

Social Protection Programs and the Future of the Poor and Vulnerable in Nigeria: Notes and Reflections from Lessons of History

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Abstract

Existing studies argue that Social Protection Programs are designed to reduce poverty and vulnerability by promoting efficient labor markets. Therefore, the government must respect and promote the principles of non-discrimination, gender equality, responsiveness to social needs, social inclusion (including in the informal sector/economy), and respect for people's rights and dignity. This research uses qualitative field methods in the area and its surroundings. This research also uses historical documents from national archives and documentary data from newspaper reports, diaries, letters, and oral reports. The most common types of social protection include labor market interventions, social insurance, and social assistance. While this is the standard worldwide, especially in the ideal Social Contract between society and government, this has yet to be the case in most countries in the Developing World, especially Nigeria, in the last decade. So the impact is increasing poverty, neglect of older people, unemployment, disappointment, and tension, which leads to violent conflict. Therefore, this research attempts to build relationships between Nigeria's government and the Poor and Vulnerable Communities. The Nigerian government must show great commitment to the issue of social protection programs that are in line with global practices.

Keywords

Social Protection, Poverty, Vulnerable, Nigeria, Economy, History

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1. INTRODUCTION

Extant studies opine that Social Protection Programs, in the general sense, represent a set of policies and programs designed to reduce poverty and vulnerability by promoting efficient labor markets, diminishing people's exposure to risk, and enhancing their capacity to protect themselves against hazards and interruption/loss of income. Thus, it should respect and promote the principles of non-discrimination, gender equality, responsiveness to social needs, social inclusion (including those in the informal sector/economy), and respect for people's rights and dignity.

The general definition is similar to the position of the United Nations Research Institute for Social



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Development, which opines that social protection is concerned with preventing, managing, and overcoming situations that adversely affect people's well-being. It encompasses policies and programs designed to eliminate poverty and vulnerability by promoting efficient labor markets, diminishing people's exposure to risks, and enhancing their capacity to manage economic and social risks such as unemployment, exclusion, sickness, disability, and old age. It is one of the targets of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 10, aimed at promoting greater equality. The most common types of social protection include labor market interventions, social insurance, and social assistance.

The social protection system should respect and promote the principles of non-discrimination, gender equality, and responsiveness to social needs, such as social inclusion (including those in the informal economy) and respect for people's rights and dignity.

Although this is the standard worldwide, especially in a situation of ideal Social Contract between the people and the government, this has not been the case in most countries in the Developing World with specific reference to Nigeria, especially in the last decade. During this period, it was discovered that the political class would make this (Social Protection Programs) as part of their Party's Manifestos and campaign promises. However, they were quick to jettison these immediately after they assumed power. The effect is that, instead of genuine governance and development, there is the case of heightened poverty, neglect of the aged, loss of jobs (unemployment), heightened disenchantment and tensions, leading to violent conflicts as championed by the pauperized populace and the vulnerable of the society.

Thus, for meaningful discourse, there is a need to begin by looking at the historicizing of social protection programs, especially as they concern our part of the world (Africa). This is to establish its workability within our space.

2. METHODS

The qualitative method is used for this particular research. Data obtained from primary and secondary sources will be used to carry out the study using an analytical and historical narrative approach. This includes historical, descriptive, and analytical approaches based on gathered evidence. The primary source for this research is based on field investigations conducted in the area and surrounding territories. Among other things, the data collection process includes semi-structured interviews with individuals.

The research also uses historical documents from the national archives, relying on previous research conducted on issues relating to Social Protection Programme in selected countries and how this has been used to reduce poverty and vulnerability by promoting efficient labor markets, diminishing people's exposure to risk and enhancing their capacity to protect themselves against

hazards and interruption/loss of income over the years in history and how this has served to sustain local economies, culture and environment in addition to documentary data taken from newspaper accounts, diaries, letters and verbal reports.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Historicizing Social Protection Programme: The African Perspective

As far as African Political Economists are concerned, Social Protection is not alien to the African people and society. Rodney describes this stage as the first major stage following simple bands of hunters (Communalism), where property was collectively owned, work was done in common, and goods were shared equally (Rodney, 1973). The community's security, whether in terms of food security, security of territory, or the individual, was always collectively pursued. Moreover, the security issue was uncomplicated at such an elementary level. Explaining the Indigenous Social Protection Programmes further, Rodney (1973:7-8) wrote:

Before the 15th century in Africa, the predominant principle of social relations was family and kinship associated with communalism. Every member of an African society had his position defined in terms of relatives on his mother's and father's sides. In all African societies during the early epoch, the individual at every stage of life had a series of duties and obligations to others and a set of rights, namely, things that they could expect or demand from others. Those things were crucial to the daily existence of a member of an African society because the land (the major means of production) was owned by groups such as the family or the head of which was responsible for the land on behalf of all kin, including fore-parents and those yet unborn. Similarly, the laborers who worked the land were generally recruited on a family basis. A single-family or household would till its plots and be available to share certain joint farming activities with other extended family or clan members. The extended family or village community also organized annual hunts and river fishing. Having been produced on land that was family property and through family labor, the resultant crops and other goods were distributed based on kinship ties. If some sudden calamity destroyed a man's crops, relatives in his village helped him. If the whole community was in distress, people moved to live with their relatives in another area where food was not scarce.

In line with the above, (Saleh, 2009) opined that the African state is, by this definition, characteristic of class societies only. In the primitive community, Security (generally) was a collective concern, and its maintenance was a collective responsibility. Social security was organized around the extended family networks, and the society provided a safety net for the young, the elderly, and the disabled. In this way, the general interests of the whole society are given primacy over the particular interests of sub-groups of the society, and conflicts or differences in interests are still reconcilable within the framework of the customs and traditions of the groups and the community (Omar, 2009). In the thoughts of Eboiyehi and Onwuzuruigbo (2014), the Social Protection Programme is an integral part of traditional African societies, in which the extended family system is an important ingredient for care and support for the

aged, poor, and vulnerable. (Eboiyehi and Onwuzuruigbo, 2014)

In analyzing the above, opined that like in every African society, care, and support for the aged, poor, and vulnerable within the family is provided by adult children, members of the extended family, and the community as a whole at three levels: physical, social and economic. The Scholars specifically noted this:

Physical support is provided when an aged person is ill and weak enough to attend to themselves. At this stage, the family provides such a function either with or without external support, at home, or in institutions if constant medical attention is required. The social support from the family comes through the conjugal relationship as well as through adult children. Thus, any child or member of the extended family who fails to cater to his aged relatives is publicly ridiculed. They also place appropriate sanctions on a child who fails to care for his aged parents. Such a child is not recognized in the family or the whole community. The economic care and support come from shared housing, food, and other necessities.

