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TACKLING POVERTY AND RETHINKING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE NATIONAL SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA.

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Abstract

The paper critically reviews the sustainability of the national social protection programme in Nigeria**.** It is a qualitative research which draws from empirical data towards rethinking development within the recent Federal Government National Social Investment Programme. Additionally, it deploys a political ecology perspective focusing on inequalities and the underlining factors of poverty. The main findings revealed that by**: (i)** presenting strategies to accelerating social protection schemes and (ii) seeking genuine partnership with the states' governments that will allow them coordination and implementation at the state levels to avoid the spiraling cycle of poverty in Nigeria. It concludes that there is the need to restore confidence, match budgetary allocations to actual disbursements, and awareness raising to improve on delivery.

Key words: Poverty, Devolution, Social Investment, Sustainable Development.

Introduction

In Nigeria, poverty is endemic and has become a major development problem. The nation stands at cross-roads of development faced with diverse challenges. Insecurity, insurgencies, kidnappings, banditry and other vices have engulfed the nation. Historically, several factors account for this, including the lopsided federal government concentration of power at the centre. These historic facts have also been boosted by series of outcome/data from recent empirical studies that corruption of top government officials and politicians, lack of real jobs/unemployment, lack of access to quality education, lack of access to infrastructure(poor healthcare, public transportation, portable water, poor electricity, micro-finance such as grants/loans for small and medium size enterprises(SMEs), lack of support of agricultural sector, pollution impact on climate change, which impacted on traditional source of livelihood(Uddin and Uddin, 2013, Ojo, 2015; Eguruze, 2017,2021;World Bank, 2019). This blight is a serious indictment on successive governments. It is not surprising that the nation is sliding down poverty lane and emerging as the

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global capital of the world with the most extreme poor people on earth. From the literature, a political economy of oil-dependence from the resource curse perspective has been implicated. Several solutions including political and economic restructuring have been prescribed to no avail. In contrast, this qualitative research draws from empirical data to rethinking development within the recent Federal Government National Social Investment Programme. This study has been arranged as follows to make a more meaningful readings: literature review, methodology, data presentation and analysis, discussion and interpretation of the findings, conclusion and recommendation.

Review of Literature

In Nigeria, poverty is ubiquitous and has become a major development problem. The World Poverty Clock Report published 2018 shows that Nigeria has overtaken India as the country with the most extreme poor people in the world. Statistics show that almost half of the population, 86.9 million Nigerians are now living in extreme poverty from the 200 million (Kazeem, 2018). The World Bank report states that from the 122million Nigerians in the working age bracket only 31 million Nigerians are employed, an abysmal figure denoting that only one out of every four Nigerians are employed (World Bank 2019). The primary responsibility of the state which is provision of security and welfare has been threatened. Successive governments struggle to lift more citizens out of extreme poverty have been largely unsuccessful due to poor planning and mismanagement of resources. This development already threatens the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which targets ending extreme poverty and the elimination of hunger by 2030.

A political economy framework has been applied to the social protection, governance and natural resource management in Nigeria. Indeed, there has been some benefits from the monocrop oil economy contributing about 65 percent of government revenue and 88 percent of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings (KPMG, 2019). A political economy perspective relates growing poverty and insecurity to the widening gap between the rich and poor leading to increasing crimes and insurgencies. Since crude oil exploitation in commercial quantities began in 1958, the nation has raked in revenue from crude oil in excess of US$600 billion. Although some infrastructural

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provisions exist, most infrastructural projects are either uncompleted and abandoned or moribund due to bad governance, weak institutions, and mismanagement of natural resources, population growth and corruption (Collier, 2007). The relatively high revenue has not addressed the poor infrastructural base in terms of improved medical care, deplorable road networks and provision of potable clean water and other basic amenities for citizens' welfare.

Poverty is endemic in Nigeria and a major development problem. Hardly a day passes without news of violent conflicts, insurgencies, kidnappings, banditry and other vices that have engulfed the nation. Historically, several factors account for this, including the lopsided federal government concentration of power at the centre with weak states, lack of inclusiveness in governance, widening gap of inequalities, corruption and underdevelopment. This blight is a serious indictment on the successive governments. It is not surprising that Nigeria is continuously sliding down poverty lane and emerging as the global capital of the world with the most extreme poor people on earth.

The federal government has taken some initiatives including the shoot on sight order of armed bandits through a concerted military option, yet the situation seems to be worsening (Ogundele and Adeniran, 2021). Perhaps, its' National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) initiated since 2017 represents a most systematic approach to tackling poverty headlong, supporting SMEs for productive activities, and generating employment for the 86.9 million Nigerians now living in extreme poverty.

Given its vast rich natural endowments and population, Nigeria has the potential of becoming one of the top 20 economics of the world. That said, Nigeria's economic fortunes based on oil revenue is declining. Nigeria is not a rich nation by many standards. Professing to be rich and being the Giant of Africa only masked the reality of a poor country with its GDP less than the state of California in the USA. Notwithstanding its rich endowment with natural resources and the associated advantages, its near total dependence on production of raw materials for export earnings is insufficient for today's reality that requires the circular economy model. This economic model is knowledge based through the elimination of waste in the production and consumption patterns.

This study examines the conventional causes of poverty in the context of Nigeria's growing poverty with millions in the poverty trap. To this, several scholars have previously undertaken empirical studies and provided critical findings that this author felt are pertinent to this current study. In fact, a review of empirical data from recent poverty studies (Eguruze, 2017:1; see 2021) specifically highlighted that the most significant causes of poverty amongst young people across Nigeria are "absence of jobs, corruption of government officials, low wages, tribalism, oil pollution, natural disasters, IMF/World Bank conditionality and wars"(all of which can be summarised as structural barriers as the main inhibiting factors). It was also found that the main experiences of poverty include "a high youth unemployment rate, lack of money to go to school, lack of money to start small businesses, less food to eat, no money to treat sickness, no money to buy clothes, no money to afford decent homes, prostitution, absence of a public transportation system as well as into-drugs and into-kidnapping." Further, "the lack of social infrastructure and access to free education, steady electricity and free healthcare are also seen as problems, with respect to Nigeria" (ibid). These findings supported earlier evidence provided by others (see Uddin & Uddin, 2013).

