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National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) and Sustainable Poverty Reduction in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract: It is estimated that 62.6 percent of Nigerians live below the international poverty line (PPP US$1.25 per day). This translates to about 100 million Nigerians. Against this backdrop, the Buhari Administration launched the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) in 2016 to tackle the country's high rate of poverty and vulnerability. The programme comprises: the N-Power designed to assist young graduates to acquire and develop life-long skills; the Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) for the support of those within the lowest poverty brackets; the Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP) which is a micro–lending intervention for traders, farmers, women, etc, and the National Home Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSF) which aims to deliver school meals to young children.

After more than two years in operation, this article examines the extent of the implementation, the challenges facing the programme and the prospects of NSIP achieving sustainable poverty reduction in Nigeria. Data were gathered through official publications, text books, online journals, periodicals, newspapers and key informant interviews (KII). The prerequisites for NSIP achieving sustainable poverty reduction were discussed. The contents of the programme were considered adequate but there are challenges with regard to operational procedures and effective implementation. These include inadequate funding, lack of transparency and accountability, poor information management and poor infrastructure. Measures to mitigate these problems were proffered. .

.Key words: National Social Investment Programme, sustainable, poverty alleviation, N-Power, CCT, GEEP, NHGSFP.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Social problems were created by the neoliberal market based policy reforms put up in response to the global economic crises of the 1980s and early 1990s. Such reforms adopted by many developed and developing countries included spending cuts, retrenchments and privatization of public services (Peng, 2015). These policies resulted in increased poverty, social and economic inequality and human insecurity. It is against this global policy backdrop that social investment perspective emerged in the late 1990s as a recalibration of the neo-liberal policy framework (Jenson & St-Martin, 2003; Jenson, 2010; Midgley & Tang, 2001; Perkins, Nelms and Symth, 2004 (quoted in Peng, 2015). States therefore, adopt social investment in response to the significant challenges they face especially that of poverty, social exclusion and unemployment among young people (Frazer and Sabato, 2015; Yi, 2015).

About 100 million Nigerians (62.6 percent of the population) live below the international poverty line (PPP US$1.25 per day).. Unemployment also doubled from 6.4 percent in 2014 to 14.2 percent in 2017 (FGN, 2017; 16). There was also high rate of inequality (GINI Coefficient of 43 percent) not just with respect to income but also in terms of access to basic social services and opportunities. The high level of poverty in Nigeria has been orchestrated by low Gross Domestic Product (GDP), poor performance of the social sector, high level of insecurity (Boko Haram insurgency, Herdsmen attack) and high rate of unemployment, among others. As a means of addressing the widespread poverty, the Buhari administration instituted the National Social Investment Programme in 2016.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study evaluates the implementation of NSIP since its inception and assesses its prospects for sustainable poverty reduction in Nigeria. Specifically the objectives of this article are to:

- Highlight the contents of the National Investment Programme (NSIP);
- Examine the extent of the implementation of the programme;
- Identify the factors that constrain the effective implementation of NSIP;
- Analyze the prospects of NSIP to reduce poverty on sustainable basis; and
- Proffer measures necessary for the effective use of NSIP as instrument for poverty reduction in Nigeria.

III. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Conceptualization

Opinions vary among scholars on the meaning of social investment (Perkins, Nelms, Smith, 2004; Wells, 2012; Boughtet, Frazer, Marlier, Sabato and Belgium, 2015; Nichous, 2009).

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as far back as in 1997, coined the term social investment as a framework for social policy reform. This was with a view to maximizing the return to social expenditure in the form of social cohesion and active participation in society and the labour market (Frazer & Sabato, 2015)

The European Commission from its own perspective defines social investments as the set of policies and instruments that promote investment in human capital and enhancement of people's capacity to participate fully in social and economic life as well as in the labour market (Frazer & Sabato, 2015). From a different perspective, Wells (2012:2) presents two broad meanings of social investment. Drawing from Giddens (1998:117), he defines social investment as the promotion of a "social investment state", with a guideline for investment in human capital wherever possible rather than direct provision of economic maintenance. The second definition emphasizes the provision of funding (such as loans) or some form of social benefits.

