

**POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMMES AND
THE POLITICS OF ETHICAL DESPAIR IN NIGERIA:**

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**POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMMES
AND THE POLITICS OF ETHICAL DESPAIR
IN NIGERIA.**

BY

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Mr. Vice Chancellor,

Following the pattern which is common knowledge in this country, decisions that are emphatic on interdisciplinary process are not as popular as those that are rigid and particularistic. The fact that philosophy, as a discipline, has successfully provided intellectual language to all disciplines a philosopher can competently pursue academic goals in any academic setting. Apparently my suitability as a philosopher in the Department of Religions of the University is not a mistake but an adventure which speaks largely to intellectualism. This explains my research option in the philosophical dimension which blends with the comfort of serving the University in the Department of Religions.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, poverty looks and seems unalterable condition of human life. This statement cannot be classified as generic since “many societies” of the temperate zones, O’neill argues, “now have reasonable standards of life for all” (O’neill, 1986: xi). On the other hand are the other zones of the world not temperate but riddled with poverty. Africa, as a continent, has a larger share in this unfortunate situation. The origin of poverty has no historical indicator in human thought. It is not a concrete phenomenon that can be determined scientifically in the objectivity realm. More interestingly is the human incompetence to determine whether poverty was put in place as a test of will by the Being who considered it expedient for human specie to come this way. If we reason along with the existentialist who insists on starting with man as subject and as one who knows wills and judges not as some external object that is known willed and judged through human reasoning, it may be easy to say that man at the instance of self-creation decided to put in place poverty by way of encouraging or instituting a mechanism or test of will among

human specie. From this kind of reasoning, it can be argued that since man is the author of...his own essential nature, the origin of poverty is traceable to him.

If this is the case that the dilemma of determinism is explained by the existentialist as within human consciousness, we are bound to underscore the indignity of humanity to have chosen to put poverty in place for any reason. However, if we abandon the existentialist position by creating autonomy between the origin of poverty and human consciousness, we can then draw from this 'seeming ignorance' only to restore human dignity. It is from this autonomy status that we can acknowledge the principles that guide human character and the interplay that these elicit in the interactions between person to person. Humanity finds himself in a world of test of will characterized with the pursuance of one's own deepest convictions and values outside his design. To this end, the will to abandon self-interest in a world of self-service is notoriously abnormal. It is to this extent that we can say that the origin of poverty is located outside human consciousness since humanity is not as he wills to be. Moving away from these expressions, scholars of diverse disciplines share an emphasis well expressed by Sahlins that;

...one third to one half of humanity are said to go to bed hungry every night. In the old stone age the fraction must have been smaller. This is the era of hunger unprecedented. (Sahlins, 1974:36)

Although there are unsettling features in the landscape of what poverty means, still, there are familiar descriptions of human difficulties and predicaments that explain what poverty stands for some of these features will be highlighted below.

The features of Poverty.

By way of avoiding unnecessary technicalities but without sacrificing rigour of argument, poverty is the state of being extremely poor and lacking the means to exist adequately. As McNamara puts it, it is a condition of life

which is so limited by malnutrition, illiteracy, disease, high infant mortality and low life expectancy as to be beneath any reasonable definition of human decency" (McNamara, 1980:1).

Apparently, poverty is itself a crisis that is habitual and it conveys the message of hardship difficult to deny because it speaks publicly on grounds of visible misery, persisting destitution, endemic hunger or starvation and visible malnutrition. As currently put, the international labour office estimated the number of destitute at 700million in the early seventies in the third world countries. Today, the world Bank estimate put the figure at 800million. This suggests, Brandt observes, that almost 40% of the people in the third world countries are surviving – but only barely surviving – with incomes judged insufficient to secure the basic necessities of life. From this point of view, Brandt further confirms, mass poverty remains overwhelmingly an affliction and it is this that seems harshly intractable. (Brandt, 1983:50).