Beyond this, it also deploys a political ecology perspective interested in the underlying factors giving rise to poverty and social actor's contestations over resource allocation (Robbins, 2008). Such in-depth knowledge is useful if a holistic approach to combating poverty is to be realized. The study explores how the federal government and the states Social Investment Progammes (SIPs) have been deployed to address poverty, analyses the feedback from social actors, beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, to provide recommendations aimed at strengthening the intervention.

Study's Problem Statement/Gap

Three phenomena that have been highlighted as key problems/challenges in this study include: (i) the recognition that Nigeria is the poverty capital of the world and therefore the overriding need to end poverty on one hand, and the priority; (ii) one of the most important ways of ending poverty in Nigeria is the duty to introduce/embark upon a social network programme/social investment programme (as critical), and (iii) ultimately the issue of whether these measures may be made

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sustainable (unlike other several previous measures that had only been ad hoc or come and go, or easily abandoned, as it tends to only serve a partisan political goal. In the past, several solutions including political and economic restructuring have been prescribed to no avail.

There have been studies relating to methods of controlling/addressing rising population through the use of contraceptives, late marriages, and national policy intervention that specifies one child per family such as in China (Kuo, and Wang, 2019); or even in advancing the meaning and definition of poverty such as below the line and unfreedom (Sen,1978, 1999; UNDP, 1979; or cumulative poverty(Eguruze, 2019, 2021) or even relative poverty(1982). Very little study has been carried out on the aspects of Nigeria government's new social protection programmes in Nigeria to the extent to which it comprehensively describes its scope and impact on the poor citizens (Ubhenin, 2021; World Bank, 2012). Other studies showed that guaranteed basic income for the poor and other social protection benefits everyone rooting for egalitarian society (Bregman, 2017). Similarly, in a study, Ojo (2015), argues for national basic income scheme for all Nigerians who are unemployed including the aged that lack pension in their retirement.

Yet, poverty still prevails. In fact, it is rather escalating. This current paper draws on the linkages between the SIP and SDGs with respect to how t could benefit the Nigerian society as with other developing world. Similarly, it appears no previous studies have been known to have interrogates the SIP in relation to structural poverty and how might the quest for policy reforms help in accelerating SIPs, which is an effort quite new in this respect to Nigeria a situation that seemingly made data in this area scarce? Similarly, the extant literature relating to same, equally limited.

Thus, the study main question explores, in what ways the services of the National Social Protection Programme and rethinking sustainable development (in Nigeria) are linked/related towards poverty reduction? The objective is to critically examine ways in which the services of the National Social Protection Programme and rethinking sustainable development (in Nigeria) linked/related to tackling poverty?

Additionally, although the evidence-based research focuses on selected areas, it has relevance and wider application throughout Nigeria and countries of low income and middle-income economies.

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The paper is innovative and contributes to a greater understanding of social protection in relation to rethinking sustainable development and addressing a growing widespread poverty. Hence this study is imperative.

Research Methodology

The qualitative research deploys social inquiry techniques and a SWOT analysis tool to explore the prospects of Social investment programmes in selected states of Edo, Delta, Bayelsa, Ekiti and Anambra states in southern Nigeria. It also applies a political ecology framework to discuss the underlying causes of poverty and rethinking sustainable development.

The study was conducted in the months of March and April 2021. The empirical data gathering involves a mapping of key informants; men, women, youths, farmers, fishermen, artisanal occupations; government officials, the media, civil society groups and community representatives using the snowball approach and access to the respondents. Primary data were sourced from face-to-face semi-structured interviews and 2 Focus Group Discussions. This was complemented by interviews via telephone. A total of 35 respondents were interviewed which covered government officials from the relevant agencies, civil society groups, and beneficiaries with an average of 5 per state. The research also benefited from papers presented during the conference on Enhancing Social Investment Programme in Nigeria held in Abuja, March 23, 2021. Literature review was conducted to provide a sound basis for visioning the research focus from a social protectionist perspective. The data provided the basis for analysis, conclusions and recommendations for the improvement of NSIP in Nigeria.

Study area and peculiarities

Geographically, the study areas covered five states: Edo, Delta, Bayelsa, Ekiti and Anambra, southern Nigeria. Politically, the states belong to different political delineations as follows, Anambra (Igbo), South-east; Ekiti (Yoruba), Southwest; and Edo, Delta, Bayelsa, South-south; (minority tribes) states with distinct ethnicity and cultures. In what is seen as elite's collusion, the Hausa-Fulani in northern Nigeria is believed to have colluded with the Igbos and Yorubas in their

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continuous domination of the political leadership space in national spheres to the disillusionment of the minority tribes in whose region oil and gas exploitation sustaining the nation is concentrated. The economic mainstay of the Niger Delta region is mainly fishing and farming occupations. The activities of mining and transnational oil companies' operations located in the area are major sources of national wealth as well as environmental degradation. The frequent oil spills and persistent gas flaring result in the pollution of water bodies, soil contamination, and air quality. These pose serious threats to survival with increasing poor crop yields, lowering fish catch, hazards to environmental and human health.

Although Ekiti and Anambra states do not belong to the Niger Delta region, however, they share some climate similarities of tropical rainforest region that is mainly in southern Nigeria. The economic mainstay is mainly subsistence farming in rice, cassava and yam tubers, and cash crops such as palm oil that is increasingly enjoying supplies to the international market. Ekiti state is also rich in cocoa farming and other cash crops such as legumes, rice and maize that are similar to the Niger Delta region.

The common denominator is that the states are ill-equipped with poor infrastructure and a growing disparity between the rich and the poor who are in the majority. The main differences account for the fact that while Ekiti and Anambra states are land-locked, the Niger Delta states are coastal states with open access to the Atlantic Ocean waterways with its rich economic advantage. However, this is punctuated by the impact of oil and gas exploitation that is resulting in environmental degradation from oil and gas activities.

Population, Poverty and Environmental Degradation

Nigeria's 200 million population is expected to double and the third largest in the world by 2050. A growing demography as a factor of development remains on the front burner of development discourse. Some hold the strong belief that increasing population is a major cause of poverty. The world has experienced increased fourfold population increase in the Twentieth Century from 1.5 billion to 6 billion and currently at 8 billion. In Nigeria, population growth is rapid and a growing concern among policy makers and development practitioners. The rapid growth may have effect on the growing population with deplorable infrastructure. This is compounded by people living in

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marginal environments and bad governance. Thus, high population density areas with weak adaptive capacity may have severe risks and impact.

