



GETTING POVERTY TO ZERO IN NIGERIA THROUGH THE LENS OF SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMES

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Abstract

The goal of eliminating poverty in Nigeria is being tackled through the implementation of social protection programmes. These programmes aim to provide support and assistance to the most vulnerable members of society. Nigeria, being a country with a high poverty rate, has recognized the importance of these programmes in improving the lives of its citizens. The government has implemented various initiatives such as cash transfer programmes, school feeding programmes, and agricultural support programmes. These programmes have shown promising results in reducing poverty and improving the overall well-being of the population. However, challenges such as limited funding, inadequate coverage, and lack of coordination between different programmes still exist. To achieve the target of zero poverty, it is crucial to address these challenges and strengthen the social protection system in Nigeria. This can be done by increasing investment in social protection programmes, expanding coverage to reach more people in need, and improving coordination among different stakeholders. Additionally, it is important to ensure that these programmes are sustainable and have a long-term impact on poverty reduction. By focusing on social protection programmes and addressing the underlying causes of poverty, Nigeria can make significant progress towards achieving the goal of zero poverty.

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Introduction

Poverty is a persistent issue that plagues many countries around the world, including Nigeria. With a population of over 200 million people, Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa. Despite its vast natural resources and potential for economic growth, a significant portion of its population still lives in poverty. According to the World Bank, Nigeria has one of the highest poverty rates globally. The National Bureau of Statistics estimates that over 40% of Nigerians live below the poverty line, struggling to meet their basic needs. This alarming situation calls for urgent action to address the root causes of poverty and uplift the lives of millions of Nigerians.

Several factors contribute to the high poverty rate in Nigeria. One of the key factors is unemployment, particularly among the youth. With limited job opportunities, many young Nigerians find themselves without sustainable income sources, trapping them in a cycle of poverty. Lack of access to quality education and healthcare also exacerbates the issue, further limiting opportunities for socioeconomic mobility.

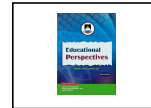
Conceptual and Theoretical Perspectives

Poverty lacks a commonly agreed-upon definition. Deciding where to draw the boundary between the "poor" and the "non-poor" is a problem that never goes away. Poverty, according to a 2002 World Bank report, is defined as the inability to achieve even a minimal level of life. To illustrate the practical side of poverty, the paper created a few indicators based on a minimal level of consumption. These include scarcity of resources, inadequate education and training, bad health, starvation, lack of political voice and freedom, inadequate housing, insufficient access to water and sanitary facilities, susceptibility to shocks, violence and criminality, and marginalisation and prejudice in politics. Hettne (2002) distinguished five categories of poverty. First, there is absolute poverty, which is a state of deprivation brought on by a limited income or by a lack of access to necessities such as food, clean water, sanitary conditions, health care, housing, education, and information. Second, relative poverty defines poverty from a comparative perspective; in other words, it is relative rather than absolute. The term "relative" describes how a family or person compares. Three metrics are used to quantify it: income, disposable income, and low-income family data.

In the same vein, thirdly, poverty is long-lasting or chronic when it is structural or chronic. The reasons are more long-lasting and may be attributed to a variety of things, including a lack of productive resources, a lack of skills necessary for successful work, occupational disadvantage, or ingrained socio-political and cultural elements. Fourth, conjectural transitory poverty, which is defined as being transient or short-lived and mostly caused by events like wars, natural or man-made disasters, environmental degradation, or structural changes brought about by policy reforms that lead to job losses, a decline in the value of real income assets, etc. Fifth, spatial/location refers to the extent and occurrence of anything based on geography or area. It deals with urban squalor and poverty, which is typified by the existence of shanties, ghettos, and slums in major cities. It is also characterised by low per capita income, inadequate welfare services, social deprivation, overcrowding in housing, informal business ventures, and environmental degradation. In rural areas, poverty is typified by substandard living conditions.