Indeed, hopelessness, alienation and passivity are common among those living in poverty. Poverty is, therefore, multi-dimensional. It can be articulated from the socio-economic and material dimensions. It must be mentioned here that the multi-faceted nature of poverty makes the following the common trends that represent its presence; namely, hunger, lack of basic necessities of life; e.g. health, clothing, shelter; lack of ability to respond to life's upkeep; squalid surroundings and unabated famine which often lead to sporadic starvation.

Studies have shown that there are two forms of poverty in Nigeria. These are absolute and relative poverty. By way of definition, absolute poverty is a condition of life characterized with the inability to meet basic needs of life; e.g. food, health and shelter needs. Those who fall into this category are the people who are hungry and they know it but cannot provide for their food needs. Such people know they are sick but cannot provide the resources for treatment, they

live on dung hills and in squalid environments. Relative poverty is the ability to meet the demands of basic needs of life but insufficiently e.g. getting some food but without demanding for balanced diet. The watchword of the relatively poor is *eat to swell the stomach*. They provide shelter of some kind not quite decent.

As we shall acknowledge later, Nigeria as a nation shares from this experience and there is no intention to deny this since poverty can easily be affirmed and cannot be denied. Poverty in the Nigerian experience is paradigmatic of absolute want which is a parallel of living of life at the very margin of existence. However, since there is a noticeable divide between the rich and the poor, this divide shows that seven of every ten Nigerians are impoverished. This divide cannot be attributed to episodic disasters but more a product of failed developmental strategies.

Some others are most likely to argue that the real sources of poverty in Nigeria are more politically oriented than economic. If this statement is true then there is the need for critical action-centered reasoning about poverty problem in Nigeria. Indeed, the United Nations Economic and Social Council has acknowledged that the eradication of poverty is a crucial and attainable goal of the international community on grounds that the struggle against poverty is struggle for peace and sustainable development.

At the international level, policies to remedy poverty are from the ethical and political dimensions. The ethical dimension speaks to the view that morality is a legitimate instrument to solve the problem of poverty while the political represents responses of the developed nations in the political allocation of foreign aid. This interventionist approach, over the years, has been quite involving moving from the symbiotic to outward looking development policy creating a framework of development theory that has no practical link with realities.

Poverty: the ethical and political dimensions

Over recent years many scholars have come by way of ethical arguments to illustrate the evil of poverty and advocated that the developed nations ought to do what they can to tackle it. By virtue of the “ought” implies “can” that this view entails, it is considered that it is ethically right for the rich nations to help who are in need as the sacrifice involved is endurable. It sounds interesting to note that it has been persistently advocated that solidarity among humanity against poverty must go beyond national boundaries. The strength of this argument is established on the insinuating judgment that;

...Mankind has never before had such ample technical and financial resources for coping with hunger and poverty. The immense task can be tackled once the necessary collective will is mobilized (Brandt, 1983;16).

The practical problem at present is how to promote a programme that sufficiently unite humanity such that can adopt the principle of sharing in the dynamics of the transformation process of technology. This, humanity is yet to achieve and hence it is only a goal inherent in argument.

In the absence of this resolve, a moral resolution that would require the rich nations to sacrifice what they do not have in order to meet the basic needs of the poor nations raises legitimate questions and conflicts in the desire to solve the problem of poverty. Ethical theories on poverty issue are unanimous on the non-existence of this kind of enormous risk. In this connection Singer has this to say;

...The problem is not that the world cannot produce enough to feed and shelter its people. People in the poor countries consume, on average, 400lbs of grain a year, while North Americans average more than 2000lbs. The difference is caused by the fact that in the rich countries we feed most of our grain to animals, converting it into meat, milk and eggs. Because this is an inefficient process, wasting up to 75% of the food value of animal feed, people in rich countries are responsible for the

consumption of far more food than those in poor countries who eat few animal products. If we stopped feeding animals on grains, soyabeans and fish meal the amount of food saved would

– if distributed to those who need it – be more than enough to end hunger throughout the world (Singer, 1983;160).

