NIGERIAN POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMMES 2015-2024: BEYOND THE PRESENT REALITIES - MYTH OR REALITY?

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Abstract

This study critically examines the efficacy of poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria between 2015 and 2024, focusing on their impact on poverty reduction and the structural challenges that hinder their success. Utilizing a descriptive survey research design, data were collected from 100 stakeholders, including government officials, beneficiaries, and experts in poverty alleviation, through a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire covered the implementation, outcomes, and challenges of key poverty alleviation programmes such as the National Social Investment Programmes (NSIPs), the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP), and state-level initiatives. The study was guided by two research questions. Experts vetted the questionnaire, and a pilot test with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85 verified its reliability. A 4-point Likert scale was used to measure the responses, with "Strongly Disagree" (1) and "Strongly Agree" (4) being the extremes. With mean scores above 2.5 signifying agreement and scores below 2.5 signifying disagreement, the decision point was fixed at 2.5. Findings found that while some projects, such as the N-Power and Home-Grown School Feeding Programme, have had small achievements, problems like as corruption, poor implementation, and fundamental economic issues have limited their overall impact. To increase the efficacy of initiatives to reduce poverty, the report suggests bolstering institutional frameworks, increasing openness, and tackling systemic problems like inequality and insecurity.

Keywords: Poverty Alleviation, National Social Investment Programmes, Economic Recovery and Growth Plan, Corruption, Inequality

Introduction

Even with its abundant natural riches and vibrant economy, poverty is still one of Nigeria's biggest problems. The nation is now one of the world's poverty capitals, with more than 40% of the population living below the poverty line (World Bank, 2020). The Nigerian government has undertaken a number of programs to reduce poverty in recent decades, acknowledging the gravity of the situation. Notable efforts were made between 2015 and 2024 under the administrations of President Muhammadu Buhari and others. The success of Nigeria's attempts to reduce poverty is still debatable, notwithstanding the scope of these initiatives. Opponents contend that these programs have had little effect on real poverty reduction, despite the fact that government representatives and supporters frequently hail them as revolutionary (Oyebola & Olugbenga, 2020).

The National Social Investment Programmes (NSIPs), which were introduced during the Buhari administration and included the N-Power programme, the Home-Grown School Feeding programme, Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT), and the Government Enterprise and Empowerment program (GEEP), were among the most noteworthy initiatives carried out by the Nigerian government, according to the World Bank (2021). These initiatives were purposefully created to address food insecurity, unemployment, and economic disparity among disadvantaged groups.

In order to promote economic stability and the eradication of poverty, the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) was introduced as a comprehensive framework of policies centered on industrialization, job creation, infrastructure development, and economic diversification. Long-term plans like the National Development Plan (NDP) and the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) were also unveiled; they aim to reduce poverty by empowering people economically, investing in infrastructure, and facilitating better access to basic services like social protection, healthcare, and education. State-level poverty alleviation techniques, such as skill development programs, rural infrastructure projects, and microcredit schemes, were developed in addition to federal initiatives and significantly aided national efforts to reduce poverty (World Bank, 2021). Although Nigeria's efforts to reduce poverty from 2015 to 2024 had good intentions, there has been much debate about their efficacy. Many academics and others contend that because of a number of significant issues, these programs were primarily symbolic rather than substantial. Corruption, financial mismanagement, a lack of proper monitoring and assessment, and a lack of cooperation between the federal and state governments are all major obstacles to implementation. Resources intended for the impoverished were frequently misappropriated, and recipients encountered ineffective support access and bureaucratic hold-ups. Efforts to reduce poverty sustainably have also been hampered by structural economic issues such as high unemployment, inflation, instability, and an excessive reliance on oil exports. The government's capacity to adequately finance and sustain these programs has also been undermined by outside variables like changes in the price of oil globally (Olawale & Adeyemi, 2022).

