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The role of the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) in Poverty Reduction in Nigeria

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I. INTRODUCTION

This paper will review the challenges and prospects of the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP), a social protection scheme in reducing poverty in Nigeria. The paper begins with a short brief on poverty in Nigeria and a conceptual framework. Theprevious social protection programmes in Nigeria will be assessed before narrowing down to a review of the NSIP. The paper will conclude with the challenges of implementing the NSIP and some recommendations.

Nigeria is often referred to as the "Giant of Africa" because of its population and economy. Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, with approximately 202 million people accounting for about half of West Africa's population. Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and culturally diverse federation comprising over 350 ethnic groups and 500 indigenous languages(World Bank, 2019). Nigeria is the largest oil-producing country in Africa and the thirteenth-largest oil producer globally, with crude oil reserves of thirty-seven billion barrels and gas reserves of 192 trillion cubic feet(Ebhota and Tabakov, 2018). This has made oil the dominant factor in Nigeria's economy since independence in 1960. The oil sector provides ninety-five percent of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings and eighty percent of its budgetary revenues. Petroleum export revenue accounts for around eighty-six percent of Nigeria's total export revenue, and the oil and gas sector accounts for about ten percent of gross domestic product(Global Edge, 2020; OPEC, 2020).

Despite its abundant natural resources, poverty is a significant problem in Nigeria. Poverty in Nigeria has increased over the years. In 1980, only six percent of the population was living in poverty. However, the figures rose to twelve and fourteen percent in 1985, and 1992 respectively, and after that surged to twenty-nine percent in 1996 and thirty-one percent in 2010(Dauda, 2019).On average, between 1960 to 2015, the poverty headcount in Nigeria was approximately sixty-two per cent of the population(Iheonu and Urama, 2019).In recent times, based on the poverty line of $1.90 per day, approximately ninety-five million people, forty-eight per cent of Nigeria's population live in extreme poverty, making it the country with the largest population of people in extreme poverty in the world. (Muhammad, 2019; World Data Lab, 2020).

Nigeria's human development indicators (HDI) are also poor. The country's Human Development Index is relatively low (0.534), giving the country a ranking of 158 out of 189 countries. Nigeria also has one of the highest income inequalities globally, with an inequality-adjusted HDI (IHDI) of 0.349 and an overall loss of approximately thirty-five percent in HDI due to inequality(UNDP, 2019; OPEC, 2020). Life expectancy at birth is fifty-four years, and the employment to population ratio is fifty-one percent. In addition to these indications of poverty and vulnerability challenges in the country, the education, gender, social-economic sustainability and human security indicators are very poor(UNDP, 2019). This considerable high level of poverty calls for social and economic policy attention in addressing the situation. This paper examines the social protection policy and programming landscapes in Nigeria and the effectiveness of social protection in tackling poverty in the country.

Conceptual Framework

The role and significance of social protection have undergone an important transformation in developing countries since the 1990s. The effects of economic crisis, structural adjustment and globalisation on developing countries have made governments and international agencies to increasingly come to accept social protection as a policy framework for addressing poverty(Barrientos, 2011).

Social protection has been defined in various ways. According to the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development(2010, p.135), "social protection is concerned with preventing, managing and overcoming situations that adversely affect people's wellbeing". It aims to alleviate or maintain peoples standards when confronted by contingencies such as unemployment, illness, disability, old age, economic crisis or natural disasters(United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), 2010). The world

Bank (2019, p.9) defined social protection as "public interventions that assist individuals, households and communities in managing risk better and in providing support to the critically poor". It regards social protection as a safety net as well as a springboard for poor people to climb out of poverty.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) defined social protection as a set of public measures that are provided to members of the society to protect them from economic and social distress that can be caused by the reduction or lack of income as a result of various contingencies such as sickness, maternity, employment injury, unemployment, invalidity, old age and death of breadwinner(García and Gruat, 2003). ILO divides those public measures into three general categories: Social insurance, labour market regulations and social assistance (International Labour Office, 2001). Social insurance programmes are contributory schemes designed to protects workers and their households against life-course and work-related contingencies, such as old-age, accidents, maternity, unemployment and sickness. Labour market policies and interventions are legal frameworks to ensure basic standards for employment and safeguarding workers' rights. Social assistance isa non-contributory intervention designed to help individuals and households cope with poverty and vulnerability(Niño-Zarazúa et al., 2012).

