

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABLE POVERTY ALLEVIATION POLICIES IN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

*Over the time, successive governments in Nigerian formulated several economic development policies to enhance the livelihood of their citizens, but unfortunately, the economic benefits appear significantly low. This study seeks to assess the impact of government policies on sustainable economic development, specifically on poverty alleviation initiatives in the country. The research adopted a qualitative method with a combination of exploratory, descriptive and contextual approaches to analyze its data which was mostly obtained from existing secondary sources. Public choice theory was adopted as a theoretical framework to guide the study. Findings of the study revealed that the Nigerian government has formulated various policies but with faulty implementation processes. However, it was recommended among others that; government policies on poverty alleviation should be adequately funded for sustainable economic development of Nigeria Government should also design an appropriate programme involving the beneficiaries in the formulation and the implementation stages of any programme.*

**Keywords;** Government, Policies, Economic and Development, Poverty

### **Introduction**

All over the world, governments, in quest to justify their existence, formulated some policies to exercise their obligations towards the people. Policy, as observed in Atairet (2020) is the bedrock for economic development of any government to guide and direct decisions to achieve desired outcomes to justify their existence. These responsibilities include the maintenance of law and order, the protection of life and property, and the provision of infrastructural facilities such as basic health facilities, educational facilities, water supply and good roads. According to Obadan, (1997), sustainable policies are necessary for the economic development of any government. In

Nigeria, governments at all levels make policies to improve the standard of living through creation of jobs, poverty alleviation programmes and resource availability for a better standard of living of its citizens, (Effiong, 2024). Public policies in Nigeria are always lofty at the formulation stage but incredibly high at the implementation stages. This is because, these lofty policies seem defeated given the lack of political will and selfish interests of implementers at the implementation stages. Consolidating this, Egonwan (2000) posited that it has been claimed that Nigeria has often formulated 'good' policies but those policies often got bungled at the implementation stage, which, according to Mboho and Effiong (2024) is

occasioned by negative attitudes and conduct of public office holders and hence, Udoh, (2021) calls for a more robust implementation strategy to ensure self-reliance and economic sustainability in the Country. Accordingly, this study seeks to assess government policies and sustainable development with particular reference to poverty alleviation efforts of the Nigerian government.

### **Conceptual Review**

#### **Concept of Government Policy**

Public policy, as defined by Robert (1971) is the relationship of a government unit to its environment, which, according to Obadan (1994) is the economic bedrock of any government. It is in the light of this, that Eminue (2014) opined that a good policy should articulate citizen's interests and ensures greater concerns for minorities and the poor are reflected in public policies. On the other hand, Anderson (2013) perceived public policy as an integrated programme of actions by the government, which, according to Sharkansky and Meter (2015), and Ikelegbe (2016) is in response in regard to a specific problem confronted it. Obviously, policy encompasses the areas in which decisions are to be made, but it does not give the decision. According to Demisa (2023) Government policy is a system of laws, regulations, courses of action, and funding priorities on a particular need, enacted by policy makers.

Government policy is administrative practices of governments where decisions frequently reflected in resources allocations to health, education, infrastructure and development care, which sometimes, may play critical roles in poverty alleviation and job creation for the overall development of a nation, (Umoh, Ekpo, Effiong and Asangausung 2023). This is obvious given the fact that there may be a difference between what governments decide to do and what they actually do.

#### **National Development Policies**

Development can be viewed as a multidimensional process involving the reorganization and reorientation of the entire economic and social system (Rodney, 1972).

In this regard, notable scholars such as Effiong, Udoyen, and Udoh (2021) have observed that human capital development, which encompasses the development of the physical and mental facilities of human beings, constitutes the basis for national development in any society. This aligns with Atakpa's (2016) view that economic development should be viewed as more than the growth rate of Gross National Production (GNP) to encapsulate human resources, which is an active agent that mobilizes, accumulates and exploits development strategies for effective national economic development. It on the basis of this observation, that Todaro (1981) and Effiong, Ekanem and Ottong (2023), noted that a country which is unable to develop the skills and knowledge of its people and utilize them effectively may find it difficult to develop any other thing. Rodney (1972) confirmed further, that a society develops economically as its members increase jointly, their capacity for dealing with environment.

From Rodney's view point above, national development could be seen in terms of economic growth, educational advancement, political awareness, job creation and national unity. In furtherance, Bamgbose (1981), described national development in terms of economic growth, attainment of economic targets, growth rate, increase in Gross National Product (GNP) or Gross Domestic Production GDP, rise in per capita income, etc. Mezieobi in Iheriohanma, (2003) conclude here that national development is a quantitative and qualitative progressive transformation or restructuring of a society to become a more inclusive and mass participation of citizens in government.