The differences in the definitions of authors notwithstanding, the common focus is on investment on human capital and enhancement of peoples' capacities, especially the vulnerable groups in society. The driving force for social investment is therefore, to enhance people's capacity to participate in social and economic life. Assisting the most vulnerable and disadvantaged through policies and programmes are recurring themes in the social investment literature.

Overview of global perspectives

The European Union appears to have taken a lead in country implementation of social investment. The European Commission in February 2013 released its 'social investment package captioned SIP, which member states should adopt (Frazer and Sobato, 2015). SIP is a broad based welfare policy covering vast areas such as childhood education, active labour market policies, retraining and lifelong education, healthcare, housing support, among others (Boughet et al, 2015:4). As at 2013 when the report of the Commission was released, thirty nine (39) member countries of EU had already commenced the implementation of social investment.

In his study, Peng (2011) showcases the social investment policies in Japan, Canada, Australia and South Korea. He compares the social investment policy reforms that have been introduced by the two Anglo-Saxon liberal welfare regimes of Canada and Australia and the two East Asian Welfare regimes of Japan and South Korea since the 1990s with respect to their areas of focus. The study found out that the two groups of countries shared similar policy ideas but differed in terms of their target groups and policy instruments. While Canada and Australia had focussed their social investment policies on children, Japan and South Korea approached their own from a broader perspective, encompassing children, women and the elderly.

The Ghanaian government embarked on a major social investment code-named Poverty Reduction Project (PCR). The project has the broad goal to reduce poverty in rural and urban areas of Ghana The social investment fund (SIF) which took effect in 1998, was a major component of the project's main source of fund. Through this fund, access to basic social economic infrastructure by the poor, was facilitated. It also enhanced access of the poor to financial services and strengthened Community Based Organizations (CBOs), Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and local governments in the overall goal of poverty reduction. In a brief assessment of the SIF, Woodling (2016) applauded PCR for lifting many Ghanaians out of poverty and achieving success in its core mandate areas.

In a graphic presentation on Latin America and Carribean, Cecchini (2017) argues that in order to advance towards poverty eradication, poverty reduction programmes must be treated as part of an integrated social protection policy. Against this backdrop, a number of crucial policy areas were identified by the Economic Commission for Latin America and Caribbean ((ECLAC) 2016b, in Cecchini, 2017:6). These include coordinating poverty reduction programmes with a universal supply of quality health and education services. It also emphasized the need to broaden coverage, based on the principle of actively seeking out those eligible and reaching the entire poor population. The Promotion of gender mainstreaming in all policies and programmes was also considered very important, as well as developing care policies to support children, the elderly, persons with disabilities. There is also the need to improve rural and urban infrastructure.

The presentation of ECLAC can arguably be considered a road map to all inclusive and sustainable social investment policy.

Literature also has it that in many Asian countries such as Singapore, Japan, China, South Korea Philippines and India among others, social investment is aimed at achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This is premised on the fact that weaving in SDGs helps maximize impacts where it is most needed because SDGs provide a comprehensive far- reaching and right-based set of universal goals and targets that collectively shape a sustainable equitable and resilient future for all nations, regardless of their stages of development (https//sdgfunders.org)

Poverty in Nigeria

There is hardly a universal way of defining poverty because it affects many aspects of human conditions. Some authors define the concept from cultural perspectives while others prefer political, economic or statistical definitions (Jobbin and Osu, 2014). A typical example of statistical definition is that of the World Bank which defines poverty as any income below US$1.25 a day for the poorest countries and US$2 a day for poor developing countries (Ravallian, 2003). This paper aligns itself with the conventional definition of poverty as a condition in which people live below a specified minimum income level and are unable to provide the basic necessities of life needed for an acceptable standard of living (Taiwo and Agwu, 2016)

The eradication of extreme poverty for all people everywhere by 2030 is the first of the Sustainable Development Goals set up by the United Nation in 2015. To achieve this globally, 90 people were expected to leave poverty every minute, and to achieve this in Africa, 57 were expected to leave every minute, and in Nigeria 12 people every minute. Regrettably, on the average 9 people in Africa are entering extreme poverty every minute and Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo are responsible for the 9 with Nigeria contributing 7 people (Ogbu, 2018:2)

It is estimated that 62.6 percent of the population live below the international poverty line (PPP US$1.25 per day) which translates to about 100 million Nigerians. Unemployment also doubled from 6.4 percent in 2014 to 14.2 percent in 2017 (FGN, 2017; 16). There was also high rate of inequality (GINI Coefficient of 43 percent) not just with respect to income but also in terms of access to basic social services and opportunities. The recent food, fuel and financial crises have exacerbated hardships already facing the poor.