Conceptual Clarifications: Social Protection and Poverty

A critical reaction to the "safety nets" debate of the late 1980s and early 1990s was the emergence of social protection. In times of crisis, "safety nets" are a kind of social protection that assist individuals in meeting their most basic requirements. Two common short-term objectives are to smooth consumption and lessen the immediate effects of shocks. According to Gentilini et al. (2014), the World Bank defines "safety nets" as social assistance programmes, which is a



somewhat different meaning. In the 1990 World Development Report, for example, safety nets were conceived as minimal social assistance in nations too impoverished and administratively fragile to implement comprehensive social welfare programmes. They were very much the third prong of the World Bank's three-pronged approach to "attacking poverty" (World Bank, 1990). Safety nets came under increased criticism in the 1990s for being residualist and paternalistic as ideas about livelihoods, risk and vulnerability, and the multifaceted nature of poverty grew more complex. As a result, more advanced solutions were put up. Larger claims about what social protection can and should try to accomplish are now being made as the larger potential of social protection started to become apparent. This answer has two interrelated threads that are both related to the goal of long-term, sustainable poverty alleviation. The first claims that lowering risk or shielding the impoverished from fluctuations in income and consumption would enable them to invest and accumulate—a "trampoline" out of poverty (World Bank, 2000). It also clearly ties risk management with economic development. Development organisations still see social protection primarily in terms of how the public responds to shocks to their way of life—the traditional, highly defined "safety net" role. However, this is not "social protection," but rather "economic protection," and it scarcely transforms society. The World Bank's Social Risk Management approach, for example, does not give much thought to fairness and social rights. It is argued that understanding this second linkage can contribute to the establishment of favourable policy conditions for pro-poor growth cycles, accountable and responsive governance structures for both wealthier and poorer citizens, and a development strategy based on social equity considerations.

Social Protection Programmes Implementation in Nigeria: Success and Challenges

Social protection programmes have played a pivotal role in addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by vulnerable populations in Nigeria. For the past decade, these initiatives have undergone significant evolution, encompassing various interventions aimed at reducing poverty, inequality, and vulnerability among the populace.

Conditional Cash Transfer as a Social Protection Programme in Nigeria: Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programmes have gained significant attention as an effective tool for addressing poverty and inequality globally. In the context of Nigeria, the implementation of CCT as a social protection programme holds both promise and challenges. CCT programmes involve providing cash transfers to low-income households, contingent upon the fulfilment of certain conditions, such as sending children to school, accessing healthcare services, or participating in nutrition programmes. The conditional nature of the transfers aims to address the immediate needs of vulnerable populations while also promoting long-term human capital development (Baird et al., 2013).

In Nigeria, the implementation of CCT through the National Social Safety Net Project (NASSP) has shown promising results in terms of poverty reduction and human development. By incentivizing families to invest in education and healthcare, the programme has contributed to improved school enrolment, increased access to essential health services, and enhanced nutritional outcomes.

Research indicates that CCT programmes have the potential to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty by empowering beneficiaries to acquire skills and knowledge that can lead to better employment opportunities and higher incomes in the future. Moreover, the infusion of cash into local economies through these transfers can stimulate growth and contribute to poverty alleviation at the community level.



However, the successful implementation of CCT programmes in Nigeria is not without challenges. Ensuring the effective targeting of beneficiaries, preventing leakages, and addressing governance issues are critical for the programme's success. Additionally, there is a need for robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track the impact of the cash transfers and ensure compliance with the established conditions.

Furthermore, the sustainability of CCT programmes hinges on adequate funding, institutional capacity, and political commitment. As Nigeria continues to grapple with economic volatility and fiscal constraints, securing the necessary resources for scaling up and maintaining CCT initiatives remains a pertinent concern.

School Feeding as a Social Protection Programme in Nigeria: School feeding programmes have gained prominence as an effective social protection initiative in many countries, including Nigeria.