Many programmes aimed at reducing poverty, according to critics, were politically driven and intended more to foster political patronage than to actually alleviate poverty. They were frequently designed and implemented with election cycles and political interests in mind, producing temporary alleviation rather than long-term, lasting reform. Even though certain programmes, like the Home-Grown School Feeding Programme, were successful in increasing school enrollment and giving children food, their influence was limited by logistical difficulties and resource limitations, especially in remote areas. Similar to this, Nigeria saw only slight improvements in non-oil sectors like manufacturing and agriculture under the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP), but these industries were unable to create enough jobs to accommodate the growing labor force, particularly in rural areas where poverty is still high (Adebayo & Yusuf, 2023). Nigeria's attempts to reduce poverty have seen some noteworthy milestones and accomplishments between 2015 and 2024. One noteworthy result is the decline in extreme poverty, especially in cities where social services and employment opportunities have improved. According to reports, the number of Nigerians living in extreme poverty has somewhat decreased as a result of government intervention initiatives. For example, hundreds of thousands of teenagers have received jobs and skills training through the N-Power programme, giving them marketable skills that allow them to sustain their families and contribute to the economy. Although there are still issues with the initiative's durability and the dearth of long-

term job possibilities after program completion, it has been instrumental in lowering youth unemployment (Okonkwo & Ibrahim, 2023).

Agricultural growth and food security are also noteworthy accomplishments, especially thanks to the Anchor Borrowers' Programme (ABP), which has had a beneficial effect on the agricultural industry, particularly in the production of rice and maize. The initiative has contributed to a rise in food production, lowering Nigeria's reliance on imports and improving food security by empowering smallholder farmers and guaranteeing access to funding. The Home-Grown School Feeding Programme has also been shown to promote access to nutrition and education, which has led to a decrease in child malnutrition and an increase in school attendance. The programme has reduced some of the financial strains on families and promoted school enrollment, especially in low-income areas, by feeding more than nine million children in public primary schools. Even while these initiatives have shown promise, there are still serious questions about their long-term viability and growth (Adewale & Salisu, 2022). Notwithstanding these achievements, Nigeria's attempts to reduce poverty have encountered numerous obstacles that have reduced their overall efficacy. Since monies allotted for poverty reduction are frequently mismanaged or siphoned off by dishonest officials, undermining the intended impact of these initiatives, implementation issues and corruption continue to be significant barriers. For example, the Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programme has come under fire for its opaque recipient selection process, which excluded a large number of disadvantaged people who ought to have got assistance. Achieving long-term poverty reduction targets is challenging due to inefficiencies in programme execution caused by poor governance and inadequate accountability systems (Adetunji& Olanrewaju, 2023).

The minimal impact on unemployment, especially among young Nigerians, is another crucial issue. Notwithstanding the fact that the N-Power programme has created options for short-term employment, it has come under fire for providing temporary contracts without permanent employment and neglecting to address the more significant issues of underemployment and unemployment. The programme's ability to promote long-term economic empowerment is still controversial, as more than 40% of young Nigerians are either unemployed or underemployed. Additionally, efforts to reduce poverty have had a limited reach due to social and regional differences. It is challenging for government efforts to make a significant impact in northern Nigeria, especially in the northeast, where there is still a high degree of poverty and insecurity. Because rural communities frequently have restricted access to programme benefits, the rural-urban divide makes these issues even worse. Nigeria's overall effectiveness in reducing poverty has also been diminished by weak institutional frameworks and poor coordination between the federal, state, and local governments, which have led to fragmented implementation, inefficient service delivery, and poor monitoring of programme outcomes (Ogunyemi & Bala, 2022).

Beyond the current situation, structural problems that have mainly gone unchecked continue to be at the heart of Nigeria's poverty crisis. Insufficient education and skill development are key obstacles because many programs aimed at reducing poverty have not addressed the underlying causes of poverty, especially the dearth of high-quality education and vocational training, which makes long-term poverty reduction difficult to achieve. Furthermore, geographical inequities and inequality still exist, with poverty levels in northern Nigeria, particularly in the northeast, being disproportionately greater than in the south (Adegbite & Yusuf, 2023).