To address the problem of poverty governments established various programmes. These include the first, second, third and fourth national development plans (1962 – 1985), the three year rolling plans (1990 - 1992), vision 2010 (1996 -1996), the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) 2003 – 2007; National Poverty Eradication programme (NAPEP) (2001 – 2015). In all these, huge sums of money were sunk into the programme. Yet, no significant reduction in the poverty rate has been recorded rather the trend is on the increase.

Numerous studies have been carried out on the causes of poverty. (Olowa, 2012; Ucha, 2010; Unicef, 1971;Taiwo and Agwu, 2016). Research findings indicate that the main causes of poverty in Nigeria are low economic growth and social development; unemployment; underutilization of resources, absence of economic diversification; inadequate investment and poor governance.

Nigeria's annual GDP growth rate from 2010 to 2018 averages 1.07 percent. (www.tradingeconomics.com) which is well below the accepted healthy growth rate of 2-3 percent for developing countries. The poor performance of the social sector especially health and education has equally been of public concern since these two sectors are key to poverty alleviation The budget mix has consistently been skewed towards recurrent expenditure, allocating less than 30 percent to capital expenditure (Onah,2015). The resultant effect is low level of industrialization and infrastructure development.

Governments have in the recent times shown resolve to diversify the Nigerian economy by putting in place measures to resuscitate the agricultural sector and solid mineral resources. However, Nigeria remains a mono cultural economy . According to the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics, (NBS), in 2017 the oil and gas industry accounted for approximately 70 percent of government revenue and more than 90 percent of its export earnings.(Shell Nigeria) Furthermore, Boko Haram insurgency in the north east , herdsmen attack in the north central and other parts of the country as well as widespread kidnapping are major security challenges facing Nigeria. These have aggravated poverty through the displacement of people from their homes and economic activities. The high rate of unemployment in the country is another cause of poverty. Between 2011 and 2015, the unemployment rates were 6.0, 10.0, 10.0, 6.4, 10.4 percents for 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015 respectively (NBS, 2016:71). These figures do not sufficiently portray the real situation as a high percentage of the supposed employed are grossly underemployed

Some of the reasons adduced for the failure of the previous poverty reduction programmes include: (Taiwo and Agwu, 2006; Achimugu, Abubarkar , Agbani .and Orokpo,2012).

- Poor management and poor accountability
- High level of corruption & dishonesty
- Pursuit of parochial interest
- Lack of commitment among rank and file of workers in the implementation
- Lack of cooperation among the three tiers of government
- Inadequate infrastructure such as roads, power and communication
- Severe budgetary, management and governance problems

The concern remains whether these factors will be eschewed in the implementation of the National Social Investment Programme, to ensure its success.

IV. DATA SOURCES AND ANALYSIS

Information used in this study was gathered essentially from secondary sources comprising text books, journals and official publications sourced on-line. Newspaper publications were copiously used as these constitute the main source of information on the programme. A number of individuals involved in the implementation of the school feeding programme were judgementally selected and interviewed These comprised the NHGSFP focal Project Manager for Enugu, members of state monitoring team, head teachers and service providers (food vendors) in the state. The qualitative data gathered were descriptively analysed

V. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Development of a widely applicable framework for analysing policy implementation has been of concern to scholars over the years. The early writers represented by Pressman and Wildavsky (1973 in Winter, 2006) concentrated on the complexity of policy implementation by various organs of government. Later writers like Mazmanian and Sabtier (1981 in Winter, 2006) projected top-down approach to public policy implementation.

It is also argued that the crucial role of implementation analysis is to identify the factors which affect the achievement of statutory objectives throughout the process (Sabatier and Mazmanian, 1979 in Winter, 2006). In line with Sabatier and Mazmanian's proposition, the theory of public policy implementation as articulated by Van Meter and Van Horn (Hill and Hupe, 2002 as presented in Solihin, 2012) is considered appropriate for examining NSIP as an instrument for poverty alleviation. Meter and Horn emphasized the need to classify policies in terms that highlight implementation difficulties (Solihin, 2012). They averred that there is an interrelationship between the change required and the level of consensus and thus hypothesised that implementation is most successful where only marginal change is required and goal consensus is high.