Although demography can be a feature of poverty, the question remains how many people can the world sustain? This may have given birth to some conspiracy theories one of which is that the world needs to reduce its population from the current projection of 7 or 8 billion people down to 5 or 6 billion. The resurgence of the Malthusian approach entrenched in the development process since the 1900s is gradually assuming centre stage. The Malthus theory posited that population will experience exponential growth unless checked by war and pestilence, or by chastity or late marriages. The concept has been enlarged by scholars as population bomb that will result in poverty and famine because of decreasing food production in relation to exponential growth of population.

While these propositions are relevant and have been largely addressed by the use of contraceptives, late marriages, and national policy intervention that specifies one child per family such as in China (Kuo, and Wang, 2019), the movement since 1970 towards a more structural approach to understanding poverty is equally growing.Critical development studies proposes a "justified critical resistance" against the conventional view of population growth as a cause of poverty and environmental degradation. They pooh-pooh the notion that humanity's population and finite and non-finite resources including energy use and material resources will reach an optimal level in which an additional unit of population can alter the optimal balance to the detriment of society. In contrast, according to Allier (2009: 1116), a "transition to sustainability" requires new thinking on demography and on the socio-ecological transition and reform of social institutions "to address unemployment, and a reform of financial institutions to stop the financial level of the economy from growing without reference to the underlying physical realities."

Such new thinking includes how the number of resources available to humanity and use should be based for example, on per capita that allows access against the current practice of inequitable distribution. For illustration, an average Nigerian produces carbon dioxide that is about 20 times

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less a citizen of the USA or Europe. Further, the material consumption of affluent societies in terms of energy, food, water, is much higher than those of developing countries.

Further, there is a growing inequality from the economic and political institutions that allocate resources without concerns for equitable distribution. This is the root cause of poverty. Indeed, most of the natural resources are extracted in poor rural communities in the global north and south. The political economy of oil and gas extraction in Nigeria coupled with poor management and weak institutions have impoverished local communities in the Niger Delta. Also, a rising land grabbing for monocrop plantations for export and how political institutions allocate resources without the involvement of the poor in decision making is significant to understanding poverty. This *unfreedom*of choice, lack of entitlements, exclusion from basic amenities for life enjoyment, and right to participation are the underlying causes of poverty and environmental degradation (Sen, 1999). Indeed, indigenous communities hold land in sacredness and radically oppose annexation of land, forests, mineral resources, and rivers or water by governments or business corporations (Alliers, 2010). That natural resources located in their domain as a major source of sustenance have been eroded or out-rightly appropriated constitute the root cause of poverty in those areas.

Basic economic geography postulates that the wealth of nations is directly proportional to how much a country is endowed with natural resources, human resources, location, population size, and access to the sea (see Short 1993; Porter,1990). This can be expanded by the amount of technology available and the quality of human resources, hence the more a nation invests on capacity building of citizens, the more returns on development and reduction of poverty. The notion of circular economy that harnesses material resources and eliminates waste might be the new economic model Nigeria can embrace instead of the frittering away of natural resources with little or no added value through exports and a rentier state economy (see Karl, 1999).

Mapping Social Investment Programmes in Nigeria

Examining how Social Investment Programmes (SIPs) have fared in Nigeria by the federal and state governments in order to strengthen them is relevant to the study. Social protection is focusing on the poor and vulnerable groups to lift them out of poverty. It is part of the strategy to fulfilling the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with the main purpose of ending

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extreme poverty (Goal 1); zero hunger (Goal 2); good health and well-being, (Goal 3), and improved access to clean energy (Goal 7) and other interrelated goals. Studies show that guaranteed basic income for the poor and other social protection benefits everyone rooting for egalitarian society (Bregman, 2017). In a study, Ojo (2015) argues for national basic income scheme for all Nigerians who are unemployed including the aged that lack pension in their retirement.

A brief catalogue shows diverse Social Investment Programmes for social protection that have been pursued by successive federal governments in various forms with very little success. In the 1970s, Gen. Yakubu Gowon implemented the Udoji Award and provided grants to all public service workers. The impression of a rich country with a growing oil revenue informed the decision. The grant had no restrictions attached and most of the beneficiaries spent the money on basic social amenities and luxury goods through improved purchasing power for better living conditions. Although it was widely acclaimed, however, the unemployed, self-employed, and the private sector especially rural farmers, fisherfolks and the poor were excluded. By focusing exclusively on civil servants, the fund was limited in scope, and as a one-off payment, there were no plans to sustain it.

Other successive national programmes for poverty alleviation fared better, at least, in the rhetoric. Briefly, some of these included the National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) by Gen. Yakubu Gowon in 1972, and the Nigerian Cooperative Agricultural Bank, entirely devoted to funding agriculture; Operation Feed the Nation by Gen. OlusegunObasanjo in 1976 to address acute food shortages; The Green Revolution Programme by Shehu Shagari in 1979 to reduce food importation and boost local production; the establishment of the National Directorate of Food, Road, and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) by Gen Babangida in 1986. Others are the Peoples Bank of Nigeria to boost low income and the unbanked, and the Better Life for Rural Women Programme. In 1993, Gen. SaniAbacha and his wife founded the Family Support Programme, and the Family Economic Advancement Programme. The SURE-P called Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme was launched on January 1, 2012 by President Goodluck Jonathan. It had some impact in the reduction of maternal and infant mortality rates in

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Nigeria due to direct and indirect intervention measures including the improvement of care by midwifery services made available in the rural communities.

The list of SIPs is by no means exhaustive. These social investment programmes were not bad in themselves as they were geared to provide support to the poor. Indeed, policy makers committed billions of naira to the programmes. Yet, several independent studies show that the initiatives failed to deliver on their objectives due to massive corruption through embezzlement of funds, mismanagement, political patronage and over-invoicing. Little surprise that most of these programmes collapsed and did not exist beyond the tenure of the government that initiated them (Johnson et. al., 2010).