Conflict and insecurity make poverty much worse by upsetting economic activity, uprooting populations, and making government initiatives ineffectual. Furthermore, the distribution of resources and the provision of social services are still hampered by corruption and governance shortcomings, which also make it difficult to impose accountability and transparency. The efficacy of poverty alleviation measures has been severely hampered by institutional flaws and systemic corruption; hence, lasting poverty reduction in Nigeria is questionable until there is a strong political commitment to solve these governance difficulties (Oladimeji &Bala, 2022).

The question of whether these programmes represent a genuine effort to alleviate poverty or a political tool for garnering support is a pertinent concern. In this context, the paper explores the evolution of poverty alleviation strategies, their alignment with global best practices, their actual outcomes, and the social and economic realities that continue to perpetuate poverty in Nigeria. The study also delves into the role of political will, governance, and institutional capacity in shaping the outcomes of poverty alleviation efforts. It is relevant to consider whether these programs are a sincere attempt to reduce poverty or a political ploy to win support. In this regard, the study examines how poverty alleviation tactics have changed over time, how well they match international best practices, their actual results, and the social and economic factors that keep poverty in Nigeria alive. The study also explores how governance, institutional capability, and political will influence the results of initiatives to reduce poverty.

Statement of the Problem

Even though there were several programs to reduce poverty implemented between 2015 and 2024, their efficacy is still in doubt. Although initiatives like the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP), the National Social Investment Programs (NSIPs), and other state-level programs were intended to lower unemployment, improve food security, and offer social support, their execution has been difficult. Their progress has been hampered by problems like lack of transparency, shoddy institutional structures, and corruption. A number of structural economic issues, such as excessive unemployment, inflation and insecurity, have further curtailed these programs' potential. These interventions have also been designed and implemented with political reasons in mind, which frequently results in short-term fixes rather than long-term strategies for reducing poverty. In light of these facts, evaluating the degree to which these initiatives have reduced poverty and if their goals have been met is essential.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to objectively evaluate the effectiveness of Nigerian programmes aimed at reducing poverty from 2015 to 2024. This study specifically seeks to:
i.   Evaluate how well programmes aimed at eliminating poverty and enhancing social welfare have succeeded in achieving their goals.
ii.   Determine the main obstacles and difficulties preventing Nigeria's poverty reduction programs from being implemented successfully.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

> ➢ To what degree have Nigerian programmes aimed at reducing poverty and enhancing social welfare between 2015 and 2024 succeeded in their goals?
> ➢ What are the main obstacles and challenges to the successful execution of these programmes in Nigeria?

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive survey research design to examine the effectiveness of poverty alleviation programs in Nigeria from 2015 to 2024. This approach was chosen to gather comprehensive information from a large sample and provide an accurate representation of the status of poverty alleviation initiatives.

Population and Sample (Include Sampling Techniques)

The study population included stakeholders from both urban and rural regions of Nigeria to ensure a thorough understanding of how poverty alleviation programs impact different settings. A sample of 100 stakeholders was selected using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure diverse responses. The participants comprised government representatives, beneficiaries of poverty alleviation programs, and experts in poverty reduction.

Instruments for Data Collection

Data was collected using a standardized questionnaire. The instrument was reviewed and approved by specialists to ensure its validity. A pilot test was conducted to assess reliability, and the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was found to be 0.85, indicating a high level of internal consistency. The questionnaire utilized a 4-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (4).

Procedures for Data Collection

The approved questionnaire was administered to the selected participants. A mean score above 2.5 indicated agreement with a statement, while a score below 2.5 indicated disagreement. A cutoff point of 2.5 was used to determine the significance of responses.

Methods of Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically means and standard deviations. This approach helped in interpreting the respondents' perceptions and assessing the effectiveness of poverty alleviation programs in Nigeria.