The critical aspect of Meter and Horn's theoretical postulations is their description of six variables that determine policy performance arising from public policy implementation (Hill and Hupe , 46-48; Solihin , 2012:15-16) as follows:

- Policy standards and objectives which elaborate on the overall goals of the policy decision.
- The resources and incentives made available.
- The Quality of inter-organizational relationship
- The Characteristics of the implementation agencies especially with regard to the agency's formal and informal linkages with the policy making or policy enforcing body.
- The Economic, social and political environment; and
- The disposition or response of the implementers which involves three elements: their cognition (comprehension, understanding) of the policy, the direction of their response to it (acceptance, neutrality, rejection) and the intensity of their response.

In applying the above variables to the implementation of NSIP for poverty reduction, the policy standards have been examined within the context of the goals and objectives of NSIP. The financial and human resources available for the implementation of the social policy have been addressed in the context of the second variable. Many agencies are involved in the implementation of NSIP and the theory's third variable-the quality of inter-organizational relationship has been highlighted.

The characteristics of the implementation agencies have also been examined to highlight the powers and functions of the various agencies involved in the implementation of NSIP and the extent of synergy that exists among them. The economic, social and political environment of Nigeria impact on the implementation of NSIP and the prospects of the success of the programme. The economic situation, primordial consideration and over politicisation of policies are relevant here. The disposition or response of the implementers of NSIP such as Social Investment Office (SIO) and ministries is considered critical to the success of the programme in alleviating poverty. The implementing agencies and other support staff's understanding and response to the programme have been applied in the analysis with a view to predicting the success of NSIP in alleviating poverty in Nigeria.

VI. PROVISIONS OF THE NATIONAL SOCIAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMME

The programme is aimed at poverty reduction, fight against hunger and poor human development indices (FGN 2017, 50). It is coordinated by the Social Investment Office within the office of the Vice President of Nigeria with a national coordinator. To ensure credible targeting of the poor and vulnerable, a National Social Register has been established.

NSIP has four suite programmes designed and implemented at the national level. (FRN, 2017:50). They are:

(i) National Home Grown School feeding Programme (NHGSFP)

The objectives of the NHGSFP are to:

- Improve the enrolment of primary school children in Nigeria and reduce the current dropout rates from primary school which is estimated at 30 percent. It is also to address the poor nutrition and health status of many children arising from poverty, which have affected the learning outcomes of the children.
- Stimulate local agricultural production and boost the income of farmers by creating a viable and ready market through the school feeding programme.

It aims to create jobs along the value chain and provide a multiplier effect for economic growth and development (National Social Investment Office, 2017:8).

(ii) N-Power Programme

This programme is created to help young Nigerians acquire and develop life-long skills to become active players in the domestic and global markets. It is targeted at graduates, skilled, unskilled and out-of-school youths between the ages of 18 – 35 years. The stipend is ₦30,000.00 a month per beneficiary. The N-Power programme is grouped into two categories – N-Power graduate and N-Power non graduate

The N-Power graduate: This category is also known as N-Power volunteers. The volunteers are expected to provide teaching, instructional, and advisory solutions in 4 key areas (npower.gov.ng)

- N-power Agro- Volunteers are to provide advisory services to farmers across the country. They are to assist the federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to disseminate knowledge in the area of extension service.
- N-Power Health: This is targeted at pregnant women and children as well as other vulnerable members of society. Volunteers are therefore to help to promote preventive healthcare among these target groups in their communities.
- N-Power Teach: In this area, volunteers are deployed as teacher assistants in primary schools in Nigeria. This will help to improve basic education delivery in the country.
- N-Tax: under this area, volunteers are to work as community tax liaison officers in their states of residence with the state's tax authorities. They are to assist in creating awareness of tax compliance, answering online enquires, etc

N-Power Non-Graduate programme provides training and certifications in two key areas, namely:

- N-Power Knowledge which provides incubation and acceleration of the technology and creative industries. It is primarily aimed at ensuring that participants can get engaged in market place in an outsourcing capacity, as freelancers and as entrepreneurs.
- N-Power Build engages and trains young unemployed Nigerians so as to build a new crop of skilled and highly competent workforce of technicians, artisans and service professionals.