In a more specific way, Akubor pointed to the Esan society as a model that still exists today. In his explanation (Akubor, 2009, 2010), he wrote:

In Esan, every family maintains a central barn to store the year's produce (since storage was as important as the production). In this way, Esan developed efficient methods of storing and preserving their produce against natural hazards). Both yam barns and maize granaries were built or constructed by the adult males of the household under the supervision and direction of the household head. While the construction of this facility was ongoing, it was the responsibility of the young male family members or hired laborers to supply the sticks, bamboo, and ropes from the nearby bush. In the case of Aka, the facility was constructed using both sticks and bamboo in a tent-like form and covered with leaves and grass. The process would always begin shortly before harvest. Immediately after harvest (or sometimes during harvest), the dry agricultural grain produce like maize was stored on the farm or around the homestead in this storage facility. The produce in the store was distributed on a regulated basis by the head of the household during the scarce period, according to the needs of each homestead. The ration from the general store was supplemented by the supply from individual family's farms.

The traditional Social Protection System started showing signs of collapse with the shift from the communal system to capitalism. This system does not recognize the family system, as everyone is left to fend for themselves. It is therefore not surprising that Togonu-Bicketsteth et al. (2022) recognized and reported the diminishing effectiveness of the traditional social safety net for the poor, aged, and vulnerable and the absence of formalized social protection measures resulting in concerns over the quality of life of this population. As far as (Togonu-Bicketsteth et al., 2022) are concerned, this situation is unacceptable and completely alien to most parts of the world, especially in Africa. Togonu-Bicketsteth et al. (2022) reported it thus:

In the case of Africa, care and support for older people were easier because the traditional form of

living arrangement in which family members, kin, and relations lived together in a concentrated area promotes family ties. Co-residence, therefore, promotes, to a large extent, intergenerational exchange between the old and the young. It is therefore not surprising that Jomo Kenyatta, in his book *Facing Mount Kenya* (1965), stresses that in African traditional society, “nobody is an isolated person. Primarily, he is several people’s relative and several people’s contemporary.” (Kenyata, 1965)

This is further emphasized by Fajemilehin, who opined that the aged know no poverty, deprivation, malnutrition, neglect, or isolation. (Fajemilehin, 2000)

3.2. Post-Colonial Society and Social Inequality: The Need for Social Protection Programmes

Nigerian society, since the colonial period uphill now, has exhibited a high level of social inequality, especially as it concerns Social Protection Programmes for the poor, vulnerable, and aged. Importantly, the Nigerian government has not developed a clear welfare package/policy or social security system to care for older people (Eboiyehi & Onwuzuruigbo, 2014). This, in the view of this paper, constitutes Social Inequality.

Social inequality, which is an area within humanities (specifically sociology) that focuses on the distribution of goods and burdens in society, is used in this context to describe the inability of the government to establish a functional Social Protection Programme for the poor, vulnerable and aged, which on the other hand, government officials and cronies embezzle state funds for private use. As far as this study is concerned, examples include income distribution, education, employment, or parental leave, while examples of burdens are substance abuse, criminality, unemployment, and marginalization. (Gunn E.B et al, 2019)

Studies carried out by (Caves R, 2004) have shown that social inequality occurs when resources in a given society are distributed unevenly, especially through norms of allocation, which engender specific patterns along the lines of socially defined categories of persons. In the case of Nigerian society, it has been established that it is the differentiation preference of access to social goods brought about by power, religion, kinship, prestige, race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, and class. In this way, social inequality has come to represent the lack of equality in outcomes. However, it may be conceptualized regarding the lack of equal access to opportunity. The social rights include the labor market, the source of income, health care, freedom of speech, education, political representation, and participation. (Akubor, 2015)

The situation in the Nigerian area, especially the northern part, indicates that the issue of social inequality is partly responsible for the high level of insecurity and turbulence. (Gaultung, 1982) Over the years, the government has instituted programs more like social protection programs to deal with this. However, the effectiveness of this has been an issue of debate over the years; some of these

programs are listed in the table below.

Table 1: Anti-Poverty Programme by the Government of Nigeria since 1986.

No	Program	Year	Target Group	Nature of Intervention	Remark
1	Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI)	1986	Rural areas	Feeder Roads, rural water supply, and rural electrification	Failed
2	National Directorate of Employment (NDE)	1986	Unemployed youths	Training, finance, and guidance.	Failed
3	Better Life Programme (B.L.P.)	1987	Rural Women	Self-help and rural development programs, skill acquisition, and health care.	Failed
4	People's Bank of Nigeria(P.B.N.)	1989	Underprivileged in rural and urban areas	Encouraging savings and credit facilities.	Failed
5	Community Banks (C.B.)	1990	Rural residents, micro-enterprises in urban areas	Banking facilities.	Failed
	Family Support Programme (F.S.P.)	1994	Families in a rural area	Health care delivery, child welfare, youth development, etc.	Failed
6.	Family Economic Advancement Programme(FEAP)	1997	Rural areas	Credit facilities to support the establishment of cottage industries.	Failed

An analysis of the performance of these programs shows that they never met the people's expectations because the government was either not serious or they turned the programs into conduit pipes through which they siphoned public funds. For example, in Nigeria, it was established that the incidence of poverty increased sharply both between 1980 and 1985 and between 1992 and 1996. In 1980, the figure was 27.2 percent; by 1985, it doubled to 46.3 percent; between 1992 and 1996, it was 65.6 percent. The 27.7 percent for 1980 translated to 17.7 million, whereas there were 34.7 million poor persons in 1985. Despite the drop in poverty in 1992, the proportion of people living in poverty was

about 5 million higher than the 1985 figure. By 1996, the population in poverty had increased sharply to 67.1 million. Other assessments of poverty also showed a deplorable situation. By 1996, infant mortality and mortality of children under five years were 78 and 147 per 1000 live births, respectively, while maternal mortality was 948 per 100,000 live births—all critically above the average for developing countries and even for sub-Saharan Africa. (Festus, 2005)

Thus, despite all these programs, the Human Development Index (HDI) report for 2001 indicates that Nigeria ranks number 51 out of the 174 countries in the world. This was not limited to Nigeria alone, but also their neighbors in the Third World Countries of Africa, even with so many resources that could ordinarily have transformed the society. This is represented in the table below.

