of the NAPEP to achieve its aim of eradicating poverty in Nigeria and the unprecedented rise in poverty necessitated the administration of Obasanjo to create the NEEDS in 2004. NEEDS is a national program having a replica at both the state and the local, which are the State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (SEEDS) and Local Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (LEEDS) respectively. The NEEDS encouraged the joint partnership amongst the three tiers of government, NGOs, and other private sectors in the fight to tackle poverty and its effects.

Thus, the objectives were anchored on 4 main strategies, which are: to fight against corruption, by promoting the principle of accountability and transparency; to facilitate development in the country by promoting the growth of private sectors; provide social welfare to the people such as good health, proper basic education, employment, poverty reduction, youth empowerment, security, and peoples participation by implementing social charter; and promotion of effective and efficient service delivery by emphasizing value-orientation (Hussaini, 2014).

The NEEDS program however recorded some notable achievements in Nigeria. These include the stabilization of Nigeria's macroeconomic environment. The strategy aimed to reduce inflation, manage public debt, and maintain fiscal discipline. As a result, Nigeria experienced significant improvements in its macroeconomic indicators, such as reduced inflation rates and improved GDP growth (Omotola, 2008). Also, it reformed the public sector which to some extent enhanced efficiency and transparency. This was because the program introduced measures to reduce public sector corruption and improve governance. This included the establishment of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), which played crucial roles in combating corruption (Igbuzor, 2006).

Another major achievement of NEEDS was the privatization and deregulation of key sectors of the economy. This led to increased private sector participation and investment, particularly in the telecommunications and banking sectors. The liberalization of these sectors contributed to improved services, increased employment opportunities, and technological advancements (Salawu, 2010).

Moreso, the program prioritized the development of critical infrastructure, including power, transportation, and water supply. Significant investments were made in these areas, resulting in improved infrastructure that supported economic activities and enhanced the quality of life for Nigerians (Obadan and Edo, 2009). The strategy also emphasized education and health as essential components of human capital development. Initiatives under NEEDS aimed to improve access to and the quality of education and healthcare services. These efforts contributed to higher literacy rates

and better health outcomes (World Bank, 2005). NEEDS implemented various programs aimed at poverty reduction, including microcredit schemes and social safety nets. These initiatives targeted vulnerable populations and provided them with the necessary support to improve their livelihoods. The program's impact on poverty reduction was notable, as it helped lift many Nigerians out of extreme poverty (Ekpo and Umoh, 2012).

However, despite how laudable the scheme seems to be, the poverty rate increased from 54.4% in 2004 to 70.1% in 2007 (Babayo and Adamu, 2019; Nigeria Bureau of Statistics, 2015). This was a result of inadequate targeting of the most vulnerable populations, and limited access to resources for implementation at grassroots levels which could be generalised to be a lack of coordination and proper policy planning, poor policy implementation, and corruption.

4.4. The Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P)

The Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P) was established by the Nigerian government in 2012 following the partial removal of fuel subsidies. The program aimed to reinvest the savings from the subsidy removal into various social safety nets and infrastructure projects to mitigate the impact of subsidy removal on the population and stimulate economic development. SURE-P was designed with several objectives which include mitigating the impact of subsidy removal, generating employment opportunities through public works and social safety net programs, funding critical infrastructure projects that would stimulate economic growth, and providing targeted interventions in health, education, and social welfare.

SURE-P encompassed various initiatives, broadly categorized into social safety nets and infrastructure projects, such as the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Program, public works, and road rehabilitation which focused on creating jobs through the rehabilitation of major roads and other public works projects, Community Services, Women, and Youth Employment (CSWYE) targeted at providing vocational training and employment for women and youth, Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS) which provided internship opportunities for graduates to enhance their employability and Mass Transit Programme (MAP) which sought to improve urban transportation and reduce the burden of transportation costs on citizens.

SURE-P recorded some notable achievements through the creation of public works and internship programs which generated employment for thousands of Nigerians. The Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS) alone provided internships to over 120,000 graduates, enhancing their skills and employability (Ogunmola, 2014). The MCH program contributed to improved maternal and child health services, with significant investments in health facilities, equipment, and healthcare personnel training (Okafor and Uche, 2016). SURE-P funded several critical infrastructure projects, including the rehabilitation of major roads, which facilitated better transportation and boosted economic activities (Eke, 2015).