(iii) Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) Programme

The CCT programme is aimed at direct cash transfer to five million poor with the final aim of lifting them out of poverty. It is expected that 30 percent of the beneficiaries would be graduating from the lowest poverty quintile in the first year, 50 percent in the second year and the remaining 20 percent in the third year (FGN, 2017:50). Each beneficiary receives ₦5,000 per month. The support is conditioned on fulfilling some responsibilities that would enable recipients improve their standard of living.

(iv) Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP)

This programme is aimed at providing access to financial services (loans) to traders, market women, women cooperatives, artisans and Small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) as well as enterprising youths, farmers and agricultural workers. The aim of GEEP is to achieve productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including young people and persons with disabilities, by providing loans of between ₦10,000 and ₦100,000 without interest and demand for collateral (FGN,2017:50). Loans are distributed through three strategies namely; Market moni, Farmer moni and Trader moni.

VII. IMPLEMENTATION AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF NSIP

Government has put in place machineries for the smooth running of the programme. To this effect, it has established State and National Database with the support of the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC). A policy Framework for all programmes under NSIP within the Nigeria Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (NERGP) has equally been formulated. A National Social Register domiciled with the ministry of budget and National Planning (MBNP) has been established. Modules and operational manual to guide the implementation of the N-power programme has been produced and a portal for the unemployed youth, created. Facilities for payment through mobile banking to reach those in remote areas have been put in place and an audit trail for all programmes established.(Social Investment Office. 2017: 5)

The sum of N500 billion was to be budgeted for the programme each year giving a total of N1.5 trillion. . However, information from the Presidency shows that only N300 billion has been spent on the programme since its inception in 2016 (Iyabosa Uwugiaren, 2019)

Table I below presents an overview of the key activities and beneficiaries of the suite programmes as at the close of 2018.

Table I: Overview of the achievements of NSIP 2016-2018.

N-Power	NHGSF	CCT	GEEP	Monitors	National Social Register
	Pupils being Fed: 9,300,892				
Volunteers 500,000	N0 of cooks 96,972		Loans Disbursed market moni & farmer moni 317,212	N0 of third party monitors paid in September 1,689	
N Build 20,000	Schools 49,837	No of Beneficiaries 297,973	Trader monitor 1,061,592 N0 of cooperatives 4,084		551, 755 Poor & vulnerable house holds (PVHH) in 23 states.

Source: Office of the Vice President (www.yemiosibanjo.ng/national-social-investment-programmes-october-2018-update.htm)

The table indicates that 520,000 persons have benefitted under the N-power programme. 9,300,892 pupils from 49,837 schools were being fed under the NHGSFP. This has also generated employment for 96,972 cooks. Through the CCT, 297, 973 core poor have been reached and been paid on monthly basis.

Under GEEP, 317, 212 and 1,061, 592 have benefited from market moni and trader moni respectively as well as 4,084 cooperatives. Third party monitors numbering 1,689 have been paid. A total of 551, 755 poor and vulnerable households in 23 states have been documented in the National Social Investment Register.

VIII. NSIP AND SUSTAINABLE POVERTY REDUCTION.

In the course of our discussion, some poverty alleviation programmes embarked on by governments, have been highlighted. These programmes failed to have significant impact as the country's population living below global poverty has continued to rise. By June 2018, a report by the Brookings Institution showed that Nigeria had the highest number of extremely poor population in the world. (Vanguard News-www.vanguardnews.com)

This raises concern about the potentials of NSIP to achieve the reduction of poverty in Nigeria on sustainable basis considering that it has been in operation for over two years.. The potential of NSIP can be examined from three perspectives namely;

i Appropriateness of the contents of the programme for addressing poverty on sustainable basis.
ii Adequacy of the operational procedure for reaching the targeted beneficiaries.
iii Impediments to effective implementation and the possibility of surmounting them.