In Nigeria, a significant portion of the population grapples with poverty, food insecurity, and malnutrition, especially among children. The implementation of school feeding programmes aims to address these pressing issues by providing nutritious meals to school children, thereby enhancing their health, educational outcomes, and overall well-being.

One of the primary benefits of school feeding programmes is the provision of essential nutrients to children who may otherwise have limited access to balanced meals. Adequate nutrition is crucial for physical and cognitive development, and by ensuring regular meals at school, these programmes contribute to addressing malnutrition and its associated health risks.

Moreover, school feeding programmes have been linked to improvements in school attendance and academic performance (Bhutta et al., 2013). When children receive nutritious meals at school, they are more likely to attend regularly and exhibit higher concentration levels, leading to enhanced learning outcomes.

From a broader perspective, school feeding programmes can also have economic benefits. By creating demand for locally produced food, these initiatives can stimulate agricultural development and support local farmers, thereby contributing to economic growth and food security at the community level.

Despite the evident advantages, challenges persist in the implementation of school feeding programmes. Securing sustainable funding and resources to maintain these initiatives over the long term remains a critical concern, particularly in low-resource settings.

Additionally, ensuring the quality and safety of the meals provided is essential. Adequate supervision, hygiene standards, and nutritional balance are crucial aspects that require continuous monitoring and oversight to prevent any adverse effects on the children's health.

The implications of school feeding programmes as a social protection measure in Nigeria are far-reaching. By addressing malnutrition and improving educational outcomes, these initiatives contribute to breaking the cycle of poverty and fostering human capital development. Furthermore, the potential economic stimulus generated by supporting local agriculture can have lasting positive effects on communities.

School feeding programmes play a pivotal role as a social protection measure in Nigeria, offering a range of benefits that extend beyond mere provision of meals. However, addressing the challenges associated with funding and quality control is imperative to ensure the sustained success and impact of these programmes. As such, continued investment and commitment from the government and stakeholders are essential to maximize the potential of school feeding programmes in Nigeria.



Health Care Subsidies as a Social Protection Programme in Nigeria: Health care subsidies play a crucial role in providing social protection to the citizens of Nigeria. As a developing country with a diverse population and varying levels of income, access to affordable and quality health care is a pressing issue. In this article, we will explore the significance of health care subsidies as a social protection programme in Nigeria, considering its impact on public health, economic development, and social equity.

Health care subsidies contribute significantly to improving public health outcomes in Nigeria. By subsidizing the cost of essential health services and medications, the government can ensure that a larger segment of the population has access to necessary medical care. This, in turn, helps in reducing the prevalence of communicable and non-communicable diseases, improving maternal and child health, and enhancing overall life expectancy (Barrientos & NiñoZarazúa, 2011).

Moreover, health care subsidies can incentivize preventive care and early interventions, leading to a reduction in the burden of disease and the associated healthcare costs. This proactive approach to public health not only benefits individuals and families but also strengthens the overall health system of the country.

An effective health care subsidy programme can contribute to economic development by enhancing the productivity of the workforce. When individuals have access to affordable health care, they are more likely to seek timely treatment for illnesses and injuries, thus reducing absenteeism from work and improving overall productivity. Furthermore, by alleviating the financial burden of healthcare expenses, subsidies can free up disposable income that can be redirected towards other essential needs, thereby stimulating economic growth and consumption (Barrientos & NiñoZarazúa, 2011).

Additionally, a healthier population is more likely to engage in productive activities, such as education and employment, contributing to the human capital development of the country. This, in turn, can have long-term positive effects on the economy by fostering a skilled and healthy labour force.

Health care subsidies are instrumental in promoting social equity by ensuring that access to health services is not contingent on an individual's financial status. In a country as diverse as Nigeria, with disparities in income and access to resources, subsidies can serve as a means to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor, the urban and the rural populations.