#### **Sustainable Development Policies in Nigeria**

The major political response to challenges of the environment has long shifted from one

of environmental protection laws and regulations to that of sustainable development. Sustainable development is a long term continuous development of society, aimed at satisfaction of humanity's need at present and in the future via rational usage and replenishment of natural resources, and preserving the earth for future generations. Vinceta (2014) argues that sustainable development means attaining a balance between environmental protection and human economic development and between the present and future needs. According to her, it means equity in development and sectoral actions across space and time. It requires the integration of economic, social and environmental approaches towards development.

Kalu (2006) view sustainable development as 'economic social development that meets the need of the current generation without undermining the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Sustainable development emphasizes the creation of sustainable improvements in the quality of life of all people through increases in real income per capital, improvements in education, health and general quality of natural environmental resources, thus sustainable development is closely linked to economic development accelerating. For Jhinghan (2008) sustainable development aim at economic development in order to conserve and enhance the stock of environmental, human and physical capital without making future generation worse off. As pointed out by Onah (1995) the approach of sustainable development describes a process that is equitable and socially responsive, recognizing the extensive nature poverty, deprivation and inequality between and within nations, classes and communities.

Given the foregoing, Zimmerman (2009) holds that sustainable development has many

objectives. Besides increasing economic growth and meeting basic needs, the aim of lifting living standards includes a number of more specific goals, such as 'bettering people's health and education opportunities, giving everyone the chance to participate in public life, helping to ensure a clean environment, and promoting intergenerational equity'. Thus, meeting the needs of the people in the present generation is essential in order to sustain the needs of future generations. Without appropriate policies and development, this can never be realised in any country.

#### **Economic Development Policies in Nigeria**

Economic development refers to the generation of wealth for the benefit and advancement of society. It is the ability to produce more output (goods and services) per a person as measure by the country's Gross National Product (GNP) (Kalu, 2010). The author further postulates that essentially economic growth of a nation hinges on the organization and improvement on the government policies especially on skill of its labour force. This includes more power plant, factories, producing or importing more machines, other service equipment etc. and putting them to their maximum capacity utilization. A skilled workforce that has acquired new knowledge and skills to increase their productivity and revenue generating potential is essential.

Economic development is one of the considerable paradigms given that forms an important component of national development in a country that desires inclusive development. Government policies is implementable component that tailors strategies to work for local people, business, and institutions, and its framework identified a city's specific needs and untapped opportunities to lift people out of poverty, boost the economic, and environmental resilience. Basse and Agbor (2015) opined that if a development model is to have any impact it must take cognizance of policies that interrelated

problems of contemporary world that addresses poverty, unemployment and inequality.

Ekpo (2000) states that the economic objectives of Nigeria is to harness the resources of the nation, promote national prosperity, self-reliant economy; and to control the national economy in such manner as to secure the maximum welfare, freedom and happiness of every citizen on the basis of social justice and equality of status and opportunity; to manage and operate the major sectors of the economy; and protect the right of every citizen to engage in economic activities. Hence the State have to formulate policies towards ensuring the promotion of a planned and balanced economic development; and to balance the material resources of the nation are harnessed and distributed as best as possible to serve the common good of the citizens irrespective of these, the economic system is operated in such a manner that it permits the concentration of wealth or the means of production and exchange in the hands of few individuals or of a group this hinder reasonable economic development of the country.

Sustainable economic development policies of Nigeria was to generate substantial economic and employment growth, sustainable business and community development to increase jobs, incomes, productivity, and competitiveness. Despite the huge resources channeled towards sustainable economic development policies in Nigeria, the country is still not been able to maintain the growth rate necessary to reduce poverty and ranks low in economic performance. Nigeria suffers from lack of balanced development where economic, social and environmental dimensions are not given due consideration for long term sustainable development. Bassey and Agbor (2015) postulated that Economic development policies entails structural and institutional changes in the 'government', the educational system, the health system, the income distribution system, as well as poverty alleviation, employment creation and inequality. In reality this is a far cry in the present day Nigeria.

### **Poverty Alleviation and Job Creation Policy**

Job creation for full employment of labour was recognized early in Nigeria by policy-makers as an important process of aligning economic growth with the developmental needs of the country. The First National Development Plan (FNDP) (1962-68) had as one of its cardinal objectives of all citizens. A detailed analysis of the First National Development Plan would reveal almost immediately that the development of employment opportunities was central in the achievement of all other objectives of the First National Development Plan. The achievement of a minimum growth rate of 4 per cent per annum, raising per capita consumption by one per cent per annum and the achievement of sustainable growth would depend largely on the absorptive capacity of the Nigerian economy. Thus, the achievement of the objectives of First National Development Plan revolved around the extent to which the economy could employ fully the factors of production (Okafor, Mba and Oleribe 2017).