A*appropriateness of Contents*

In deriving the Global Multi-dimension Poverty Index (G-MPI), emphasis is laid on three dimensions of policy (Wikipedia)

- Health-comprising nutrition and child mortality;
- Education-consisting of years of schooling and school attendance.
- Living standards-comprising cooking fuel, sanitation, drinking water, electricity, housing and assets.

Reduction of poverty would therefore, require decisive policy thrusts in these areas. A critical analysis of the four suite programmes through which NSIP is implemented reveals that they are clearly focussed on these three policy dimensions of G-MPI. The School meal programme (NHGSFP) focuses on health and education, They address nutrition and by extension child mortality, as well as years of schooling and school attendance.

The N-Power programme aims at improving the living standards of beneficiaries through entrepreneurship promotion, employment and skills acquisition. The Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) is directed towards the core poor.

The monthly direct cash transfer of five thousand naira (₦5,000.00) is directed towards raising the living standards of the beneficiaries. The programme aims to lift five million Nigerians out of poverty within 3 years of commencement (FGN, 2017:50).

The Government Enterprise Empowerment Programme (GEEP), provides access to loans to traders, market women, artisans, women cooperatives, small and medium enterprises. Such funds would enable them start their own business, raise their living standards and increase their access to drinking water, electricity, housing and assets.

Based on the above brief review, we aver that the content of NSIP are adequate for poverty reduction in Nigeria on sustainable basis, baring other impediments.

Adequacy of operational procedure

Another focal point in the analysis of the potentials of NSIP to bring about sustainable poverty reduction is the operational procedure. The stipulation that the 36 states of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory should partner with the Federal Government in the implementation of the suite programmes are in line with participatory policy implementation which enhances effectiveness. The formulation of a policy framework for all the programmes under NSIP, the establishment of a National Social Register as well as payment through mobile banking, are all aimed at creating enabling environment for the smooth running of the programme.

Although the operational procedure and mode of implementation are clearly spelt out, a wide chasm exists between the prescription and the actual implementation. These gaps and the reason for their existence form the focus of this study in the next section.

Impediments to Effective Implementation of NSIP for Poverty Reduction

The Minister of State, Ministry of Budget and National Planning identified some challenges that face NSIP. These include the need to design a sustainable enrolment and payment system. This is necessitated by rural terrain as well as long distances between communities. This problem she said, is compounded by the lack of technology and banking infrastructure. The Treasury Single Account (TSA) policy was identified as a disincentive for commercial banks to engage in the programme She also pointed out communication gap and overlap of responsibilities by state actors (especially between the state focal persons and the ministries, departments and agencies) as constituting challenges. The problem of funding to cover logistics was also disclosed. Another challenge is low literacy levels of most beneficiaries which without adequate advocacy and sensitization at the community level, makes seamless integration difficult (Ndubisi, 2017)

In addition to the challenges identified by the Minister of State, there are other existing and potential challenges that constitute impediments to the effective implementation of NSIP. These include:

.

- ***Poor information management and accountability***

A major criticism against the implementation of NSIP is lack of transparency and accountability arising from inadequate documentation of information on fund acquisition and application. A World Bank representative in the Social Investment Programme lamented the unprecedented lack of transparency and accountability she witnessed in fund application especially with regard to Trader moni aspect of GEEP. It is informative that shortly before the 2019 general elections, government teams went into market places and distributed ₦5,000 on the spot without due record of who got what and of what use such monies were to be put to. A corollary of this poor documentation is the lack of official document for dependable a information on the management of NSIP. Hence, there is undue reliance on newspaper and other on-line sources which validity cannot be assured for data and other information on the programme..

Information is a resource which can be effectively utilised through other relevant institutions to capture the target beneficiaries namely, the abject poor, the vulnerable groups and those who suffer exclusion. However, not much of the activities of NSIP trickle down to a large percentage of these expected beneficiaries as most of them are either rural based or urban poor. They neither enjoy the privileged access to newspapers nor television and internet. They rely on third parties who may put their relations and cronies in their priority list.

Beyond the beneficiaries, other stakeholders and interested public lament the paucity of information about NSIP implementation. The Chairman Senate Committee on Appropriation, Mohammed Goje, lamented the committee's inability to excise oversight function owing to information asymmetry. (Jimoh and Akhamo, 2018). In line with the public policy implementation theory (Solihin, 2012) information is a critical variable that determines policy performance. Consequently, its effective management is crucial for the success of NSIP.