This ethical view is so unpopular among scholars because the pluralist and solidarist accounts of international community is limited to well defined mutual interest. Having said this, the international ethical or moral sensitivity requires institutional appeal which, in turn, can result into norm construction at the individual level.

Apparently, there has been a serious open and close campaigns among ethical theorists that morality demands that the problem of global poverty be seen as a salient responsibility principled on the terrain of humanitarianism. The instability of intentions coupled with political opportunities for deception put all ethical arguments in the range of the political. Indeed, positions maintained in the response to global poverty in the twentieth century and in this early twenty-first century focus largely on the need to share in the process of discussion for change, mutual understanding and negotiation by way of making foreign aid effective.

The schematic overview of main developments in the history of foreign aid moved far away from the ethical and steadily moved into the political arguments. This shift is a child of international politics governed by endless political interests. It is within the context of ‘endless political interests’ that the variety which aid structure presents is complex and the content of the structure cannot be given easy assessment. Indeed humanitarian inklings, diplomacy, strategies of diverse forms combine to give a complex tag to aid structure.

It is astonishing to note that the complex dimensions through which aid policies have passed are yet to be sources of optimism both for the donor and recipient nations. The prevailing circumstances “point largely to skepticism and in some quarters cautious optimism with great hope that policies of some kind will create a meeting point between theory and practice in aid scheme (Akanmidu, 2003;13). Worst still is the fact that the evolution of the development doctrine with respect to foreign aid right from inception in the 1940s favours the tradition of liberalism but the changing trends that characterize world politics have systematic influence on the goals set for such liberal activities.

This influence often result into constraints that compel flexibility for the sake of national interest, and by extension the protection of the interest of allies in the name of political security. The various forms of analytical liberalism share an emphasis on the international political structure as the primary determinant of foreign aid. Apparently, from the political dimension, the interests of the donor countries or nations are embedded in the aid given. In fact, the evidence that follows demonstrates that collusion between political and economic interests have been the driving force behind aid reform policies since 1940 to date. See the table below.

Table 1- Schematic overview of main developments in the history of foreign aid

	Dominant or Rising institutions	Donor Ideology	Donor Focus	Types of aid
1940s	Marshall Plan and UN System (including World Bank)	Planning	Recommendation	Marshall Plan was Largely programme Aid.
1950s	United States, with Soviet Union gaining Importance from 1956	Anti-communist but with role for the state.	Community Development Movement..	Food aid and projects.
1960s	Establishment of bilateral programmes.	As for the 1950s with support for state in productive sector.	Productive sectors (e.g. support to the green revolution) and infrastructure.	Bilaterals gave technical assistance (TA) and budget support; multilaterals supported projects.
1970s	Expansion of multilaterals especially World Bank, IMF and Arab-funded agencies).	Continued support for state activities in productive and activities and meeting basic needs.	Poverty, taken as agriculture and basic needs (social sectors).	Fall in food aid and start of Import support.
1980s	Rise of NGOs from mid 1980s.	Market-based adjustment (rolling back the state).	Macroeconomic reform.	Financial programme aid and relief.
1990s	Eastern Europe and FSU become Recipients rather than donors; emergence of corresponding institutions.	Move back to the state toward end of the decade.	Poverty and then governance (environment and gender passed more quickly).	Move toward sector support at end of the decade.

Note: Entries are main features or main changes, there are of course exceptions.

As the summary can easily show in the 1940s the principle was underlined by reconstruction from the world wars; the 1950s was community development movement; in the 1960s it was support for productive sectors of the economy of aid recipient nations; while the 70s aid was directed at poverty in terms of meeting basic needs through the support of agriculture. The 1980s distributive principle was directed at macroeconomic reforms and the 1990s was aimed at poverty alleviation and political governance.

There are, at least, three distinct points that must bargain with our consciousness from the table put above. First it is generally accepted in these changing principles that there is a conception of the ideal state or society which is essentially the western liberal democracy to which developing nations should aspire. This acceptance is a product of unwilful patrimonialism which excuses useful input on development strategies by the developing nations. There is a gap between actions of patrimonialism from that of altruism. This gap is maintained by the general opinion subtly expressed in the view that aid recipient nations have no competence to initiate developmental strategies that are home breed.