Federal Government Social Investment Programme (2016-2021)

The Federal Government (FG) under President MuhammaduBuhari has shown some commitment to addressing chronic poverty in Nigeria. It has established the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) in 2016 and important institutions such as the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development (FGN, 2020) set up in August 2019. The vision, designed in line with the global agenda to end poverty by 2030, is for social protection systems that are proactive, inclusive and sustainable for improvement of citizen's general welfare (FMHDSD). In terms of service delivery, FG established the N-Power scheme; Government Enterprise Empowerment Programme (GEEP); Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT), and National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSP) to encourage pupil's enrolment in schools (FGN, 2020).

The GEEP was launched in 2016 to provide access to micro-credit through interest and collateral free credit for Nigerians at the bottom of the economic pyramid. It is to offer credit facility to boost the millions of SMEs and businesses, enroll them into the formal financial system through opening of bank accounts, and provide verifiable formal identities for them. So far, the programme has developed 3 loans products which are, TraderMoni, MarketMoni, and FarmerMoni that have disbursed over N38 billion to beneficiaries between 2016 to 2020 (FGN, 2021).

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(a). Trader Moni

Social Investment Programme called TraderMoni is part of the GEEP programme and operated by the Bank of Industry to provide a minimum of 30,000 loans per state including the federal capital FCT (FGN, 2020). The loans are specifically for petty traders and artisans who are in dire need for capital but are not attractive to traditional lenders, often cannot access loans, and thus remain in a cycle of poverty. Such businesses and artisans include, small kiosk owners, bread seller, mobile tailor, mobile cobbler, keke rider, fruits seller, wheel barrow pusher. Pay back is within 6 months with a weekly or monthly repayment options. Once beneficiaries utilize the loans well and pay back on schedule, they have the choice to graduate upwards to N10,000, N15,000, N20,000, 50,000, and 100,000 maximum.

(a) MarketMoni and FarmerMoni are two micro-credit schemes. While MarketMoni is mostly for women entrepreneurs for SMEs and the loans range between N50,000 and N100,000, the FarmerMoni is aimed at empowering'' agropreneurs ''and the loan size is between N300,000 and N350,000.

Federal Government N-Power Programme

There is no gainsaying that the recent FG N-Power stands out as a social investment programme with potentials that could deliver on the goal of empowering the unemployed especially the young ones who are without jobs with inadequate skillset, and lacking financial means to survive (FGN, 2020). According to official sources, N-Power is aimed at providing jobs and skills empowerment to building self-reliance for unemployed youths between the ages of 18 and 35. The programmes are broad based including jobs in the related fields. The N-power programme provides N-Agro training for farm advisory services and data on agro-assets in Nigeria; N-Teach provides teachers for primary schools; N-health provides training for preventive health care delivery in the communities; N-Build and N-Tech which provide technical and creative skills to help expand their respective skillset that will foster innovation and creativity (FGN, 2021).

The scheme is currently witnessing a third Batch or Batch C and targeted at both graduates and non-graduates. Minimum prerequisites for selection include willingness to work, ability to develop

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skills, and a relevant test to be administered by the officials. Selected candidates are provided with a monthly stipend of N30,000 while gaining relevant skills and knowledge.According to reports over 109,000 beneficiaries have already set up their businesses and become employers of labour. Others simply proceeded to further their education to master's level (FGN, 2020). Since inception, the N-Power social investment programme has trained over 500,000 beneficiaries by June 2020 in various vocational areas such as farming, aviation, jobs in federal offices, oil and gas, banking, insurance, organisations, workshops and factories to garner the needed experience that employers are often seeking after.

Abacha Loot for SIP

Another monetary instrument being used to address poverty by the federal government is the so-called Gen. Abacha loot of US$322.5 million returned by the Switzerland authorities to Nigeria in 2018. Based on the MoU reached between Nigeria, Switzerland and the World Bank, the funds targeted the poorest of the poor through cash transfers. A study conducted by ANEEJ (2020) shows that 80 percent of the total monthly cash transfer of N5,000 came from the Abacha loot while the balance 20 percent was sourced from the World Bank facility granted Nigeria under the federal government National Cash Transfer Programme (NCTP) (ANEEJ & UKAID, 2020). For the purpose of convenience, N10,000 is paid to beneficiaries every two months.

Monitoring the disbursement of the Abacha loot provides some key successes and challenges. Its'Monitoring of Recovered Assets in Nigeria Through Transparency and Accountability (MANTRA) verified that the funds were received by the National Cash Transfer Office (NCTO) and disbursed to specific states with a high level of success. While 96.69 percent were paid N10,000, about 1.29 percent claimed to have been paid less than N10,000. Further, the grievance mechanism was not adhered to. There was poor feedback on registered complaints because majority of the respondents who registered complaints did not get their complaints resolved. Also, more than half did not get any feedback to their registered complaints relating to irregularities in payment, transportation costs in relation to cash received, and demands for upward review of the fixed stipend. Feedback from the field showed that there is uncertainty surrounding the cash transfer as the last disbursement was made in August 2020, and there is no information as to when disbursement will commence again.

SIPs and SWOT Analysis

Perhaps it is too early to critically appraise the levels of successes of the SIPs. This is because social protection is still at its nascent stages and emerging in terms of policies and implementation framework. Also, there are scant materials and critical study providing feedback on implementation and this makes critical appraisal difficult. Table 1 presents a SWOT analysis of the NSIP which relates directly to the internal factors of strengths and weaknesses, while the opportunities and threats relate to external forces. It applies a functional approach to analysis, identifying source of competitive advantage as well as reputational factors (Sammut-Bonnici, T and Galea, 2015). This will enhance greater understanding and practice. In a nutshell, the study shows that notwithstanding the good intentions of government and the roll out of the various programmes that are clustered under SIPs, their overall impact and spread is considerably minimal. Critical evaluation and monitoring studies should be directed to analyzing and documenting the level of success of these programmes. This relates mainly to policy and institutional framework, finance and sensitization on outcomes.