Despite these achievements, SURE-P encountered several issues that hindered its overall effectiveness, such as widespread reports of corruption, mismanagement, and diversion of funds intended for SURE-P projects (Adetayo, 2013). This significantly

affected the program's ability to achieve its goals. Inefficiencies in the implementation process, including delays and bureaucratic bottlenecks, undermined the program's impact (Ilesanmi, 2014), and the program's heavy reliance on savings from subsidy removal, without a clear long-term funding strategy, raised concerns about its sustainability (Olomola, 2013).

4.5. National Social Investment Programs (NSIP)

The National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) in Nigeria was established in 2016 by the Nigerian government to address poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion. The NSIP encompasses several key initiatives aimed at providing social safety nets and enhancing human capital development. These programs include the N-Power program, the Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP), the Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) program, and the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP). Here's an overview of this program and its achievements:

N-POWER: N-power is a scheme targeted at improving youth capacity and development in Nigeria. It's a type of National Social Investment Program (NSIP) implemented in 2016 under the leadership of President Buhari aimed at re-carving the values and vision for graduating Nigerian citizens from poverty circles through capacity building, investment, and direct support (FGN, 2018). The N-power programme is focused on improving the quality of the youth from age 18-35, thus, providing different schemes for both graduates and non-graduates. The program for the graduates is N-power TEACH, TEACH (STEMS), HEALTH, AGRICULTURE, AND VAIDS; while for the non-graduates includes N-power BUILD, KNOWLEDGE, JUNIOR, AND INNOVATION. This program intensified lots of resources in its implementation and provided short-term employment to youths across the 36 states, as the beneficiaries were entitled to a monthly salary structure and other benefits (Nwaobi, 2019).

The major achievement of N-Power includes the engagement of hundreds of thousands of young Nigerians in sectors such as education, health, agriculture, and technology. Participants receive stipends and have the opportunity to gain practical experience that enhances their employability (Eme and Okeke, 2017).

Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP): GEEP aims to provide financial inclusion and access to credit for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). It includes sub-programs like MarketMoni, TraderMoni, and FarmerMoni, which offer interest-free loans to traders, artisans, and farmers. GEEP disbursed loans to millions of beneficiaries, helping them to expand their businesses and improve their livelihoods. This programme has been particularly effective in reaching marginalized groups who traditionally lack access to formal financial services (Adejoh, 2018).

National Home-Grown School Feeding Program (NHGSFP): NHGSFP aims to improve the nutritional status of school children and increase school enrollment and attendance. The program provides free, nutritious meals to primary school pupils, sourced from local farmers to boost the local economy. The NHGSFP achieved success in that it positively impacted millions of children across Nigeria by improving

their health and educational outcomes. It also supports local agriculture by sourcing food from local farmers, thereby creating a sustainable link between education and local economies (Adelman et al., 2008).

Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT): The CCT program provided cash transfers to the poorest households, contingent upon fulfilling certain conditions such as children’s school attendance and regular health check-ups. The aim was to reduce poverty and improve human capital development. By achievement, CCT reached thousands of households, providing them with financial support to meet their basic needs. The programme was instrumental in encouraging poor families to invest in their children’s education and health, thereby breaking the cycle of poverty (Ogwumike et al., 2014).

While the National Social Investment Programs (NSIP) in Nigeria have achieved some success in addressing poverty and unemployment, they have also faced significant challenges and criticisms. Several factors have contributed to the perceived failures and shortcomings of these programs. These include implementation challenges, corruption and mismanagement, insufficient coverage, and targeting, sustainability issues, inadequate infrastructure, insufficient capacity building, etc. (Adebayo and Ogunleye, 2018; Akinola, 2017; Iroghama and Ibe, 2019; Olaitan, 2020).

4.6. The challenges of poverty alleviation policies/programs implementation in Nigeria

Since independence till date, lots of poverty alleviation policies have been enacted by different regimes to reduce or arrest the plague of poverty in Nigeria, rather than it subsiding, however, its increasing rate is alarming and devastating. The various poverty alleviation policies hitherto formulated and implemented are confronted with different factors that have posed challenges in achieving their planned aims. Though, each policy has some peculiar reasons for failure, however, there exist similar challenges that confront these poverty alleviation policies in Nigeria.

Table 2. A Tabular Representation of the Poverty Alleviation Program in Nigeria between 2000 and 2017 and their failures.

Year	Poverty Alleviation Programs	Failures/Challenges
2000	National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP)	Lack of proper implementation and accountability, leading to minimal impact on poverty reduction.
2004	National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS)	Inadequate targeting of the most vulnerable populations, and limited access to resources for implementation at grassroots levels.
2012	Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P)	Mismanagement of funds, corruption, and lack of transparency in project execution, diminish the intended impact.
2016	National Social Investment Programme (NSIP)	Operational challenges include delays in disbursement, insufficient coverage and targeting, sustainability issues, inadequate infrastructure, insufficient capacity building inadequate monitoring, and reports of funds diversion.