Table II: Human Development Indices for OECD, Developing, Least Developed Countries and Nigeria

No	Index	OECD Countries	Developing Countries	Least Developed countries	Nigeria
1	Life Expectancy at Birth (years, 1998	76.4	64.7	51.9	50.1
2	Adult Literacy Rate (% age 15 and above) 1998	97.4	72.3	50.7	61.1
3	Combined primary, secondary, and tertiary gross enrolment ratio (%) 1998	86	60	37	43
4	GDP per capita (PPP US\$	20,357	3,270	1,064	795
5	People not expected to survive to age 40 (%) 1998	-	14.3	30.3	33
6	Share of income or consumption Poorest 20% (%) 1987-1998	-	-		4.4
	Richest 20% (%) 1987-1998				55.7
7	Population below income poverty line % - \$1 a day	-	-		70.2
	1993 PPP US\$) 1987-1998				43
	National Poverty Line 1987-1998				
8	GDP per capita (1995 US\$)				
	1975	5,390	720	-	301

	1980	8,690	1,170	-	314
	1985	11,210	1,520	690	230
	1990	16,040	2,170	890	258
	1998	20,360	3,260	1,050	256
9	People not expected to survive age 60 (5) 1995-2000	12.5	28.0	50.1	52.2
10	People living with HIV/AIDS Age 0-49, 1997	1,534,150	28,567,010	11,425,200	2,300,00
	Adult Rate (%)				
	Age 15-49) 1997	0.34	1.18	4.13	412
11	G.N.P. per capita (US\$) 1998	20,900	1,250	270	300
12	Exports of goods and services (as % of G.D.P.) 1990	17.4	27.0	16.0	43.4
	1998	21.7	31.7	20.2	23.5
13	Imports of goods and services (as % of G.D.P.) 1990	17.9	26.3	23.9	28.8
	1998	20.7	30.2	28.8	31.1

The Human Poverty Index (H.P.I.) measures human poverty as an aggregate of deprivation in four areas: the "percentage of people born today who are not expected to survive to age 40, deprivation in knowledge by the adult illiteracy rate, deprivation in economic provisioning and the percentage of children under five who are moderately or severely underweight. All the 85 countries listed in the Human Development Report belong to the underdeveloped parts of the world, with Nigerians occupying the 62nd position. No developed capitalist country is listed. The statistics for Nigeria are indeed frightening:

- a. Life expectancy at birth is 50 years for a Nigeria (49 for a man and 51 for a woman) compared to 77 years for those living in OECD countries and Cuba;
- b. 332.3 percent of Nigerians will not live to be 40 years of age;
- c. 52.2 percent of Nigerians will not live to be sixty years old;
- d. the poorest 20 percent of Nigeria's population have access to only 4.4 percent of the incomes earned in Nigeria, whereas the richest 20 percent of the population are in control of 58 percent of the nation's wealth;
- e. 70.2 percent of the population lives below the poverty line of at least US\$1.00 per day;
- f. in 1995, our external debts accounted for 79 percent of the Gross National Product, and

- g. in 1997, 1.5 million people under age 49 were diagnosed with HIV/AIDS in all the OECD countries put together; the corresponding figure for Nigeria alone stood at 2.3 million. The rate of H.I.V. infection in any given country is closely related to the level of poverty in that country.

In general, the government's evidence indicates that the incidence, depth, and severity of poverty have grown in Nigeria. Using an income level of N658.00 per month (\$8.20) per month to indicate the poverty line and N320.00 (US\$4.00) to indicate extreme poverty, the data from the Nigerian Federal Office of Statistics (F.O.S.) and UNDP show that in 1980, the poverty level was 27.2 percent or 17.7 million out of an estimated Nigerian population of 65 million people (In 1980, Nigeria was ranked 35th in the world by the World Bank as a middle-income country, with a per capita income of nearly \$1,000 per annum at the prevailing exchange rate of \$2 to the Naira). By 1966, the World Bank report showed that Nigeria had dropped to the 13th poorest country in the world, with a per capita income of less than \$300 per annum or N35,000,00 per annum at today's exchange rate.

In real terms, this means that the condition of Nigerians is three times worse than it was just thirty years ago. Thus, by this period (1996), the poverty level had more than doubled to 65.6 percent or 67.1 million out of an estimated population of 102.3 million. By 1998, the poverty level was 70.2 percent or about 71 million out of an estimated 105 million people. The depth and severity of poverty also more than doubled during the period. According to the figures of the federal government of Nigeria, whereas the depth and severity of poverty were 0.160 and 0.080 in 1980, the figures increased to .358 and 207 in 1996. (Festus, 2005)

By 2018, the poverty situation became reflected in the high level of out-of-school children. By that period, Nigeria was estimated to have 10.5 million out-of-school children (Unicef.org). In October 2018, the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) announced that the population of out-of-school children in Nigeria had increased from 10.5 million to 13.2 million and that the country had the highest number of out-of-school children worldwide. Regarding human development, Nigeria was ranked 157th out of 189 countries sampled, with a HDI value 0.532 for 2017. This situation has continued to worsen by the day, and no meaningful measures are being taken to curb the situation except for political talks and shows (allafrica.com).