Table 1: SWOT Analysis of social protection programmes in Nigeria

Strengths	Weaknesses
Programme specifically targeted at lifting the poor out of poverty Budgetary allocation of N500 billion annually for SIPs Aligning goals/indicators of the SDGs related to poverty reduction Legitimacy of government tackling citizens welfare	Ad-hoc manner of implementation that is lacking policy framework - Poor institutional system that is lacking capacity (quality of personnel, and resources) - Subject to manipulations (multiple registration) and political patronage Low awareness of SIPs and poor perceptions of SIPs especially by some beneficiaries Inconsistencies in the payment schedule (eg. Last Cash transfer since August 2020) -Poor tracking and monitoring process. Corruption -Weak procurement process
Opportunities	Threats
Ad-hoc approach giving way to institutionalizing	Lack of legislative backing to guarantee continuity

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Expanding vision to lift 100 million people out of poverty in 10years (from 2017) Energy transition from fossil-based mono-economy to renewable energy sources as part of poverty reduction Expanding to tackling the root cause of poverty	Lack of public trust and confidence in the system Current insurgency, banditry, kidnapping and general insecurity including attack on aid workers Corruption to undermine SIP budgets Covid-19 pandemic

Source: Author's contribution 2021.

SIPs and Areas of Strength

Government direct targeting of the poor: The study shows that government Social Investment Programmes specifically targeted the poor and has the potential of addressing poverty. The goal is to lift 100 million people out of poverty within a 10-year period. This is strategic to address the 122million Nigerians in the working age bracket. Only 31 million Nigerians are employed and this is negligible hence national wealth redistribution targeting extreme poverty is highly relevant. The objectives of the national and state social protection is directly linked to the SDGs, especially the elimination of all forms of poverty, hunger and access to clean water and affordable energy for all.

Budgetary allocations to SIPs

The provision of finance through direct budgetary allocations is a major indicator that the government is sincere in combating poverty. Direct finances from the federal, state governments and partners disbursed to pursue the objective of poverty reduction will go a long way in addressing poverty. Specifically, all the respondents agreed that the federal government statutory budgetary allocation of N500 billion to social protection programmes is a right step in the right direction.

Although funds received by recipients may be meagre, however, the value of such money can be highly inestimable in the hands of the unemployed and those who have no hope of financial means of survival. This form of income redistribution has helped to reduce Nigeria's income disparity amongst citizens that is one of the highest in the world.

Majority of the respondents stated that the potential to curb the rate of crime and reduce insecurity is high. When fully operational, it has high level returns in helping to build social cohesion, engender a sense of belonging and improve citizen's morale that was otherwise eroding in a

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divided society in the Nigeria of today (Ojo, 2015). In this sense, security should be seen as investment on citizens for them to realize their potentials rather than the building up of arms and ammunitions meant to safeguard the rich and the powerful in the society.

Testimonies from Beneficiaries

Positive Testimonies from beneficiaries attest to the relevance of SIPs. Beneficiaries across the five states recounted success stories of SIPs. In terms of spread, 70 percent of respondents admitted knowing one or more persons that are beneficiaries of one form of SIP or the other at the federal or state level. The success stories vary. 98 percent of the beneficiaries interviewed claimed that the projects have added value to their lives and have helped them out of poverty. Some guarantee food supply. From the basic improvement of food due to improved purchasing power, some beneficiaries are able to buy food. One beneficiary from Edo state cash transfer stated that, "I will eat well and better than before." In terms of reducing poverty, steady food supply is significant.

Some beneficiaries invested their social protection support to more productive uses that resulted in skills acquisition, setting up of businesses. A beneficiary from the N-Power scheme said she was able to expand her tailoring business to employ five others. Similarly, some farmers through FarmerMoni have been able to expand their farms from one hectare to five hectares.

According to a respondent from Ekiti state, his mother used the N20,000 monthly FarmerMoni to start animal husbandry. The goat business she invested in grew from two to 10. Eventually, she has used the proceeds to finish the uncompleted building she started years ago and has moved from being a tenant to a landlady. Similarly, the state government has increased monthly stipend from N5,000 to N10,000 with a social protection legislative backing.

A federal government SIP for rural women empowerment was recently rolled out in Edo state with 3,400 reported beneficiaries. One beneficiary from Edo state stated that she is a trained baker since 2016 but had no money to commence the bakery business. She expressed gratitude to the federal government for the N20,000 monthly cash grant. She said she would use the money to buy baking ingredients and commence business in earnest.

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In a case study, Oko (2021), N-power beneficiaries expressed satisfaction with the scheme which they said have changed their lives for the better. Some said, N-power is their Savior, and described the social investment programme of the federal government as "a lifeline to many unemployed Nigerian youths." They called on the federal government to sustain the programme as a way of providing quick capital to youths for self-reliance. The N-power beneficiaries appealed to the federal government to provide loans or grants to enable them to solidify their various trades. Some trade include fashion and design, furniture design, interior décor, welding and metal fabrication, some have used their N-power profits to pursue their dream of further education most of which were at Master's level.

However, 5 percent of respondents who benefited said the programme was not helpful to them. An example is the N-Tech that a teacher benefited for 2 years period only to return to the unemployment market because he was unable to secure a teaching job. A few other stated that instead of "throwing money at poverty" they should address the root cause of poverty.

Perhaps it is in the area of data analysis and packaging of beneficiaries' information that the SIPs lack tremendously (ECN, 2018). The data on beneficiaries are not readily processed or aggregated and updated regularly. Public documents available lag behind and information packs not available for visitors to the office. However, a recent visit to the Ministry in Abuja shows that some officials are making plans to produce newsletters and magazines focusing on beneficiaries. An official stated that success stories publication is in the pipeline and will document impacts from the perspectives of beneficiaries. It is hoped that these public materials will be used by the media and help improve the image and awareness raising on SIPs.

Institutional arrangements for SIPs in Nigeria

The institutional arrangements had the SIPs coordinated from the office of the Vice President and thus, had some inherent drawbacks from the start. To address this, the federal government under President Muhammadu Buhari established the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development (FMHDSD) in August 2019. It has the mandate for social protection systems that are proactive, inclusive and sustainable for improvement of citizen's general welfare.

75 percent of the respondents stated that all SIPs should be made a "one stop shop" under one umbrella agency of government. That is, anything relating to SIPs should be located within the new ministry currently undergoing a transition process. A visit to the Ministry in late March 2021 showed that the offices and officials are yet to come under one physical structure as the offices are still scattered in the Abuja Secretariat. According to the Minster of State for Budget and National Planning, a review of the National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) covering 2021-2025 is underway and has been transmitted to the 36 states for review. It is unclear the role CSOs will play in this review process.