No wonder then that the Second National Development Plan (SNDP) had sought to use industrialization, as envisaged in the industrial policy, to create more employment opportunities (FRN, 1970). Even the Third National Development Plan (3NDP) and the Fourth National Development Plan (4NDP) had, as one of their objectives, "the reduction in the level of unemployment" (FRN, 1980). Between 1973 and 1981, employment expanded in the public sector, private sector and services sector (Ibe, 2014).

However, the continuing fall in crude oil price since 1982 and the accompany-reduction in foreign exchange earnings had resulted to shrinkage in government revenues, shortage of raw materials and spare parts for the import-dependent manufacturing sector and a depression in the business of firms retailing and servicing imported goods. The reaction of the public and private sectors to their changing fortunes was the adoption of the strategy of retrenchment of workers. Thus, there was a considerable contraction in employment

opportunities, which has continued to constitute unemployment problem in Nigeria. According to Ibe, (2014) most of the unemployed persons were school-leavers and graduates of tertiary institution.

Rising unemployment rate in Nigeria has now constituted the bane of economic development of Nigeria. "Joblessness has resulted in the rising incidence of social ills among young people" (National Population Commission NPC, 2004). Urban unemployment rate of 10.8 per cent was considered too high for Nigeria with urbanization rate of 5.3 per cent. To reduce unemployment, successive governments in Nigeria had adopted various policies to create jobs. These employment policies were pivoted around small and medium enterprises (SMEs) as veritable instruments to impart skills and provide financial assistance to unemployed persons. In spite of the various strategies and targets of successive governments, unemployment in Nigeria has continued to grow unabated. In 2004, the identified 6495 small and medium enterprises employed just a little over one million workers, which constituted only a small proportion of the total of 18.5 million jobless persons in Nigeria (Nnadi, 2008).

The continuing rise in unemployment rate in Nigeria is an evidence of the failure of the employment policies to achieve their objectives. So, the present study was neither focused on appraising the effectiveness of these employment policies nor on identifying the possible causes of the policy failures. Economic literature is already replete of studies in this area, and notable among such studies are Baumbach (2003), Fiakpa (2008), Olaniyan et al. (2001), Obitayo (2011), Levitsky (2014), and Adamu (2015).

Rather than resort to unnecessary replication of earlier studies, the present study aimed at a detailed analysis of data pertaining to job creation in Nigeria with a view to determining the degree of conformance of the outcome of employment policy implementation to the main thrust of these policies. Undoubtedly, an in-depth understanding of the degree of compatibility between policy

achievement and policy prescription is required to remove discernible inconsistencies in the various employment policies of different administrations and so make adjustment for periodic reviews of these policies. Therefore, the major issue remains that government policy in Nigeria have not yet address or provide solution to the unemployment challenge that is facing the country.

### **Theoretical framework**

This research was anchor on the public choice theory by Buchanan and Tullock (1962) and Niskanem (1973).

The public choice theory is associated with the works of Buchanan and Tullock (1962) and Niskanem (1973). According to Ibok and Tom (2010), the major proposition and policy prescriptions of public choice theory are the advocacy of the market place as the mechanism for allocating goods and making decision. They consider the existing democratic arrangements as ineffective predictors of citizen Preference and demands. The market mechanism should guide the choice of government policies and programmes and not political actors or interest groups and their peculiar demands expressed at the expense of the silent majority.

Also, Ibok and Tom (2010) noted that the contention of this theory is that the expended role of the public services carries with it the risk of ineffective use of public resources and the over extension of government into areas that can better be left to private market public sector expenditure continues to grow phenomenally by demands imposed by self-seeking politicians where by the demands of the citizens are abandoned for selfish purposes. According to O'Heary (1987) in Ojong (2002) through government policies, budget maximization, self-interest bureaucrats are prone to allocate or concentrate on their individual carrier advancements to increase budgetary allocation to their benefit and self-interest goals instead of concentrating on public interests. In all these, disorganized and silent local clients who finance



public expenditure are the losers (Ibok and Tom 2010).

According to Roberts (1965) Ojong (2002) Ibok and Tom (2010) public choice theory is criticized for ignoring or underestimating conflicts within bureaucrats; over simplification of the complexities of organization and political relations and failing to address the issues of income and resource inequalities among clients and parasatals of government.