3.3. Government and Nigeria's Social Protection Programme from 1999

From the analysis above, it is clear that up to the eve of the return to democratic rule in 1999, Nigeria witnessed huge and seemingly growing insecurity problems, rapid increase in poverty rate, high inequality, and concurrent threats of instability. For instance, by 1988, F.O.S. data showed that Nigeria's poverty level was 28.1 percent. By 1996, the poverty level was 65.6 percent or 67 million people. On a comparative basis, Nigeria, it was argued that by that figure, Nigerians were at that time poorer than

virtually all her neighbors. That was because, based on statistics, it was discovered that at that time, Ghana ranked 33rd with a per capita income of \$410; Togo ranked 25 with a per capita income of \$320; Benin ranked 30th with a per capita income of \$370. Cameroon ranked 47 with a per capita income of 680, more than twice the per capita income of Nigeria.

The scenario demonstrated above proves that in 1999, Nigeria was one of the weakest economies in the world. As of 1999, poverty was considered one of the major socio-economic problems in Nigeria, and it recently drew the attention of policymakers in Nigeria. In response to Nigeria's scourge of poverty, Obasanjo's civilian government introduced the Poverty Alleviation Programme (P.A.P.) in 2000. However, later, P.A.P. was halted and replaced with the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) in 2001. NAPEP has a multi-various approach to poverty eradication, including the Capacity Acquisition Programme (C.A.P.), which emphasizes skills acquisition and training for self-reliance.

The National Poverty Eradication Program (NAPEP) claimed to have trained 130,000 youths and attached 216,000 persons to various establishments, yet there was no fact to back this up. Only a little was achieved as the number of Nigerians living below the poverty line increased. This is based on official statistics indicating that unemployment was at 10.8% in 2003, and the average growth rate was about 3.6% between 1999 and 2003. This figure is below the minimum of 5.0% to prevent poverty from worsening and 7.0% to meet the M.D.G. target for poverty and hunger. As a result, various governments since the Fourth Republic began implementing various social protection interventions to lessen poverty, economic shocks, and vulnerability in Nigeria's rural and urban areas. It is against this background and in line with the United Nations M.D.G. number one, i.e., to halve the proportion of people living in absolute poverty by the year 2015, that the government of the Fourth Republic launched a reform program called NEEDS.

3.4. United Nations Millennium Development Goals and the Nigerian Social Protection Scheme

In 2000, the United Nations proclaimed the Millennium Development Goals (M.D.G.s), measurable aims and indicators to reduce poverty, starvation, sickness, illiteracy, and discrimination against women. As a member state of the U.N., Nigeria signed the agreement to reduce poverty by 2015 to 50% and promote gender equity. In line with the U.N. initiative, Poverty Reduction Strategy Plans (PRSP) were developed to map out ways to tackle the poverty scourge in Nigeria. The Nigerian homegrown version was developed and named NEEDS: National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy. It was hoped that implementing this strategy would stabilize the social, economic, and political situation and consolidate the democratic process.

Thus, by 2004, the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy came on board. The 2004 National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy marked the beginning of social

intervention programs since the inception of the Fourth Republic in Nigeria, with emphasis on employment opportunities and poverty reduction. NEEDS Stands for the Nigerian Economic Empowerment Development Strategy, Which Was Nigeria's Strategy and Plan to Bring about Development and Reduce Poverty among the Nigerian Poor. It Had Parallel Programs at the State and Local Government Levels Known as SEEDS and LEEDS, Respectively (State Economic Empowerment Development Strategy and Local Economic Empowerment Development Strategy). NEEDS Was the Nigerian Elite's Version of a World Bank Directed Poverty Reduction and Development Blueprint. It Was Supposed to Be Country-Owned Home Grown. With NEEDS, plans were made to achieve the following.

- a. Empower the Nigerian masses to draw a social agenda that should heavily invest in people.
- b. Promote private enterprises and consolidate the macroeconomic framework.
- c. Strengthen the efficiency of the public sector, diminish corruption, and promote security and the rule of law.

To achieve the above, the government argued that NEEDS targets creating one million jobs in 2004 and two million in 2005, 2006, and 2007. These jobs were expected to be created by the manufacturing and the agricultural sector. In what seems like a self-assessment, it was said that between 2000 and 2005. NEEDS did not achieve the desired result due to weak poverty statistics, particularly income poverty (Olaniyan, 2003). With this, it could not achieve the set aim of the government. (Nwakanma, 2004)

The failure of NEEDS led to the abandonment of the program by the Yar'Adua administration, which in 2007 introduced another set of Social Protection Programmes such as universal primary education, reducing child mortality, and improving maternal health care. These programs were designed to run concurrently with the Millennium Development Goal of reducing chronic poverty and hunger by 2015. These interventions were also disrupted due to the demise of the then-president in 2010. The Goodluck Jonathan administration also recognized the importance of Social Protection Intervention by introducing the Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YOUWIN) and Community Service Schemes with human capital development in mind.

The ineffectiveness of the programs above led the Muhammadu Buhari regime to implement a new set of intervention programs such as Youth Employment and Empowerment, Conditional Cash Transfers, Home-grown School Feeding, and a Micro-Credit Scheme for one million market women. However, various social protection programs implemented over the years have failed to buffer the vulnerability and poverty level in the country, as there was no significant decrease in poverty and vulnerability levels. This could be attributed to poor design and uncoordinated manner of the interventions with no clear-cut policy framework driving the social protection agenda. Consequently, their lifespans ended when the administration that initiated them left power. In other words, social

protection programs in Nigeria need to be more ad hoc and coordinated. Another major problem facing the social protection programs in Nigeria is the lack of data to indicate those who are vulnerable. Poor data systems have hindered various intervention programs in the country, resulting in coverage estimated at a tiny fraction of low-income people, regardless of social protection or social exclusion. The reasons for low coverage result from many factors, including political, financial, and capacity limitations, which restrict the potential effectiveness of social protection interventions to lessen poverty and vulnerability in the country.

3.5. Nigeria's Social Protection Programme up to the eve of the COVID-19 Pandemic

In 2016, the Federal Government established the National Social Investment Programme, NSIP,. Nigeria has a Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management, and Social Development, which President Muhammadu Buhari's administration established to coordinate the administration's response to humanitarian challenges in the country. The National Social Investment Programme, NSIP, was to tackle poverty and hunger across the country. The programs have largely focused on ensuring a more equitable distribution of resources to vulnerable Nigerians, including children, youth, and women. Since inception, these programs have combined with supporting more than four million beneficiaries country-wide. The programs include the N-power program, the Conditional Cash Transfer, C.C.T.; the Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme, GEEP; and the Home Grown School Feeding Programme, HGSF.