Results

Question 1: To what degree have Nigerian programmes aimed at reducing poverty and enhancing social welfare between 2015 and 2024 succeeded in their goals?

Table 1: Descriptive Data on the Fulfillment of the Goals of Poverty Alleviation Programmes

S/N	Items	Mean (X)	Std. Dev	Decision
1	Poverty alleviation programmes have significantly reduced extreme poverty.	2.8	0.76	Agreed
2	The N-Power programme has provided sustainable employment to beneficiaries.	2.6	0.81	Agreed
3	The Home-Grown School Feeding Programme has improved school enrollment.	3.1	0.72	Agreed
4	The Conditional Cash Transfer programme has effectively reduced poverty.	2.4	0.85	Disagreed
5	The Anchor Borrowers' Programme has increased agricultural productivity.	3.0	0.78	Agreed
6	Poverty alleviation programmes have improved access to healthcare.	2.5	0.83	Agreed

The results in Table 1 indicate that poverty alleviation programmes have had mixed success in achieving their objectives. The Home-Grown School Feeding Program has been relatively successful in increasing school enrollment, according to a mean score of 3.1 (SD = 0.72); the Anchor Borrowers' Program has been positively impacted in terms of agricultural productivity, according to a mean score of 3.0 (SD = 0.78); and the Conditional Cash Transfer program has not been as successful in reducing poverty, according to a lower mean score of 2.4 (SD = 0.85). These results imply that while some programs have succeeded in providing the desired results, others have encountered major obstacles in doing so.

Question 2: What are the main obstacles and challenges to the successful execution of these programmes in Nigeria?

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on the Difficulties in Putting Poverty Alleviation Programs into Action

S/N	Items	Mean (X)	Std Dev.	Decision
1	Corruption and mismanagement of funds hinder the effectiveness of programmes.	3.5	0.70	Agreed
2	Poor coordination between federal and state governments affects implementation.	3.2	0.74	Agreed
3	Inadequate monitoring and evaluation systems lead to poor programme outcomes.	3.3	0.75	Agreed
4	Political interference affects the design and implementation of programmes.	3.4	0.72	Agreed
5	Structural economic challenges, such as unemployment, hinder poverty reduction.	3.6	0.68	Agreed
6	Insecurity in conflict zones disrupts the delivery of poverty alleviation programmes.	3.1	0.78	Agreed

The findings in Table 2 reveal several key challenges affecting the implementation of poverty alleviation programmes. Unemployment and other structural economic issues are major obstacles to reducing poverty, as indicated by the highest mean score of 3.6 (SD = 0.68). Furthermore, a mean score of 3.5 (SD = 0.70) indicates that financial mismanagement and corruption are significant issues that compromise the efficacy of these initiatives. Inadequate monitoring and evaluation systems (mean = 3.3, SD = 0.75), poor coordination between the federal and state governments (mean = 3.2, SD = 0.74), and political meddling (mean = 3.4, SD = 0.72) are additional noteworthy difficulties. These findings indicate that corruption, political interference, and structural economic issues are significant barriers to the effective implementation of poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria.

Discussion of the Findings

According to research question one, the study shows that although some programs aimed at reducing poverty, like the Anchor Borrowers' Program and the Home-Grown School Feeding Program, have succeeded in reaching their goals, others, like the Conditional Cash Transfer program, have had a difficult time producing the desired results. These results are consistent with those of Adebayo and Olajide (2021) who conducted a study titled Assessing the Impact of Poverty Alleviation Programs in Nigeria: A Critical Analysis, which aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of various poverty reduction initiatives implemented by the Nigerian government. Using a qualitative research design, the study reviewed existing literature and policy documents, and conducted interviews with stakeholders involved in program implementation. Their findings revealed that while some programs achieved minor successes at the community level, their overall impact was significantly undermined by poor execution, corruption, and systemic inefficiencies within the administrative framework. Similarly, Okonkwo et al. (2023) carried out a study entitled Accountability and Transparency in Poverty Alleviation Programs: Lessons from Sub-Saharan Africa, which sought to investigate the role of governance in enhancing the effectiveness of such programs. Employing a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data analysis from program beneficiaries and qualitative insights from policymakers, the study found that the potential of poverty alleviation initiatives to generate sustainable impact was largely constrained by a lack of accountability and transparency in their management and distribution processes. Together, these studies highlight the critical need for institutional reforms and improved governance structures to enhance the efficacy of poverty reduction efforts.