SIPs and Areas of Weaknesses

Weak Institutionalizing and ah-hoc implementation lacking policy framework: The institutional arrangement was chaotic from the start. Although there are some areas of strength, the areas of weaknesses of the SIPs are many and they erode from its strengths. Although it was initially under the Vice President of the federation, sectoral approaches meant that most of the social protection programmes were scattered in the various ministries, including the Ministry of Budget and National Planning, Women Affairs, NEMA, and Ministry of Agriculture, etc. It is hoped that the coordination of SIPs will fully be integrated under one umbrella Ministry, Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development (FMHDSD). Also, the NSPP review is being coordinated by the Federal Ministry of Budget and National Planning in conjunction with FMHDSD and state governments.

There is also unclear selection process that is subject to manipulations. For example, there are multiple registrations and in other instances some unemployed have registered in Batch A and B and were not selected. Some have now registered in Batch C hoping to be selected.

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Also, respondents did not prioritize the federal initiatives over the state and vice-versa. One respondent said that the federal government social protection in terms of delivery and impact is not better than those of the states' governments because they are all trying to address poverty. However, majority stated that implementation was better at the grassroots by the state than by the federal government. A respondent said SIPs should avoid the 'Moses Syndrome' whereby the FG through its FMHDSD is administering everything about the SIP programmes especially in the GEEP wholly from Abuja and leaving the state governments in the dark.

In terms of the school feeding programme, the N7000 allocation for feeding per child is grossly inadequate. However, state governments could complement this by a counterpart funding to make the initiative more attractive and reduce the number of children not enrolled in school due to poverty.

Weak institutionalizing: There is no clear-cut policy framework and legislative backing or an act of parliament which makes the SIP initiative tentative. This implies that the SIPs may not see the light of day beyond the present administration that initiated them. Continuity has been a major constraint in social protection delivery, and one hopes that this will not be the case after 2023 when a new administration takes over the reins of governance.

Poor targeting and low Awareness of SIPs: From the federal to the state levels, there is low awareness of SIPs in the study area. Over 70 percent of respondents who are not benefiting or involved with SIPs did not know the objective. They described SIPs as "giving out money arbitrarily to selected individuals." According to one respondent from Anambra state, the SIP is "a drop in the ocean of poverty."

However, some of those informed about social protection were skeptical about the genuine intention of government. From both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries and the public there are poor perceptions about what the SIPs are about and what they are meant to address. Indeed, some of the perceptions are remarkably damaging to the SIPs and the government running them. Some respondents from the five states either claimed that it was the ruling party's way of repayment for their "party loyalty", or it was their "share of the national cake." According to some respondents

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in Edo, money shared to the poor on the heels of election showed that it was politically motivated. Others suggest that the ad-hoc nature of delivery of some of the products suggest that it is "micro-managed" by powerful people from Abuja especially the conditional cash transfer payments that is lacking cohesive policy framework. According to respondents, some of the notice of intervention came from the federal to the state level within 24 hours of delivery and often location, beneficiaries and market to be visited are kept under wraps until the 11th hour.

There is manipulation and abuse of process. In some cases, married women with husbands feigned widowhood in order to access the N5,000 monthly cash transfer. This was evident in Delta and Anambra states. Some respondents suggest that this manipulation could not be possible unless there is collusion on the part of project officials for anyone to consent to such debasing manipulations that is against their cultural norms. These weaknesses raise a high level of skepticism and suspicion on the SIPs and those who manage them.

Others claimed that poor targeting is hindering the SIP delivery. They stated that money is not targeting the real people that need the funds as vulnerable people are in the remote villages and this project does not reach out to them because it is "City based SIPs." A respondent stated that it is people that are connected or have people in the system that often benefit. Others claimed that they have never met a beneficiary in person, noting, that, "I see beneficiaries only on TV. Thus, there is also the issue of willingness and readiness to be assisted as it is against cultural norms to declare oneself poor in some Yoruba communities.

Across the five states, SIP has been corrupted. According to one respondent, his son got a grant of N200,000 and the officials asked for a percentage share from the fund before it was released. Another common practice of the N-Teach to garner teaching skills is that some beneficiaries are engaged in other activities or simply uninterested and they bribe their supervisors for a cut from the N30,000 monthly stipends. Thus, the desired impact is betrayed.

Some beneficiaries themselves also exhibited low awareness on the goal of SIPs. Some do not go through the requisite training but show up to collect their monthly stipends. In Ekiti State, some beneficiaries from the N-Power creativity sold their laptops given to them after the training. In

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another instance, some persons have benefited 3 times from the N-Power programme because of the monetary gains and not necessarily the capacity building and skills acquisition for future experience and work. In Bayelsa State, some of those who benefitted simply sold their sets of starter-packs for catering services including fridges, generator, gas burner, oven for baking and utensils. Such assets were not put into productive use and the multiplier effect lost because they did not know the value or understand the objectives of the SIPs.

There is the need to intensify public awareness through the mass media and community-based organisations and NGOs. The FMHDSD provides some basic documentation regarding their operations on-line but needs to intensify their mass media campaigns to raise public awareness on the relevance and benefits of the NSIPs. The standard practice of processing and packaging testimonies of beneficiaries themselves on the impact and changes in their lives is currently scant. A recent visit to the FMH office shows that officials are aware of this gap and claimed that publications of success stories are in the pipeline. Others include publications on the target and goals of SIPs, infographics, TV and Radio talk-shows, engagement with communities, and critical studies on monitoring and evaluation of impacts.