Source: Authors’ Compilation.

The above **Table 2** depicts the poverty alleviation program in Nigeria between 2000 and 2000 and its challenges. This is also in consonant with the findings of Kolawole (2021), Olagunju (2020), Ozoh et al., (2020), Nwaobi (2019), Taiwo and Agwu (2016), and Hussaini (2014). They discovered in their works that challenges

such as lack of a standard for project harmonization and effective coordination among the three tiers of government, underfunding, corruption, lack of clear vision, fund embezzlement, and diversion, policy focus diversion, lack of political will, lack of continuity in projects, poor implementation, poor or inadequate monitoring system, inappropriate targeting, political instability, and among others, face poverty alleviation program in Nigeria. Succinctly, these challenges are briefly discussed below:

Lack of Sustainability or Continuity: Various poverty alleviation programs that have been established in Nigeria have no mechanism of continuity, what is evident is the change in nomenclature and no change in strategy. Every successive administration comes up with its policy or programme, with no proper examination of the predecessors' policies and how they can be improved or sustained. Rather, each administration at coming to power, abandons the past policies and the committees set up to achieve them and institutionalize its own new goal and objectives. This has led to the rise and fall of poverty level in Nigeria (Kolawole, 2021). AS part of correction measures, sanctions can be used against defaulters (Aluko et al., 2023).

Lack of Monitoring and Supervision: This has also been one of the major challenges hindering the success of various policies enacted to alleviate poverty in Nigeria. According to Nwaobi (2019), corruption and primordial interest in creating this poverty alleviation program had led to a lack of checks on the committees committed to executing them. Those who are appointed as head of this program are people connected to the leadership of the country, thus, the monitoring, supervision, and evaluation of the activities of the committees if they are meeting the purpose of establishment is mostly impossible.

Corruption: Corruption is not a new phenomenon in Nigeria; it is an ever-growing and persistent socio-political issue that has stifled development in Nigeria. It is regarded as a bane to good governance and has been canonically embraced and accommodated both at the central, state, and local government (Lawal and Oladunjoye, 2012). Various policies enacted to alleviate poverty have also been infiltrated by the scourge of corruption, which has hindered the progress of alleviating poverty across the nation. The efforts of the government will determine the success of its society (Chukwudi et al., 2019).

Lack of clear policy implementation framework: The various programs lack proper coordination; there is an over-stretched scope of activities for the different programs (Taiwo and Agwu, 2016). In the discharge of duties or the execution of policies, the different tiers of government perform overlapping functions, which makes the limited resources used on duplicated activities.

Insufficient involvement of beneficiaries: The poverty alleviation policies are in outlook for the betterment of the people, but in practice are elitist, that is, are created on hidden interests. The people who are meant to be beneficiaries of the policies are sidelined in the formulation and implementation of the policies; hence, they feel less motivated to identify themselves with the successful implementation of the program (Dode, 2010; Taiwo and Agwu, 2016).

4.7. The influence of elites in poverty alleviation policy formulation and implementation in Nigeria: The effects on Nigeria's populace

The domination and overriding capacity of the elites in Nigeria's Fourth Republic is far-reaching. Their influence extends across all spheres of life. Mukuru et al. (2020) explain that the domination and influence of the elites over the formulation, implementation, and evaluation processes of public policy in any society is widely recognized. By implication, concerning poverty alleviation policies in Nigeria over the years, Nigerian elites have played a large role in the outcomes of the policy processes, which is crystal clear that these policies are the reflection of their interests with public interests in disguise. In the analysis of Babayo and Adamu, (2019) pointed out that the impact of the elites in the failure of NAPEP is significant. He explains that the beneficiaries of NAPEP were selected based on the grounds of their connection/ or affiliation with the elites who enlisted them into the program. This reflects that the policy was a push and pull of the elites' interests, in retaining the consent of their people to maintain their positions as Gaetano Mosca proposes in his view on elite theory.

Iwuchukwu and Igbokwe (2012 as cited by Kolawole (2021)) assert that the poverty alleviation programs in Nigeria are trickery devices employed by the elites in putting the masses in captivity. She remarks that the poverty alleviation policies were deceptive rather than empowering the masses, it thrust them into dependency syndrome rather than giving them the political power to agitate for their public benefits. Babayo and Adamu (2019) assert that the beneficiaries of the Program were not better than who they were before, as strong measures were not put in place to ensure their self-sufficiency after the completion of the program.