Table III: Social Protection Programmes from 2016 and its Impact

S/no	Program	Target	Impact
1.	N-power	A program was created in 2016 to reduce the rate of unemployment. It is supposed to train graduates and non-graduates in relevant skills that will help them earn more money and stand out locally and internationally.	Minimal
2.	Conditional Cash Transfer	This provides targeted monthly cash transfers of NGN 5000 to eligible persons who meet specified criteria from the National Social Register. The transfer is to help improve their consumption levels and encourage them to develop saving skills.	Minimal
3.	Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme,	Created by the Federal Government and funded through the Social Investment Unit in the Office of the Vice President to assist market women, artisans, women cooperatives, enterprising youths, small-scale farmers, agro0-allied	Minimal

		processors, and other categories of small and medium businesses in Nigeria	
4.	Home Grown School Feeding Programme	Created to enhance school enrolment, improve nutrition and health, and stimulate the growth of the local economies by sourcing food items from local farmers, which strengthens the local agricultural Economies, creating Employment opportunities with jobs in catering., processing, and farming	Minimal

A recent report by the National Bureau of Statistics affirmed that 40 percent of Nigerians live below the poverty line, and more than two million are internally displaced. These and many more challenges posed serious threats to national development.

3.6. The COVID-19 and Social Protection Programme in Nigeria

The global economic crisis due to the coronavirus pandemic has resulted in unprecedented disruptions to global supply chains, a sharp drop in global crude oil prices, turmoil in global stock and financial markets, and the lockdown of large swath movements of persons in many countries, among others. Experts have argued that these outcomes have severely affected households' livelihoods and business activities, resulting from a drop in global demand, declined consumer confidence, and a slowdown in production. (African Press Agency, 2020)

For instance, in the oil and gas sector, there was a slump in crude oil prices due to weakening global demand for Brent crude, Nigeria's benchmark grade, which dropped by over 60 percent from the beginning of 2020. The effect of the crash in global oil prices, in turn, necessitated the downward adjustment of the reference price of crude oil from \$57 per barrel to \$30 and further down to \$25 per barrel for the implementation of the 2020 budget. This had serious consequences for implementation and, in turn, the general welfare of the people.

In the case of the aviation industry, the closedown of both local and international space has caused serious damage to the daily income of airline operators and their defendants. This is because there was a serious loss of jobs, especially during the period of the lockdown, a situation which led to the loss of over 100,000 jobs in the aviation sector. In monetary terms, it is estimated that the Nigerian aviation sector lost nearly N17 billion monthly by the airlines since their operations were grounded. Similarly, the banking sector experienced limited operations during the lockdown, and the Central Bank of Nigeria halted some of the bank's plans to lay off staff due to the difficult operating environment. (Efrem, 2020)

As far as the hospitality and entertainment industry was concerned, the cancellation of many bookings and the closure of many hotels due to the lockdown affected the hotels' income and operation.

Film and entertainment companies had to close down during the lockdown period. For the health sector, the pandemic exposed the rot and the dearth of basic infrastructure. (Akubor, 2017)

The hospitals that have been ill-equipped for years could not stand the moment's pressure. In fact, despite promises of adequate care, Nigerians refrain from public hospitals and take refuge in private ones. As it is now, there is an urgent need for governments to take steps to provide some basic facilities and equipment needed to battle the virus as well as the need for post-COVID life.

The above is very worrisome when seen in the light of the fact that even before the coronavirus officially hit the country, the majority of the people had been living in what has been described as absolute poverty, and this has been on for years with successive governments paying lip service to change the situation. (Akubor, 2011)

For instance, official statistics show that less than 20 million people (or an estimated 27 percent of the Nigerian population) lived in poverty in 1980. Up to COVID-19, findings as released by the World Data Lab's Poverty Clock indicated that over 95 million Nigerians (or 48 percent of the population) live in extreme poverty, defined as those who live on less than \$1.90 per day. Poverty levels vary across the country; the northwestern part of the country has the highest incidence of poverty, while the southeast has the lowest—a majority (63 percent) of the poor live in rural areas. (Akubor, 2010)

Yet during the lockdown, the federal government revealed that it spent about N523.3 million on the school feeding program, as against the initial N13.5 billion declared as her monthly expenditure. (Uroko, 2020) This was a program the government was advised against as the pupils were all at home during the said period. Yet, it continued with the program, claiming it spent the said amount on children in only two states and the Federal Capital Territory. The breakdown includes F.C.T., 29,609 households were impacted, 37,589 in Lagos, and 60,391 in Ogun, totaling 124,589 households that benefited from the program between May 14 and July 6. This act has been described as a charade as these are not the only states that constitute the Federal Republic of Nigeria with children. Specifically, the Nigerian Union of Teachers described the act as fraudulent. All these calls for serious concern and attention. (Akubor, 2018)

Amidst the above and corruption perpetuated by politicians and their associates against the people, the United Nations is already raising the alarm of possible famine in the area. They have attributed this to the effect of COVID-19, which killed some parts of the country, caused displacement, and destroyed livelihood. (Edition.cnn.com) According to the Report, the situation varies from country to country, but civilians were being killed, injured, and displaced; livelihoods were destroyed, and availability of and access to food were disrupted amid growing fragility. In the case of Nigeria, the Report emphasized this (Chioma, 2020)

Alarming levels of food security and hunger have arisen largely as a result of the actions of extremists affiliated with armed groups in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states in Nigeria;...more than 10 million people in the three states –about 80%of the population – need humanitarian assistance and protection, an almost 50% increase since 2019 and the highest recorded since humanitarian operations began, Yet the U.N. appeal is only 33% funded, its lowest

On the fate of farmers and the Famine situation, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres argued that Nigeria lost 25% of the rice harvest to flood. In contrast, about 2 million tons of rice were washed away by floods in the country. That is more than 25% of the previously projected amount of water being washed away by floods in Nigeria. Corroborating the position of Antonio Guterres, Mohammed Sahabi, the Chairman of the Rice Farmers Association of Nigeria, Kebbi Chapter, revealed that at least 450,000 hectares (1.2 million acres) were destroyed in the main rice-growing Kebbi state. He argued that farmers aimed to target a 2.5 million ton contribution to the national basket but will now meet less than 20% of the target. This is because the body is experiencing similar losses in Kano, Niger, Enugu, Jigawa, and Nasarawa. In all these situations, the government showed no sign of good governance; rather, there seems to be deliberate attempts at making the populace suffer even more. Reacting to this trend, Ogunyemi Adetunji opined thus:

The country is acting on autopilot as if somebody is absent from the government. There is a complete and total disequilibrium and disarticulation between the political economy and the welfare economy, which is the responsibility of the Nigerian state. This is indeed a sign of insensitivity in governance. At a time when most governments of the world are stepping up to provide palliative to give their people the best of governance, the Nigerian government is facing the opposite direction, taking unpopular and mass unfriendly decisions at a time in world history. (Adetunji, 2020)

The above view has also been expressed differently, making the government suffer severe criticism and condemnation.

Generally, the way and manner in which the government, both at the state and federal levels, handled the issue of COVID-19 (especially in the area of finances and expenditure) made the populace lose trust in the government. The enthusiasm the people showed at the beginning of the pandemic could be seen in the areas of individuals and corporate organizations donating to support the government in the fight, so much so that within the first few weeks, donations were pouring in from various angles. For instance, of the N36.3bn public funds and donations paid into the COVID-19 Eradication Support Accounts, N1.4bn came from Nigerians and companies through accounts at the First Bank; Access Bank; G.T.B., Zenith, and U.B.A., while N536m donations were made through the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN). The N536 donations comprise N89m and N279m from the Senate and House of Representatives, respectively. In addition, China General Chambers of Commerce in Nigeria donated N48m; the

Petroleum Equalization Management Board gave N50m, while the Nigerian Content Development and Monitoring Board donated N70m. (www.premiumtimesng.com)

The non-challenge attitude of the government supporting the poorest Nigerian vulnerable during the period has led to the vehement quest for accountability. It was discovered that instead of looking into the welfare of the vulnerable and poor, government officials and their cronies were hoarding palliative meant for the people. This fueled the breaking into various government food stores and facilities nationwide. This was even as other groups threatened showdown and legal actions against the government if it failed to satisfy the accountability yearning of the people.

3.7. Aftermath of COVID-19 Pandemic on Nigeria's Welfare of the Poor and Vulnerable.

Although the world, in general, and Nigeria, in particular, has yet to witness the end of the COVID-19 scourge, experts and analysts believe that the impacts will be felt not only presently but also in the future. In the case of Nigeria, which has largely been a mono-economy, scholars have argued that, apart from the loss of jobs, the country will be plunged into the worst economic problems and starvation. This has been spelled out by the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics and the World Bank Poverty Survey in August 2020. (Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics and World Bank Poverty Team, 2020)

For instance, the second quarter (Q2) 2020 Labor Force Survey (L.F.S.) – collected by the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics (N.B.S.) between June 17 and July 8 2020 – provides crucial information on households' response to COVID-19 in the key states of Kano, Lagos, Rivers, and F.C.T. Abuja, which can be benchmarked against pre-crisis data from the 2018/19 Nigerian Living Standards Survey (NLSS). Several key insights emerge from this analysis:

- a. The share of people engaged in economic activities in the four states was lower in June/July 2020 than before the COVID-19 crisis, especially in F.C.T. Abuja, where the share of people working was down by around 14 percentage points.
- b. Even if some people have resumed work, incomes may still be precarious, with larger shares of workers in Kano and Rivers engaged in agriculture and fewer workers in Lagos engaged in industry than before the COVID-19 crisis.
- c. Food insecurity appears to be prevalent across all four states, but especially in Rivers and F.C.T. Abuja, where 79 percent of households and 72 percent of households reported skipping meals since the start of the pandemic.
- d. Households in all four states are drawing down their savings and borrowing money to cover their living expenses, which may leave them more economically vulnerable and reduce their investments in human capital.

- e. More than 1 in 5 households in Kano and F.C.T. Abuja and more than 1 in 10 households in Lagos and Rivers reported violating containment measures to maintain a living, emphasizing the trade-offs between earning incomes and protecting their health.
- f. The coverage of social assistance, in the form of free food, varied dramatically between the four states, with 43 percent of households in Rivers having received food assistance since the start of the pandemic compared with just 5 percent of households in Kano (the state with the highest poverty headcount rate of the four); social assistance in cash or kind was far rarer.
- g. Despite some variation between the four states, most households knew about the importance of washing hands with soap and water (at least three-quarters of households in each state) and using face masks (at least 80 percent of households in each state) to protect against COVID-19.

Apart from the above, statistics from N.B.S. also indicate that Nigerians became even more indebted as monies obtained for businesses and other developments were channeled into food purchases due to the loss of jobs and hunger. According to the national longitudinal survey on the socio-economic effects of COVID-19 on Nigerian households, conducted by the bureau in August, 51 percent of households used loans taken after the pandemic began to pay for food items. The information reads thus:

About one in four households were already indebted before the pandemic, while nearly one-third have taken out new loans since the onset of the pandemic. The food security situation in Nigeria remains precarious, even as the lockdown restrictions continue to be loosened. The share of households experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity remained high at 68% in August 2020. Indebted households reported that 55 percent of the loans were obtained from friends or relatives. Loans obtained from more formal sources were far less frequent, with only 9 percent of respondents reporting loans from banks and microfinance institutions and 16 percent from cooperatives and savings associations. This could reflect the barriers Nigerian households face to obtain formal loans in a crisis, and many households must turn to friends and relatives for loans instead. The N.B.S. reported that the overall share of working respondents is back to pre-pandemic levels. However, six percent of the respondents have not worked since the pandemic began. In comparison, 60 percent have experienced periods without work, which, according to the N.B.S., indicates instability in the job market. The data office said 1,881 households from the baseline were contacted, and 1,789 households were fully interviewed. (www.thecable.ng)