Some features distinguish the pattern of social protection in developing countries where there is a strong focus on poverty reduction and providing support to the poor. Whereas in developing countries, the emphasis is on the maintenance of income and protecting living standards. Social protection is not restricted to compensating the poor but rather aspires to have a broader developmental role which involves: (a) to help in the protection of basic standards of consumption among people living in poverty and those at risk of falling into poverty: (b) to enable investment in human capital and other productive assets, which can provide a gateway for families trapped in the cycle of poverty; (c) to strengthen the agency of those in poverty in order to overcome their dilemma(Barrientos, 2011).

Overview of Social Protection Policies in Nigeria

Several social protection programmes have been implemented from the military regime to the current democratic dispensation in Nigeria. Most of the programmesimplemented between 1986 when the Structural Adjustment Programme was initiated,and 1997 fell undersocial services and focused on the rural population, mostly the poor. In 1986, the Directorate for Foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructures (DFRRI) was established, which targeted the rural communities through an integrated approach to rural development. The World Bank supported thisto promote community development and social mobilisation, community self-help projects, and rural development, as well as improve the quality of life of the rural population of Nigeria(Oluseyi, 2018).

In 1987, the federal government introduced the Better Life Programme for Rural Women (BLPRW), a self-help and rural development programme targeted at skills acquisition, provision of credits, and cottage industries for rural women. The programme also had social welfare services donating food, money and equipment.(Nkpoyen et al., 2015)Family Economic Advancement Programme was instituted in 1997 to provide credit facilities to locally-based producers of goods and services in cottage industries(Osinubi, 2005). Other programmes within this period include; National Directorate of Employment (1986) established to train and provide financial guidance to unemployed youths, and Family Support Programme (1994), which replaced the Better Life Programme, targeted at providing health care delivery, child welfare, youth development, and nutritional interventions to families in rural areas(Osinubi, 2005).

The return to democratic government from 1999, saw the introduction of safety nets programmes such as the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), and the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). The National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) was established in 2001 to eradicate extreme poverty in Nigeria. The activities of NAPEP were classified under four programmes: Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES), Social Welfare Service Scheme (SOWESS), Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS), and Natural Resources Development and Conservative Scheme (NRDCS) (Taiwo). The first conditional cash transfer (CCT) programme in Nigeria was implemented under NAPEP in 2007. The CCT programme of NAPEP was reviewed in 2009 to address challenges and later implemented under the Conditional Grants Scheme of the Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on Millennium Development Goals (Aiyede et al., 2015).

Overview of the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP)

The government in 2015launched a set of social protection schemes called the Social Investment Programme (NSIP) to address the country's high rate of poverty and vulnerability. The programme is coordinated by the National Social Investment Office (NSIO) under the supervision of the office of the Vice President of Nigeria. NSIP has two broad categories: one is focused on social safety nets while the other is on social investments. The National Social Safety Net Programme (NASSCO) operates the safety net aspect, which includes the Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT). The social investment programmes include the N-Power Job Creation Programme, The

Community Enterprise and Empowerment Programmes (GEEP) and the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP)(Federal Ministry of Budget and Planning, 2017; The World Bank, 2019).