- ***Politics and primordial factors.***

The separation of politics and other parochial factors from the programme constitute major impediments to the effective implementation of NSIP. Literature (Jebbin and Osu, 2016, Taiwo and Agwu, 2016, Hotness, Akim Musi, Morgan and Buck, 2011) show that the major factors that led to the failure of previous poverty alleviation programmes and social policies in Nigeria are politicisation, ethnicity, favouritism and nepotism.. These are often brought to bear on the generation of data and other vital indicators and they impact negatively on the validity of such information.
Implementation of NSIP is not unaffected by these factors. Severe hardship orchestrated by the high rate of inflation, hike in the price of petroleum products and other essential commodities and the low purchasing power of the Naira make many people desperate for the ₦5,000.00 monthly stipend. Hence, political, kinship and other primordial considerations predominate in the selection process.

- ***Funding:***

The National Director of NSIP reveals that only 15.8 percent of the 2016 and 2017 appropriation for the programme was actually released (Wakali, 2018; Guardian, 20 Feb, 2018) As already stated, only N300 billion out of the budgeted N1.5 trillion has been utilised for running the programme.. Appropriation without release and actual cash backing make effective project execution impossible. This is buttressed by the theory of public policy implementation by Meter and Horn (2002) which identified available resources as critical in policy implementation. Adequate funding is central to the success of NSIP.

During interview with vendors and head teachers of Central school Amalla and Central School I Obollo Afor both in Udenu local government and Community Primary School, Ugwu/Agbo Edem-Ani, in Nsukka local government, it was revealed that the school feeding programme was on hold for the first and second quarter of 2019, as no funds were released to the food vendors. This situation may not be unconnected with the last general election. Another challenge associated with funding is irregular remittances. According to the Enugu state Project Manager, these unnecessary gaps in payment results in non feeding of pupils. The food vendors interviewed corroborated this by confirming that, they stopped cooking any time funds were not remitted

There is also the issue of equitable distribution of vendors. It was observed that some schools with large population do not have commensurate number of food vendors. This was the case with Central school Amalla and Central School I Obollo Afor, among others. Another area of concern is the management of funds released for the execution of the programme. The Presidency reportedly identified corrupt practices by some state officials in its social investment programmes. The Special Adviser to the President on special investment programmes identified these corrupt practices as comprising short-changing of beneficiaries, racketeering and harassing of beneficiaries as well as exploitation of the vulnerable (Wakali, 2018). She acknowledged that the Federal Government was weak in monitoring. This alleged fraud had occurred in spite of the engagement of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Department of State Services (DSS), the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) as well as traditional rulers in monitoring exercises.

The cost of food in Nigeria increased 17.59 percent in February, 2018, over the same month in 2017. The food inflation in Nigeria reportedly averaged 11.49 percent from 1996 to 2018. (trading economic.com) and as at Jan 2018, the rate was 19.42 percent. The ₦70.00 per meal approved under the school feeding programme is not adjusted for inflation and as reported by the food vendors, is inadequate as it is unable to provide a standard meal and the complementary fruits for a balanced diet.

IX. PROSPECTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

NSIP has been described as a transformative and most arduous programme aimed at the reduction of poverty and empowerment of the vulnerable groups in the country. The programme suites – NHGSFP, N-Power, CCT and GEEP - are inclusive enough to address poverty, exclusion and empowerment needs of the critical vulnerable groups in Nigeria. Their objectives are clearly articulated and the implementing institutions duly identified.

The school Feeding Programme (NHGSFP) addresses the nutritional needs of primary school children (especially primary 1-3 classes) which are critical to the proper physical and mental development of the child. It is hoped also that through this programme increase in primary school enrolment would be stimulated. Education is a critical instrument for conquering poverty. Youth unemployment is a great challenge to the Nigerian society as a result of the concomitant societal ills associated with it. These include armed robbery, drug abuse, rape, prostitution and widespread violence. The N-Power has been packaged to empower this teeming population of Nigerians not only to be self employed through skill acquisition but also potential employers of labour.