A general survey of the government's social protection programs as empowerment projects shows that they should have targeted developing human capacity for development. The impact is that the people and the economy have been moving towards a negative curve. For instance 2020, Nigeria's inflation rate rose by 14.23% (year-on-year) in October 2020, against 13.71%, as recorded in September 2020. This was contained in the consumer price index report recently released by the National Bureau of Statistics (N.B.S.). According to the report, the October figures indicate a persistent increase in 14

months, the highest recorded since March 2018. Also, on a month-on-month basis, the Headline index increased by 1.54% in October 2020, a 0.06% rate higher than the rate recorded in September 2020 (1.48%). Specifically emphasizing Food inflation, the report continued thus:

... on the composite food index, a closely watched component rose by 17.38% in October 2020 compared to 16.66% recorded in September 2020. On a month-on-month basis, the food sub-index increased by 1.96% in October 2020, up by 0.08% points from 1.88% recorded in September 2020. The major drivers of food inflation were increases recorded in the prices of Bread and cereals, Potatoes, Yam and other tubers, Meat, Fish, Fruits, Vegetables, alcoholic and food beverages, and Oils and Fats. (National Bureau of Statistics (N.B.S.), 2020)

On what it described as Core inflation, it goes on thus:

The "All items less farm produce" or Core inflation, which excludes the prices of volatile agricultural produce, stood at 11.14% in October 2020, up by 0.56% compared to 10.58% recorded in September 2020. The highest increases were recorded in prices of Passenger transport by air, Hospital and Medical services, Passenger transport by road, Pharmaceutical products, Motor cars, Vehicle spare parts, maintenance and repair of personal transport equipment, Hairdressing salons and personal grooming establishments, Miscellaneous services relating to the dwelling, Paramedical services and shoes and other footwear.

An analysis of States with the highest inflation indicates that Zamfara State recorded the highest rate in the month of October with a 17.69% increase (year-on-year), followed by Sokoto State (17%), Ebonyi (16.91%), Bauchi (16.73%), and Plateau State (16.69%). On the flip side, Cross River recorded 11.5%, followed by the federal capital, Abuja (11.84%), Lagos (11.95%), Ondo (12.33%) and Kwara State (12.5%). In terms of the food index, Edo State led the list with 21.65%, followed by Zamfara (20.88%), Kogi (20.58%), Sokoto (20.5%), and Plateau State (20.26%). In comparison, Ondo State recorded the lowest inflation rate with 14.23%, followed by Ogun, Lagos, Bauchi, and Gombe with 14.47%, 14.57%, 14.85%, and 14.88%, respectively.

The implication of the above is that the rise in inflationary pressure indicates a persistent decrease in the purchasing power of consumers, especially at a time when the economy is on the verge of recession, characterized by increases in the price of major food items and service fees. The irony is that while Nigeria's inflation rate hits 13.71% as food prices soar, neighboring Ghanaian inflation rate drops for the 3rd straight month to 10.1%. This is occurring at almost the same time Nigeria's food Inflation rose by 110.5% in five years. (Oyekanmi, 2020)

The situation, as described above, has become so terrible that it has been established that citizens (Nigerians) are taking loans to buy food, as 68% of households suffer food insecurity. This was revealed from figures from The National Bureau of Statistics (N.B.S.), which opined that 68 percent of Nigerian households experienced moderate or severe food insecurity in August due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the national longitudinal survey on the socio-economic effects of COVID-19 on Nigerian households, conducted by the bureau in August, 51 percent of households used loans taken after the pandemic began to pay for food items. In detail, the Report reads:

About one in four households were already indebted before the pandemic, while nearly one-third have taken out new loans since the onset of the pandemic. The food security situation in Nigeria remains precarious, even as the lockdown restrictions continue to be loosened. The share of households experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity remained high at 68% in August 2020. Indebted households reported that 55 percent of the loans were obtained from friends or relatives. Loans obtained from more formal sources were far less frequent, with only 9 percent of respondents reporting loans from banks and microfinance institutions and 16 percent from cooperatives and savings associations.

The summary of the above reflects barriers faced by Nigerian households in the face of the crisis, and for survival, households turned to friends and relatives. It is on record that, to date, most Nigerians, estimated at 60 percent, are experiencing periods without work, which, according to the N.B.S., indicates instability in the job market. The people and economy have not recovered from the COVID-19 Pandemic, especially in terms of job losses, death, and other hardships that came with the pandemic. This heightened insecurity, which in turn threatened agricultural activities, which is the major employment of the rural dwellers. (www.thecable.ng)

3.8. The Removal of Fuel Subsidy and the People

The withdrawal of fuel subsidy in May 2023 in Nigeria led to a 150% to 200% surge in fuel costs (N 500 – 600) across the country. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are facing difficulty accessing affordable power. As a way of cushioning the effect of the hardship that followed the removal of fuel subsidy, the government promised palliative, which, to date, have not impacted the people.

Months after the removal of the subsidy and the promised palliative, the situation is yet to change for the better. Pictures emerging from different parts of the country indicate that the government did not make any plan to cushion the effect of the pain on the populace. In most cases, what is described as Palliative looks ridiculous, as government officials are seen distributing Cups and *Congoes* (local measuring devices) of grains as Palliative. Initially, the government suggested distributing N12000 (less than 14 U.S. dollars) as part of the government's Social Protection Programme to families to alleviate the pain. There has been a massive price increase in food items, yet the people are encouraged to bear with the government.

The National Bureau of Statistics (N.B.S.), the consumer price index (C.P.I.), which measures the rate of change in prices of goods and services, established that inflation rose to 24.08 percent in July 2023 — up from 22.79 percent in the previous month. It opined that the latest figure represented the seventh consecutive rise in the country's inflation rate in 2023. It also argued that the July 2023 inflation figure

is the highest in more than ten years and that the last time Nigeria's inflation reached the 24 percent level was in September 2005, when the rate was 24.3 percent. According to the N.B.S. report, the headline inflation rate rose to 24.08 percent in July 2023, relative to the previous (June 2023) rate, which was 22.79 percent. It continued:

"Looking at the movement, the July 2023 headline inflation rate showed an increase of 1.29 percent compared to the June 2023 headline inflation rate,"; ... "On a year-on-year basis, the headline inflation rate was 4.44 percent points higher compared to the rate recorded in July 2022, which was 19.64 percent. This shows that the headline inflation rate (year-on-year basis) increased in July 2023 when compared to the same month in the preceding year (i.e., July 2022)."