N-Power Programmeis a job creation and skills acquisition programme targeted young Nigerians between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five years. The programme exposes young Nigerians to skills acquisition and capacity building.There are two different categories of N-Power, namely: the non-graduate programme and the graduate programme. The graduates are exposed to capacity building training before posting to one of four key areas. They are N- Agro (agriculture), N- Teach (education), N-Health (healthcare) and N-Tax (revenue generation). The deployed youths are armed with the latest technology and are paid thirty thousand naira monthly.Non-graduates are enrolled in some focus industries such as building, construction, aluminium and gas(Adegbenle, 2019). The N-Power scheme has empowered 520,000 beneficiaries across the country(The World Bank, 2019).

The Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) is a cash transfer programme that is aimed at providing a safety net for the poorest and vulnerable households in the country. The beneficiaries of CCT are paid a monthly stipend of five thousand naira to lessen the vulnerability of poor households, build their resilience to shocks, promote financial inclusion and stimulate productivity. The CCT has empowered 297,010 households in the federation(The World Bank, 2019).

The National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP) is a nutrition programme aimed at feeding school pupils, with a focus on increasing enrollment, reducing malnutrition, and creating a value chain of socio-economic activities from the farm to the table. The free school meals are procured from local farmers, processed and cooked by individuals in the local community. The scheme, when launched, had a target of feeding 5,500,000 primary school pupils (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2017). So far, around 9,052,235 pupils have benefited from NHGSFP,thereby surpassing its initial goal (The World Bank, 2019).

The Government Employment and Empowerment Programme (GEEP) is designed to provide micro, small and medium enterprises with interest-free loans. The schemes usually marketed as Trader Moni, Farmer Moni and Market Moni aims to improve trade for men and women by providing progressive loans ranging from ten thousand naira to one hundred thousand naira without interest or the need to provide collateral(Onah and Olise, 2020). The schemes target is to assist 1000,000 traders, 200,000 small and medium enterprises, 260,000 enterprising youths and 200,000 agriculture workers, making it a total of 1,660,000 beneficiaries(Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2017).So far, 1,634,533 Nigerians have benefitted from this programme(The World Bank, 2019).

Classification of Nigeria Social Investment Programme

Devereaux and Sabates-Wheeler(2004)classified social protection as promotive, protective, preventive and Transformative. This classification of Nigeria Social Investment Programme used the World Bank(2019) approach from UNICEF classification of policies, programmes and types of risks. The classification is presented below:

N-SIP	**Type**	**Classification**	**Instrument**
N-Power	Promotive	Productive transfers, subsidies and work	Youth Labour Market Intervention
CCT	Protective	Social Assistance	Cash Transfer
NHGSFP	Protective	Social Assistance	School Feeding
GEEP	Promotive	Productive transfers, subsidies and work	Loans

Source: Author, adapted from the World Bank(2019)

The table above shows that the Nigeria social investment programmes are promotive and protective interventions, the promotive schemes enhance income and capability of the beneficiary while the protective schemes such asthe school feeding programme provide relief from deprivation such as malnutrition. It is noteworthy that the school feeding programme is promotive for different beneficiaries such as farmers, caterers, suppliers and others along the value chain while it is protective for the school children.

NSIP and Sustainable Poverty Reduction

The Global Multi-dimension Poverty Index (G-MPI) is used as a measure to determine the degree of poverty using three dimensions and ten indicators: health (child mortality, nutrition), education (years of schooling, enrolment) and living standards (water, sanitation, electricity, cooking fuel, housing, assets)(Alkire et al., 2019).Reduction of poverty would, therefore,entailsignificant policy thrust in these dimensions. An analysis of the four NSIP schemes reveals that there are complementarities within the schemes, and they are relevant to the three policy dimensions of G-MPI.

The cash transfer is focused onimproving the living standards of the beneficiaries. The conditionalities (co-responsibilities) that ensure that pregnant women attend ante-natal, post-natal care, and immunisation of children between zero and two years is capable of significant health service uptake. The school feeding programme (NHGSFP) is directed towards health and education. Proper nutritionleads to good health and improvements in school enrolment and attendance, leading to a better educational outcome for the beneficiaries. The farmers also benefit from the readymarket for the crops, thereby leading to improved livelihood for the farmer.