Based on the second research question, the study pinpoints a number of significant obstacles that hinder the execution of programs aimed at reducing poverty. The results show that political meddling, corruption, and structural economic issues are major obstacles to reducing poverty. This supports Uche & Adekunle (2022) who conducted a comprehensive study titled "Corruption and Political Meddling in Poverty Reduction Programs: The Nigerian Experience," which aimed to investigate the extent to which governance issues have impeded poverty alleviation efforts in Nigeria. Using a qualitative research design that involved document analysis and key informant interviews, their study revealed that corruption and political interference have significantly undermined the effectiveness of national poverty reduction programs. Similarly, Olatunji et al. (2023) carried out a related study entitled "Institutional Capacity and Coordination Challenges in Implementing Poverty Alleviation Programs in Nigeria," which sought to assess the role of institutional weaknesses in hindering program success. Employing a mixed-methods approach that combined surveys and policy document reviews, their findings highlighted that poor

coordination between federal and state agencies, coupled with inadequate institutional capacity, has led to inefficiencies and suboptimal outcomes in poverty reduction initiatives. Both studies converge on the conclusion that systemic governance challenges ranging from corruption and political influence to weak monitoring, evaluation, and intergovernmental coordination are major obstacles to effective poverty alleviation in Nigeria.

Conclusion

From 2015 to 2024, Nigeria undertook several poverty alleviation programs with the objective of reducing unemployment, improving food security, and promoting social inclusion. Notable initiatives such as the National Social Investment Programmes (NSIPs), the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP), and other state-level schemes were implemented to tackle the growing poverty crisis. While some successes were recorded especially in urban areas and through initiatives like the N-Power and school feeding programs the overall impact of these interventions has been limited by persistent structural and institutional challenges. The findings from this study suggest that although these poverty reduction efforts were well-intentioned, their execution was marred by corruption, weak monitoring frameworks, poor coordination, and political interference. Many of the programmes failed to achieve sustainable results, particularly in rural and conflict-prone areas where poverty remains deeply entrenched. Short-term employment opportunities and increased food production offered some relief, but did not translate into long-term poverty reduction due to a lack of follow-up support and the absence of systemic reforms.

Additionally, disparities in programme coverage, mismanagement of funds, and inadequate beneficiary targeting further undermined the credibility and effectiveness of these initiatives. The lack of institutional accountability, coupled with economic instability and insecurity, continued to frustrate progress toward meaningful poverty reduction. Ultimately, while Nigeria made some strides in addressing poverty between 2015 and 2024, these efforts were largely constrained by underlying governance and structural issues. Achieving long-term poverty reduction requires not only effective policy design but also a firm commitment to transparent implementation, strong institutional capacity, and inclusive development. Without addressing these core challenges, future interventions may continue to fall short of their intended impact. The lessons learned from this period must serve as a foundation for reshaping future poverty alleviation strategies toward a more equitable and sustainable path.

Recommendations

In light of the study's findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are made:

i.   The government should fortify institutional structures to guarantee accountability and openness in the execution of programs aimed at reducing poverty.

ii.   To measure the effectiveness and progress of programs aimed at reducing poverty, ongoing monitoring and evaluation methods ought to be put in place.

iii. To achieve long-term poverty reduction, efforts should be made to address structural economic issues including inequality and unemployment.

iv.   In order to guarantee that resources are efficiently directed towards the most vulnerable groups, political meddling in the planning and execution of programs aimed at reducing poverty should be kept to a minimum.

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