By targeting vulnerable and marginalized groups, such as low-income households, women, children, and the elderly, health care subsidies can address health inequalities and contribute to a more equitable society. This inclusivity in healthcare provision aligns with the principles of social justice and human rights, affirming the government's commitment to ensuring the well-being of all its citizens.

Health care subsidies as a social protection programme in Nigeria carry immense significance for public health, economic development, and social equity. By prioritizing the accessibility and affordability of healthcare services, the government can foster a healthier, more prosperous, and fairer society. However, challenges such as funding sustainability, efficient implementation, and equitable distribution of subsidies must be carefully addressed by the government through proper legislative framework.

The Impact of Social Protection Programmes on Poverty Reduction in Nigeria

Social protection programmes play a crucial role in poverty reduction efforts in Nigeria, a country with a significant portion of its population living below the poverty line. These programmes encompass various interventions aimed at improving the livelihoods and well-being of the most vulnerable and marginalized individuals and communities.



Targeted Cash Transfers: One of the key mechanisms through which social protection programmes can alleviate poverty is through targeted cash transfer schemes. By providing direct financial assistance to the poorest households, these programmes help to address immediate needs such as food, healthcare, and education. For example, Nigeria's National Social Safety Nets Project (NASSP) has implemented cash transfer programmes in several states, demonstrating positive impacts on household consumption, food security, and school enrolment.

Access to Basic Services: Social protection initiatives also focus on enhancing access to basic services, including healthcare and education. By subsidizing or entirely covering the costs of essential services, these programmes ensure that individuals living in poverty can access quality healthcare and education without facing financial barriers. This not only improves their immediate well-being but also contributes to long-term human capital development, ultimately breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

Productive Asset-Building: In addition to immediate relief, social protection programmes can facilitate asset-building among poor households. This may involve providing support for small-scale entrepreneurial activities, agricultural inputs, or vocational training, empowering individuals to generate sustainable income and improve their economic resilience. For instance, programmes that offer training and resources for smallholder farmers have the potential to boost agricultural productivity and income levels, contributing to poverty reduction in rural areas.

Gender Empowerment: Furthermore, social protection initiatives can play a pivotal role in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, which are integral to poverty reduction efforts. By specifically targeting women with interventions such as cash transfers, skills training, and access to microfinance, these programmes can help address the unique challenges faced by women living in poverty. Empowering women economically not only benefits them directly but also has positive ripple effects on family well-being and community development.

Challenges and Considerations

While the potential of social protection programmes in reducing poverty in Nigeria is significant, several challenges and considerations must be acknowledged. These include issues related to targeting and coverage, programme sustainability, funding constraints, and the need for effective monitoring and evaluation to ensure impact and accountability.

In conclusion, social protection programmes have the potential to significantly reduce poverty in Nigeria by addressing immediate needs, enhancing access to essential services, promoting asset-building, and empowering marginalized groups. However, effective implementation, coordination among stakeholders, and sustained political commitment are essential for maximizing the impact of these programmes. As Nigeria continues to strive towards poverty eradication, investing in well-designed and comprehensive social protection initiatives remains a critical imperative for sustainable development and growth.

Toward Reducing Poverty to Zero: The Role of Social Protection Programmes in Nigeria

The World Bank asserts that social protection initiatives have the power to lessen poverty, advance the development of human capital, and encourage social inclusion in Nigeria (World Bank, 2021). The National Social Safety Nets Project, the Conditional Cash Transfer Programme, the Youth Empowerment and Social Support Operation, the Community and Social Development Project, and the National Health Insurance Scheme are just a few of the social protection initiatives that the Nigerian government and its partners have started in an effort to accomplish these goals (World Bank, 2021). These projects are intended to provide weak and marginalised members of society—such as impoverished and vulnerable families, youth, and



communities—cash transfers, skill development opportunities, and healthcare services. Some of the functions of Nigeria's social protection schemes are listed below:

- i. Reducing Poverty: By providing resources to low-income and vulnerable families, social protection programmes like cash transfers, food assistance, and microfinance schemes lessen their susceptibility to shocks and poverty. Social protection schemes help to lower the prevalence and severity of poverty and enhance the general well-being of the populace by providing a safety net to the most vulnerable members of society.
- ii. Fostering Social Inclusion: By offering assistance to often marginalised populations including women, children, the elderly, and those with disabilities, social protection initiatives foster social inclusion. By guaranteeing that everyone has an equal opportunity to engage in the development process and by providing equal access to resources, services, and opportunities, these initiatives contribute to the reduction of inequality.
- iii. Improving Access to Basic Services: Another goal of social protection schemes is to increase people's ability to get necessities for human growth, such housing, healthcare, and education. The National Social Safety Nets Project (NASSP) helps vulnerable households gain better access to basic services, while programmes like the Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) and National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) help to improve access to healthcare and education, respectively.
- iv. Fostering Economic Development: By supporting small and medium-sized businesses, encouraging financial inclusion, and developing human capital, social protection measures also contribute to the development of the economy. Programmes like the youngsters Empowerment and Social Support Operation (YESSO) assist underprivileged youngsters develop their human capital and encourage entrepreneurship by offering them support and skill-building opportunities. For this reason, social protection programmes—which provide disadvantaged families with resources, encourage social participation, enhance access to essential services, and stimulate economic growth—are essential in lowering poverty in Nigeria. The accomplishment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the creation of a more wealthy and inclusive society depend on these initiatives.

Conclusion

Poverty remains a pressing issue in Nigeria, with millions of citizens living below the poverty line. The government, along with various stakeholders, has been implementing social protection programmes to address this issue and uplift the most vulnerable segments of the population. Social protection programmes are designed to provide assistance and support to individuals and communities facing economic and social challenges. These programmes aim to reduce poverty, inequality, and vulnerability by providing cash transfers, social insurance, and other forms of support. In Nigeria, several initiatives have been introduced, such as the Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programme, the National Social Safety Net Programme (NASSP), and the Youth Employment and Social Support Operation (YESSO).

One of the key advantages of social protection programmes is their ability to directly target the most vulnerable populations. By identifying and reaching out to those living in extreme poverty, these programmes can provide them with the necessary resources to improve their living conditions. For example, the CCT programme provides cash transfers to poor households on the condition that they fulfil certain requirements, such as enrolling their children in school or accessing healthcare services. This not only helps alleviate poverty but also promotes education and healthcare utilization.



However, there are challenges and limitations associated with social protection programmes. One of the main concerns is the issue of targeting and inclusiveness. Identifying the most deserving beneficiaries can be a complex task, and there is a risk of excluding those who are in need. Additionally, there is a need to ensure that the delivery mechanisms are transparent, efficient, and free from corruption. Strengthening governance and accountability in social protection programmes is essential to overcome these challenges.

Another area of concern is the sustainability of these programmes. While social protection initiatives are crucial in addressing immediate poverty, they should also be accompanied by long-term strategies for economic growth and development. Creating employment opportunities, improving access to quality education and healthcare, and promoting entrepreneurship can contribute to sustainable poverty reduction. It is important to strike a balance between immediate relief and long-term solutions to poverty.

Future Prospects and Policy Implications

Looking ahead, the period from 2023 onwards offers an opportunity to consolidate and expand social protection interventions in Nigeria. Strengthening the synergy between various programmes, enhancing coordination among stakeholders, and leveraging technology for efficient service delivery are critical imperatives. Furthermore, there is a growing consensus on the need to integrate climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction components into social protection frameworks to address the escalating impacts of environmental hazards.

In light of the evolving socio-economic landscape, the sustainability of social protection programmes hinges on strategic policy formulation, adequate resource mobilization, and community participation. Embracing innovative financing models, such as social impact bonds and public-private partnerships, can augment the financial sustainability of these initiatives while fostering private sector engagement.



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