The N-Power Programmefocuses on raising the living standards of beneficiaries. The N-Agro provides extension services, N-Teach volunteers teach in the rural areas; thereby contributing to Agricultural and educational development.The GEEP programmeoffers access to loans for its beneficiaries. Such funds will enable them to start or improve their trades, thereby raising their living standard and increasing their accessibility to water, electricity, housing and assets.

Challengesthat are Limiting the effect of NSIP

- Poor accountability and transparency

A big challenge facing the implementation of NSIP is the unavailability of reliable and adequate data.The Senate President and the Speaker of the house of representatives queried the lack of transparency in funds applications, especially with regards to the conditional cash transfer and the billions of naira, purportedly spent on the school feeding programme.They wondered how the NSIP office came about the list of beneficiaries, the parameters used and the geographical spread. The first lady's office also questioned the modalities of the programme and wondered why only one local government benefitted from the largest state in the northern region(The Sun, 2020).The lack of periodically updated official report or document from the management of NSIP further compounds the challenge.

- Political factors.

Politics and other factors such as ethnicity, favouritism and nepotism questions the integrity of the process andmakessubstantialimpairments to the effective implementation of the programme. The government recently announced that of the 428,941 conditional cash transfer beneficiaries, 130,455 are from Katsina State (Odunsi, 2020), which is the home state of Nigeria. This new information has been condemned by Nigerians who question the criteria used for disbursement considering that Katsina State is not on the top list of states worst hit by COVID-19.

- Funding:

Despite being relatively rich compared to other countries in the region, Nigeria spends 2.6 percent of its gross domestic product on the social sector, making it the least spender on social protection of other lower-middle-income countries and spends less than most of its regional peers. This contrasts with the aims of the Economic Growth and Recovery Plan (EGRP) that links cash transfer programmes to improved human capital outcomes for the poor in the country(The World Bank, 2019). This lack of adequate funding will essentially limit the programme's coverage and lead to the irregular implementation of the schemes.

- Lack of proper coordination mechanism.

The programme lacks a proper institutional mechanism to coordinate the different social protection schemes. There is no proper training and coordination of NSIP staff on the field. To cite an example, the special adviser to the president on social investment programme revealed that corrupt practices in states and the exploitation of beneficiaries by NSIP officials were hindering the smooth running of the programme(Olawoyin, 2018).

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

NSIP is a transformative programme that aims to reduce poverty and empower vulnerable groups in the country. CCT, N-Power, GEEP, and NHGSFP are comprehensive enough to improve the country's health, education, and living standards of the poorest and most vulnerable groups. However, these desires can on only be realised if strict control measures are implemented, and to this end, the following recommendations are suggested:

- A lead agency to coordinate social protection programmes and align various social protection programmes under one umbrella should be identified or established.
- Social safety nets that alleviate the suffering and human capital of vulnerable groups should be scaled up.
- Social protection programmes should target areas where people are most vulnerable such as places affected by disease outbreaks like COVID-19 and conflict-affected regions.
- People working outside of the formal sector such as those in the agriculture sector should be protected through the reduction of risks and shocks

- Funding for social protection should be increased through proper channelling of oil and non-oil revenues.

III. CONCLUSION

The prospects of National Social Investment (NSIP) to reduce poverty have been analysed against the dimensions and indicators of Global Multi-dimension Poverty Index. Though the NSIP has ameliorated poverty in some quarters and supported some vulnerable people at the micro-level, its impact has not been felt at the macro level. I believe that the four NSIP programmes if effectively implemented, are comprehensive enough to ameliorate poverty. The obstacles to the effective implementation of the schemes have been highlighted, and suggestions to address them have been given. NSIP can reduce poverty in Nigeria if these recommendations are diligently applied.

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