### **Empirical Review**

Okafor, Mba and Oleribe(2017) studied job creation for full employment in Nigeria. This study was embarked upon with a view to determining the extent to which federal government employment policies had proved effective for achieving full employment in Nigeria. It was designed essentially as a descriptive survey. Data were sourced from National Bureau of Statistics and the CBN. Data were analyzed using time series and Pearson's r. Results indicate that (1) Job creation strategies did not contribute significantly to total employment in Nigeria (2) FG employment policies were not effective for creating jobs (3) Job creation in Nigeria was susceptible to trade cycle (4) NEEDS was a veritable tool for employment generation in Nigeria. Based on the above-stated findings, it was concluded that employment policies in Nigeria were yet to be adapted to the economic realities in the country's labour market.

Aibieyi and Dirisu (2010) researched on National Poverty Eradication Programmes in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects. The study examines the strategies that have been adopted by the various governments to alleviate poverty in Nigeria. These include, Operation Feed the Nation, Green Revolution, Better Life for Rural Women, Family Economic Advancement Programme. The study reveals among others that, all the poverty alleviation programmes have not been successful due to inadequate funding, lack of proper coordination and commitments, poor design and evaluation of programmes etc. The paper recommends that government should ensure that programmes of poverty eradication

are well designed, evaluated and coordinated before they are carried out, fraudulent officials should be prosecuted to serve as deterrent to others handling poverty eradication programmes and so on. This scenario, urgently require recommendation of studies from Udoh and lheanyichukwu, (2017), advocating for the re-orientation and re-structuring of our mind set to catch-up with the global best practice of creating an inclusive society equitable to all.

Ugwuanyi and Emma, (2013) conducted a research on enhancing Rural development in Nigeria: Periscoping the impediments and exploring imperative measures. They observed that the rural areas of Nigeria are so far largely characterized by lack of basic infrastructural facilities and general underdevelopment in spite of their immense contributions to the national development. They argued that enhancing the rural development status is therefore a pre-requisite for sustainable national growth and development. Stephen and Moses, (2012) conducted a research on local government and appropriate capacity building for accelerated and sustainable rural development in Nigeria using simple content Analysis. The result depicted that capacity building to accelerate sustainable rural development at the local government level is missing. They suggested that for capacity building to improve at the local government to ensure accelerated and sustainable development, the following measures must be adopted as a way forward, capacity assessment/profit, analysis of the existing capacity problems, strengthening the existing system and technology transfer.

Olorunsola, Joy Omoligho (2022) conducted a research on evaluation of impact of N-power programme among youth in Nigeria using descriptive survey design. The study depicted that N- power has not been a sufficient veritable antidote to the endemic problem of unemployment and unproductively among Nigerian youth. He suggested that the Economic policies government should be geared towards the creation of jobs.

## **Conclusion**

Nigeria is a nation that is well endowed with human and material resources but statistics showed that the country still ranked low in development. Statistics revealed that Nigeria ranked 7th among the poorest nations in the world with all the known indices of underdevelopment to prove that. These are: High illiteracy rate, high mortality and morbidity rate, low per capita income, political, religious, social and economic instability, low infrastructural and technological development, corruption, violence , high rate of unemployment , high rate of poverty and so on (Aibiyei and Dirisu,2010) .

The effect of the above is low living standard and poverty. This situation has always been of great concern to all successive Governments in Nigeria, but the unfortunate thing is that all efforts to address these ills through government policy have yield no significant result due to

faulty implementation process and negative social values, attitude and conducts of some Nigerians, (Mboho and Effiong, 2024). Research study, such as Effiong, (2024) observed that earlier policies and programmes directed at alleviating poverty, unemployment and education by different regimes have not made much impact for several reasons. There is need for rural people to be actively involved in various socio-economic activities and also have access to education, health and water supply services. Enhancing access of small scale farmers and traders (particularly women and youth) to credit, improving rural infrastructure, generating, and applying better production technologies are measures for poverty alleviation. In Nigeria the case is different given that all the mention facilities accessible by the rich and political office holder while the poor masses cannot access even portable water for survival.

## **Recommendations:**

1. Government policies on poverty alleviation should be adequately funded for sustainable economic development of Nigeria.
2. Government should design appropriate programme involving the beneficiaries in the formulation and implementation stages of any programe.
3. Government should make every possible effort to ensure that corruption and other indecent sharp practices in all spheres of Nigerian various programmes be eradicated so that available resources can be properly utilized for the benefit of citizenry, and for public interest.
4. There should be accountability and transparency in government and its agencies responsible for implementing economic development programmes. This

will circumvent or abate the habit of corruption during implementation so that programs should not be served as a “conduct pipes” for drainage national resources.

5. There is need for rural people to be actively involved in various socio-economic activities and also have access to education, health and water supply services. Enhancing access of small scale farmers and traders (particularly women and youth) to credit, improving rural infrastructure, generating and applying better production technologies are measures for poverty alleviation. In Nigeria the case is different given that all the mention facilities accessible by the rich and political office holder while the poor masses cannot access even portable water for survival.

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