A major handicap to entrepreneurship in Nigeria is fund. Many micro, small and medium enterprises lack the capacity to raise loan through commercial banks essentially because of lack of collateral. GEEP has been instituted to make available interest and collateral free loans to qualified beneficiaries. This is definitely a giant stride towards lifting them out of poverty by promoting their enterprises.

The core poor pose peculiar challenges in society. Their level of vulnerability is so high that they lack the basic necessities of life such as food, water, clothing, healthcare among others. In order to lift them out of abject poverty, they need direct cash transfer. This is the target of CCT of NSIP which has been acclaimed for having the potentials for lifting many poor Nigerians out of poverty.

NSIP has good potentials to bring about sustainable poverty reduction in Nigeria. However, these can only be realized if some mitigating measures are put in place. To this effect, the following recommendations are made:

- ***Improved funding***

Adequate funding is critical to the success and sustainability of NSIP. Budgetary allocation to NSIP should be placed on first line charge. This will make early release of funds possible and promote the smooth running of the programme. The greatest achievement of the government with regard to NSIP is to financially empower the beneficiaries of GEEP and N-power skill acquisition programmes immediately after training, to enable them start off their businesses.

Furthermore, there is need to shield the funding of the programme from political vagaries. A situation where the remittances to food vendors are interrupted by election process is definitely inimical to the achievement of the goals of the programme.

The federal government should attract the private sector in order to beef up the funding of the programme which is presently grossly inadequate.

- ***Diversification of the economy and broadening the policy areas***

The foremost measure the Nigerian government must take is to tackle the multi dimensional causes of poverty as identified in this article. This is necessary to create an enabling environment for the implementation of NSIP and to .address the challenges arising there from. The areas that need immediate attention are the provision of critical infrastructure and industrialisation especially agro based industries .This recommendation is corroborated by the World Bank report titled, 'Nigeria Bi-annual Economic update::a fragile recovery' (Jannah,2018) .The report pointed out the continued decline in the non oil and agricultural sectors .It observed that Nigeria has a big home market which is constrained by limited connective infrastructure which reduces products and firms ability to reach wider markets. Revamping the non oil and agricultural sectors would generate employment which is the only way to lift many Nigerians out of poverty on sustainable basis. Along with these is the need to threat NSIP as part of an integrated social protection policy in line with the propositions of Cecchini (2017) as already cited.

- ***Improved information management and accountability***

The Social Investment Office (SIO) should utilise various media for information dissemination in order to carry all the interested public along. There should be increased utilisation of the National Orientation Agency (NOA), Faith-based and Community Based Organisations (CBOs) for advocacy and sensitization at community level. For greater outreach, it should mount a weekly programme on radio and upload all its major implementation activities and fund utilisation to the website.. A newsletter should be established and published quarterly.

- ***Improved monitoring and evaluation***

It is crucial that the implementing agencies at both the federal, state and communities be closely monitored This is necessary to ensure that laid down procedures are adhered to. Close monitoring would enhance early detection of fraud.

Against this backdrop, the state governments are urged to take more interest in the programmes through logistic support and protection of the largely illiterate beneficiaries from exploitation. Evaluation plays the critical role of ensuring that the programme is on course towards the set target. It is necessary for SIO to establish a base year and level of poverty against which the programme would be evaluated. The N-power beneficiaries under N-power teaching assistants need to be closely monitored to ensure regular attendance and quality teaching.

- ***Widening the net of beneficiaries.***

With as many as 67 million Nigerians living below the poverty line, it becomes a herculean task for the impact of NSIP to be felt. The net of beneficiaries needs to be widened to reflect the magnitude of the problem of poverty. In line with the recommendation in the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) 2017- 2020 .(MBNP,2017), federal government should immediately up-scale the NHGSFP and N-Power volunteer corps, as well as improve employability in order to close skills gap.

X. CONCLUSION

The potentials of NSIP to reduce poverty on sustainable basis have been analyzed against three key perspectives. With regard to content, the four suite programmes through which NSIP is implemented are considered comprehensive enough to address poverty on sustainable basis. The laid down operational procedure is equally considered adequate. Numerous impediments to the effective implementation of the programme have been identified and recommendations towards surmounting or ameliorating them proffered. Consequently, if these recommendations are meticulously applied, NSIP can reduce poverty on sustainable basis in Nigeria

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