From the Report, N.B.S. made it clear that the food inflation rate in July 2023 hit 26.98 percent on a year-on-year basis. This was 4.97 percent points higher relative to the rate recorded in the same month in 2022. The rise in the food index, N.B.S. said, was caused by increases in prices of oil and fat, bread and cereals, fish, potatoes, yam and other tubers, fruits, meat, vegetables, milk, cheese, and eggs, according to N.B.S.

On a month-on-month basis, the food inflation rate in July 2023 was 3.45 percent, 1.06 percent higher than in June 2023 (2.40 percent). Increases in prices of bread and cereals, potatoes, yams and other tubers, fish, oil, and fat caused food inflation month-on-month. " "The average annual rate of food inflation for the twelve-month ending July 2023 over the previous twelve-month average was 24.46 percent, which was a 5.71 percent points increase from the average annual rate of change recorded in July 2022 (18.75 percent)."

A state-by-state analysis shows that Lagos, Ondo, and Kogi residents paid more for food during the review period.

In July 2023, food inflation on a year-on-year basis was highest in Kogi (34.53 percent), Lagos (32.52 percent), and Bayelsa (31.31 percent), while Jigawa (20.90 percent), Sokoto (21.63 percent), and Kebbi (22.45 percent), recorded the slowest rise in food inflation on a year-on-year basis; ... "On a month-on-month basis, however, July 2023 food inflation was highest in Kogi (6.73 percent), Akwa Ibom (5.64 percent), and Bayelsa (4.59 percent), while Taraba (-0.21 percent), Jigawa (0.28 percent), and Yobe (0.90 percent), recorded the slowest rise in inflation."

Generally, various social protection programs implemented over the years have failed to buffer the vulnerability and poverty level in the country, as there was no significant decrease in poverty and vulnerability levels. This could be attributed to poor design and uncoordinated manner of the interventions with no clear-cut policy framework driving the social protection agenda. Consequently, their lifespans ended when the administration that initiated them left power. In other words, social protection programs in Nigeria need to be more ad hoc and coordinated. Another major problem facing the social protection programs in Nigeria is the lack of data to indicate those who are vulnerable. Poor

data systems have hindered various intervention programs in the country, resulting in coverage estimated at a tiny fraction of low-income people, regardless of social protection or social exclusion.

4. CONCLUSION

From the discourse, it is safe to argue that the Social Protection Programme, as perceived and conceived by the Nigerian government, is completely a negation of what it should be. In the real sense of Nigerian politics, the issue of the Social Protection Programme has been politicized and Ethicalized, and as such, it has not made any meaningful impact on the lives of the people. Scholars and experts have argued that some reasons for low coverage range from political and financial to capacity limitations, which restrict the potential effectiveness of social protection interventions in lessening poverty and vulnerability in Nigeria. It is in line with this that the paper makes the following suggestions/recommendations:

- a. Embark on a Comprehensive Study of the Indigenous Pre-Colonial Social Protection Programme of the People: Historically, it has been established that the people had a system of Social Protection Programme that was indigenous and most effective for them. This was what was implemented by the locals before the invasion and colonization of the area. The analysis indicates that it was very effective as resources were owned by all and used for the welfare of all, especially the vulnerable and poor. With this system, people can maintain a peaceful and harmonious life. Some of the local communities still maintain and practice the system.
- b. Develop and Maintain a comprehensive database for proper identification of the vulnerable: As it is currently, it is clear that Nigeria does not have a comprehensive database for proper identification of the poor and vulnerable. It is clear how resources are distributed in the name of Social Protection Programmes. This is also evident in the roadside and marketplace displace of wealth distribution, which at the end of the day amounts to zero. At this level, it is necessary to recruit the local government to create this database as they relate with the people at the grassroots level. In this way, the state can identify the needy and vulnerable. This would accentuate proper evaluation and monitoring of the social protection programs in Nigeria.
- c. Develop a comprehensive social protection framework: The need to develop a comprehensive social protection policy framework in Nigeria is closely related to the above. This would help clarify institutional roles and responsibilities, guiding social protection design and implementation at the local, state, and federal levels. Immediately after this is achieved, some form of accountability will be achieved as it will give room for proper implementation and continuity of the programs when the administrations that initiated them have left power. This is most appropriate when because government is a continuum.

- d. Monitoring and evaluation: Apart from the traditional system of social protection programs in most local settings in Nigeria, the Nigerian state needs a better grasp of the program's workability. In line with this, the Social Protection Programme is considered relatively new in Nigeria, especially because there needs to be more empirical evidence on their impacts and effectiveness locally or in aggregate. Continuous monitoring of the performance of social protection programs would provide an evidence-based framework to see if progress is being made and where amendments or modifications are needed to improve system performance. When these factors are considered, social protection programs can effectively meet their aims and objectives and improve and protect the lives of beneficiaries. This becomes even more relevant because social protection plays a key role in realizing the rights of persons with disabilities of all ages: providing them with an adequate standard of living and a basic level of income security, thus reducing levels of poverty and vulnerability.
- e. Foster political commitment to social protection programs at the national and state levels: Currently, the Nigerian state needs more political commitment to social protection at both state and national levels, especially concerning designing, funding, and implementing programs. The absence of such has made it more of a political program to assist Political cronies and friends at the national and state levels. Elements of this were seen in the distribution of palliative jobs created in the last dispensation with the minister of state for Employment, which cannot be accounted for publicly.
- f. Enacting Laws that support allocating resources to strengthen Social Protection Programmes: The government must be able to move Social Protection Programmes from its seeming ad-hoc arrangement to a permanent one. This can be achieved once the government significantly increases fiscal resources available for social protection programs to address increasing poverty and vulnerability levels.

Generally, the Nigerian government must show great commitment to the issue of the Social Protection Programme in line with global practices. Elsewhere (with specific reference to the European world), the governments have been able to establish the fact that well-established social protection (devoid of the politics of the developing world) can play a vital role in the fight against poverty and vulnerability and, more generally, in building human capital, empowering women, and protecting households against shocks and natural disasters. Therefore, social protection programs must be expanded with smart technical, political, and institutional features.

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