Low budgetary allocations: The budgetary allocation may appear significant representing about US$1 billion annually. All the respondents agree that the enrolment level is low. According to government sources, the N-Power programme has benefitted 1.7 million Nigerians as at April 2019. The total figure of beneficiaries is hard to come by and would be better if updated quarterly. A recent study shows the reported beneficiaries updated March 2021 (see Table 2). In 2021, although over 5 million registered for N-Power in Batch C, only 500,000 were to be selected throughout the 36 states and the federal capital territory. However, a World Bank study (2019) shows that Nigeria spends 0.3 percent of the GDP on social investment programmes. Statistics also show that there are 122 million of working age in Nigeria, while only 31 million are employed (Ukpe, 2021; NBS, 2017). This means that only one out of four Nigerians is employed. To address such shortfall in Bayelsa state, some respondents disclosed that 10 percent of internally generated revenue be dedicated to educational feeding programme to complement the federal government initiative of N70 feeding per child per day. Thus, in terms of scope and reach, the coverage remains

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very low and effort to improve implementation is yet to be seen in concrete terms and number of beneficiaries. About 70 percent % of the respondents claimed that the amount paid was too little and the duration of some of the products is too short.

Although budgetary provisions are relevant, the area of fund disbursement is even the more important. There are differences between budget and funds disbursed. Between 2016 and 2018, the National Social Investment Office (NSIO) received N470,825 billion out of the N1.5 trillion in the three years period (Akeregha and Okwe, 2019). This represents a quarter of the budgeted amount and an indictment of FG that it should put money where its mouth is.

Table 2: Updated Coverage of the NSIP

Programme	States	Beneficiaries
N-Power Hubs	36 + FCT	549,500 N-Power graduates, non-graduates, 7 Technology
NHGSFP	33	9,963,762 pupils, 107,862 cooks, 54,952 primary schools
NCTP	33	620,947 cash transfers beneficiaries
(NSR by NASSCO)		1,648,967 households in NSR
GEEP (BOI managed)	36 + FCT	2,279,380 TraderMoni, MarketMoni, FarmerMoni beneficiaries

Source: Ubhenin (2021) derived from various sources (Mar. 2021).

Corruption and other internal weaknesses: Some respondents said corruption is a factor and listed poor monitoring and tracking of beneficiaries and budgetary allocations, inconsistences in the payment schedule, weaknesses in the procurement process as different manifestation of corruption (see also, ANEEJ & UKAID, 2020). Some level of corruption is evident in the reported cases of multiple registration of beneficiaries, and shortage of payment in the cash system that are eroding the integrity of the SIP processas stated by some respondents. Some misinformation regarding the school feeding programme made during the Covid-19 lock-down remains unresolved (Adesomoju, 2021). According to a government official, the schools feeding programme recorded a 20 percent increase in school enrolment with 9.7 million pupils being fed in 30 states and the

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Federal Capital Territory (FCT)(see also, Edeh, 2019). While this is laudable, the claim of feeding school pupils during Covid-19 lockdown has been challenged by CSOs monitoring the programme.

At a broader level, some respondents claimed that Nigeria institutions are typical examples of "extractive institutions" out mostly to "siphon resources" to the detriment of the poor. There is opaque procurement process and the lack of participation and inclusiveness in decision making. These can be addressed through good governance system that is currently a challenge in Nigeria.There is also concern over the quality of personnel as specialized staff is a major part necessary to put round pegs in round holes. These are mainly professional social workers that will enhance effectiveness of process and delivery.

SIPs and Areas of Opportunities

The opportunities are external factors that could help to ensure the success of SIPs. The institutionalizing process is currently on-going on policy review. However, legislative backing is still not in place and this is a clear opportunity to embrace. The SIPs represent a more thought-out plan to directly confront poverty., However, it is yet to align fully with SDGs in terms of targets Therefore, it should better align to the universal SDGs and benchmarks for measuring success, especially those related to the elimination of poverty, hunger, and provision of clean water, clean and affordable energy.

Shifting implementation to the state levels

The federal government NSIPs appear to be robust and are recommended to states for replication. Given the various portfolios of the SIPs it is easy to lose count or confuse them including the Covid-19 palliatives from both federal and state governments. Apart from these, the states also evolved their own processes, institutions, and social investment programmes ostensibly to support the federal government initiatives. At least, there is presence of multiple forms of SIPs in all the

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study areas and in most cases states replication schemes run side by side with that of the federal government leading to confusion and dissipation of efforts.

A more radical but common-sense approach requires partnership between the state and federal governments in ways that are complementary rather than competitive. The SIP pogrammes stand a better chance of success if there is concerted effort between the federal and the state governments. The majority of respondents stated that social protection should be streamlined under one agency of government as a one stop shop. However, the current situation where the federal government often dives directly into the states almost unannounced to disburse fund amounts to duplication, waste of time and resources. Also, states often strive to replicate the federal government programmes in different guises and formulations that are also unnecessary and time wasting.

To avoid these bottlenecks, the federal government should be responsible for policy formulation, strategic national principles, and specific targeted intervention; while the states should be solely responsible for programmes implementation and coordination. The SIPs implementation at the state level should be coordinated by a lead agency at each state level. Counterpart financing by the federal and state governments if properly channeled can help improve social protection delivery.

SIPs and Areas of Threats

Some external factors are threatening the survival of the SIPs. Failure to deal with the weaknesses and take opportunities might result in serious risks and threats facing the social protection efforts. The current spate of insecurity, banditry, kidnapping including attacks on social workers dwarf any sense of SIP successes. The government is losing legitimacy hence the need to tackle insecurity headlong and ensure that it does not overshadow the benefits.

There is low inclusivity of non-state actors in the SIPs on the part of government. There is the need to improve active citizenship that is able to engage their national government and hold government officials to account as a major way of addressing structural poverty.

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The Covid-19 pandemic is a special threat to SIPs especially in the event of lockdowns and restricted movements. Covid-19 has engendered poverty and some SMEs are struggling to stay afloat on a daily basis, while others have simply closed shops.

Discussion and Interpretation of the Study Findings

The study demonstrates that despite the myriad challenges facing social protection delivery, it remains a formidable tool to addressing poverty. While these disparate initiatives are varied, on aggregate, the fund represents a formidable and direct way of tackling poverty by the provision of statutory budgetary allocations annually that represent the largest SIPs in Africa. Thereis the need to strengthen the implementation of the SIPs in Nigeria, especially the study areas listed below. Some measures include, increasing the budgetary provisions and disbursement for optimal results, strengthening institutionalizing policy framework and provide legislative backing for the implementation of SIP to ensure continuity, and enhancing public awareness for SIPs. The varied programmes are low on public awareness.