Another concern is the appointment of the poverty alleviation program boards specifically the head of the program. The leaders or managers of this board and the members of the ad-hoc committees remain the elites and their people. Majorly, these people are those close to or in the same political party as the ruling power. More worrisome is the fact that there are always charges of corruption and misappropriation, yet the charges are always refuted and forgotten. For instance, Dr. Magnus the head of NAPEP, was close to the then president, Obasanjo, who was accused of corruption, but the senate refuted these claims and was exonerated; Sadiya Umar Farouq the minister in charge of N-power was a close accomplice with President Buhari, who was recently accused of unethical behavior and misappropriation of public funds (BBC News, 2020), but after lots of glaring evidence, she is still exonerated. Sardonicly, the various heads of these programs are always receiving a welcomed public face and even being promoted by the government. By and large, Nigerian elites have played diverse roles in the outcome of policy processes, however, these roles have undermined the success of every poverty alleviation program in Nigeria thereby having consequential effects on the people.

One of the repercussions of the influence of elites in poverty alleviation programs on the population is the issue of chronic poverty in Nigeria. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2022), over 40.1% of Nigerians live below the poverty line and 63% are multidimensionally poor according to the National MPI 2022. Poverty alleviation programs in Nigeria have historically aimed to reduce the high levels of

poverty and improve the standard of living for the populace. Despite these efforts, the country continues to grapple with high poverty rates, indicating that the implementation of these programs has been largely ineffective. As a result, an increasing number of individuals are living below the World Bank's current daily poverty standard of \$2.15.

Also, poor implementation of these alleviation policies exacerbates inequality among the populace, as the benefits of these programs often do not reach the most vulnerable populations. Ogbuabor and Malaolu (2013) remark that in a situation where the dividends of government policies do not effectively transform the lives of the beneficiaries, the gap between the rich and the poor in a country deepens. This is evident in Nigeria's economy, as those who could be formerly regarded as middle class, have fallen to the level of poor, thereby, there exist only two classes in the economy- the rich and the poor.

Another effect of this malady is the heightened social unrest and vices, cybercrime, and other insecurity issues that have bedeviled the Nigerian economy. The majority of the crimes such as robbery, kidnapping, banditry, cultism, cyber fraud, etc. are committed by the young citizens in the country. More worrisome is that these are reactions of the aggrieved citizens who could not meet up with life expectations as a result of bad governance, and poor implementation of policies that could revive the economy as a result of corruption, nepotism, leadership gerontocracy, etc.

In short, although poverty alleviation programs are good initiatives implemented by Nigeria's successive governments, they have rather done worse to the country than its purpose due to the influence of elites on the implementation of these policies or programs.

5. Conclusion and recommendation

The paper has been able to enumerate and explain briefly the poverty alleviation programs in Nigeria. Undoubtedly, several policies have been enacted to curb the scourge of poverty and its devastating effects in Nigeria. However, there are lots of challenges hindering the success of these policies, some of which include lack of continuity of the program, poor implementation resulting in the truncation of some programs before reaching their maturity, corruption, and misappropriation of funds, among others. Therefore, with the increasing rate of poverty index in Nigeria year by year, it's sufficed to conclude that poverty alleviation programs in Nigeria have made less or no impact on Nigeria's economy, as most of the programs are elitist; they are pure reflection of the elites' interests rather than the masses. Since the execution of these programs was seen as a significant difficulty, the paper suggests that future researchers investigate this subject matter about variables such as corruption and leadership idiosyncrasy.

Therefore, this paper recommends that for an effective reduction of poverty incidence in Nigeria:

- (1) A holistic developmental approach should be adopted that will encourage the collaboration of government, NGOs, international agencies, private sector, community leaders, and voluntary individuals;
- (2) The policies to be formulated and implemented should be in the interest of its

beneficiaries rather than the elite groups. There should be synchronization of the needs of the citizens with the policies to be formulated. The several policies after completion should create better differences in the lives of its beneficiaries.

- (3) There should be a system of continuity in policies/programs that are effective and viable after completion irrespective of change in government. Laudable programs should be organized with a people focus, and such programs should be sustained if effective to remove every citizen gradually from the plague of poverty.
- (4) The government should also imbibe a culture of public accountability and transparency in curbing corruption and misappropriation of public funds. Government officials and heads of programs should be accountable and transparent to the public if poverty incidence is to be reduced; and
- (5) There should be proper coordination among the three tiers of government, as well as among the institutions and agents carrying out these policies. Also, stringent regulatory and monitoring laws should be domesticated to ensure the effective and efficient completion of a given program within the given time.

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