Fundamentally, there is the need for the provision of health insurance for the extreme poor because they lack access to medical care. Enrolling them for free medical care or government health insurance system can be a major boost to addressing poverty.

Addressing structural causes of poverty and rethinking development in agriculture

While effort is made through direct intervention, this can hardly be sustained without addressing the root cause of poverty. Since climate change will seriously impact on agriculture and affect the poor, special attention should focus on food production and processing as a primary means for food security and reducing hunger and poverty. The major occupation of the population of the study area is predominantly fishing and farming. The lowlands riverine and swampy areas support fishing and aquaculture, while the upland areas support rainfed agriculture for cash crops such as cocoa, citrus, and food crops such as tubers, legumes, fruits and nuts, and vegetables.

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Since the Niger Delta is a fragile ecosystem, changes in rainfall variability and impacts of oil and gas extractive activities pose serious risks to the livelihood sources of the people. The underlining challenge is not much of food production than that of transportation, preservation, storage and packaging. The problem of deplorable infrastructure and road network makes it difficult for food movement from areas of surplus to areas of deficit. In some remote villages, there is lack of access to market days that is usually between 3-5 days intervals. As a result, about 40 percent of food production (perishable goods) perish before they arrive the market.

Farm produce undervaluing is an underlining factor of poverty. This is due to produce market glut arising from seasonal planting and harvesting as most produce hit the market at peak times. In this regard, effort should be directed at restoring farmer household livelihoods options, provide cash to boost purchasing power parity and access to basic social services. Also, building food and crops banks such as silos and granaries are required to preserve food stocks and food relief when needed. Communities are learning new farming practices, through the use of technologies, extension farm workers and early warning signals.

Reversing energy poverty through SIPs

The oil and gas sector fueling the hydropower generation represents about 90 percent of Nigeria energy sources and hence the high-level dependence on the sector. Yet, over 70 percent lack access to energy through national grid that will take the next 50 to 100 years if national grid and uninterrupted power supply is to be extended to Nigerian cities and villages. Energy utilization is a yardstick for measuring poverty as many citizens are without electricity for an average of 4-5 days a week. Nigerians that are poor pay a “significant poverty penalty” for energy in order to meet their energy needs that is often in short supply (FGN, 2018: 42). There is frequent power outage and demands outstrip supply in ways that suggest the acute energy needs is not abating.

A decentralized energy system to allow Community Energy Cooperatives is feasible to address clean and affordable energy needs through off-grid, mini-grid, and stand-alone systems. Rural electricity provision can be driven from bottom-up instead of the top-down approach. Developing the renewable energy sector particularly the renewable energy technologies will mop up teeming

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unemployed youths, and address poverty by boosting artisanal SMEs. This will make possible the achievement by 2030 the universal access to safe, clean, affordable, efficient, and sustainable cook stoves in all households of vulnerable groups. Meeting the energy needs will ensure a quicker lift out of poverty than any direct cash transfer or other SIPs seek to achieve in a lifetime.

Reducing corruption and poverty

A strong relationship exists between corruption, the cankerworm that has eaten deep into Nigeria's societal fabric and abrasive poverty. Corruption engenders poverty because it constitutes the biggest drain on development resources and frustrates every effort that is geared towards the liberation of the citizenry from the clutches of poverty. There is the need to fight corruption at all levels. This includes a general orientation that national wealth belongs equitably to all citizens. This means that the poor need to be catered for to ensure that they have quality life. A conventional definition of poverty as the inability to meet basic needs such as food, health care, education, shelter is insufficient to addressing poverty. Beyond this, poverty as *unfreedom*and the exclusion of the poor to participate in the decision-making process and in the allocation and use of resources rob them of access or exclusion to basic amenities. This needs to be reversed through inclusive participation in the development process. Other underlying factors to guide against relate to political insensitivity to lowering social spending for the poor, government policy bias engendering inequality, and tax system favouring the rich and powerful (Johnson et.al., 2010).

Although 'below the line' starting with $1 per day has been the general definition over the years (Sen, 1978;UNDP, 1979), the crucial line has always been adjusted and varied from over time, which currently stands at $2 per day. Nevertheless, the dichotomy between relative and absolute (extreme poverty) as well as the contrasts between single dimensional and multidimensional poverty still exists, as these reflect inevitable perspectives (Godwin, 1982; Eguruze,2017, 2021). There is also the emergent new definition; namely 'cumulative poverty': the idea that poverty is not only expressed in extreme or absolute sense, but also occurring on a cumulative basis and on multiple fronts across multiple variables of human needs, on a day-to-day basis, and on cyclical basis, is critical. Hence, it is perceived as multidimensional, intergenerational as well as transgenerational, in terms of its impact on vulnerable people, as advocated by some scholars

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(ibid). It also depends on the regional factor variations as there is hardly any agreeable general definition of poverty . Which is why the current case on the need for provision of a safety net such as the Social Investment Programmes or the National Social Support Programme targeted to the poor or vulnerable people is fundamentally critical.

Conclusion

The study has assessed the prospects of SIPs to end poverty. Study objectives were: To critically examine ways in which the services of the National Social Protection Programme and rethinking sustainable development (in Nigeria) linked/related to tackling poverty? In response to this, the main findings revealed that by (i) presenting strategies to accelerate social protection schemes and (ii) by seeking genuine partnership with the states governments that will allow them coordination and implementation at the state levels to avoid the spiraling cycle of poverty in Nigeria. To these, the study concludes that there is the need to restore confidence, match budgetary to actual disbursements, and awareness raising to improve on delivery.

The study responds to the question of 'how could rethinking of sustainable development help critical appraisal of the services of the National Social Protection Programme (in Nigeria)?' With respect to this objective, the study argues that, while social protection is relevant as safety nets for the poor, there is the need to tackle structural causes of poverty, institutionalizing the SIPs through legislative backing and genuine partnership between the federal and state governments requires devolution of power to the state to allow the coordination and implementation of the schemes at state levels.

Importantly, the study suggests, the need to rethinking development that is sustainable from a fossil-based economy to the emerging green economy that is rooted in renewable energy, and the circular economy that seeks to eliminate wastes in the production and consumption process. These economic models will ensure that food and energy supplies are driven from bottom up to avoid the cycle of poverty that Nigeria is currently facing.

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