Second, all these years there is no willingness on the part of donor nations to focus on alternatives that can guarantee technological take off in aid recipient nations. Aid paradigms have consistently avoided this focus. International transfers, (i.e. foreign aid programs) certainly have some influence but by any measure this is insignificant in the absence of alternatives that initiate values that generate competence that is domestic oriented in aid recipient nations.

Third, one significant way in which societies or nations provide for their own development is through investments in both human and physical capital. This kind of view recognizes the value of domestically reasoned developmental process. The history of foreign aid has always depended on the donor ideology and the choice of focus has

always been the dictum of the donor countries. It seems a plausible conjecture that these observed constraints have constituted very serious threats to the positive impact of the resources already put into foreign aid. (Akanmidu, 2003:5).

Indeed, the minister of food in the post-war labour government in Britain stated that, “by one means or another, by hook or by crook, the development of primary production of all sorts in the colonial area is a life and death matter for the economy of the country”. (Gupta, 1975:320). As long as these problems persist, donor interests will give birth to new interests and the flow of aid will go only to serve these interests. At the end of the twentieth century, international liberalism became a process of political manipulation. This manipulation provided the fundamental principles regulating the conduct of aid recipient states from two major perspectives.

These perspectives are fiscal and political reforms. The fiscal reforms saw the introduction of structural adjustment programme (SAP) initiated and supervised by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) under the surveillance of the World Bank. The political aspect saw the promotion of democratic reform, human rights and administrative accountability of the aid recipient nations. This development is generally accepted by development scholars that such conditions have helped sustain useful reforms. The method of political conditionality as can be seen in table (fig. 2) below clearly confirms such changes.

Date	Country	Measures Taken	Subject	Method
Sept 1991	Zaire	Suspension of aid	DEM	NEG
Sept 1991	Mongolia	Commitment of new aid	DEM/ME	POS
Oct. 1991	Haiti	Suspension of aid	DEM	NEG
Nov.1991	Kenya	Express concern	HR/DEM	NEG
Nov. 1991	Indonesia	Express concern	HR/DEM	DIP
March1992	Zambia	Commitment of new aid	ME/DEM	POS
April 1992	Peru	Express concern	DEM	DIP
May 1992	Mongolia	Commitment of new aid	DEM/DEM	POS
May 1992	Thailand	Express concern	DEM	DIP
May 1992	Malawi	Cancellation of new aid	HR	NEG
Oct. 1992	Sudan	Suspension of aid	HR	NEG
May 1993	Sierra Leone	Suspension of aid	DEM/HR	NEG
June 1993	Guatemala	Cancellation of new aid	DEM/HR	NEG
July 1993	Kenya	Resume ODA	DEM/HR	POS
Oct. 1993	Sierra Leone	Resume ODA	NEM/HR	POS
Nov. 1993	Pakistan	Conciliation on NPT	Nuc Dev	DIP
Jan. 1994	India	Conciliation on NPT	Nuc Dev	DIP
Jan. 1994	Malawi	Resume ODA	DEM/HR	POS
March1994	Nigeria	Cancellation of new aid	DEM	NEG
March1994	Cambodia	Commitment of new aid	DEM	POS
June 1994	China	Express concern	Nuc Dev	DIP
July 1994	South Africa	Commitment of new aid	DEM/HR	POS
Sept. 1994	Gambia	Cancellation of new aid	DEM/HR	NEG
Oct. 1994	Haiti	Resume ODA	DEM/HR	POS
Oct. 1994	China	Express concern	Nuc Dev	DIP
May 1995	China	Express concern	Nuc Dev	DIP
July 1995	Myanmar	Partially resume ODA	DEM/HR	POS
Aug. 1995	China	Stop grant aid	Nuc Dev	NEG

Abbreviations:

DEM = Democracy
 DIP = Diplomatic Pressure
 HR = Human Rights
 NEG = Negative Linkage
 Nuc Dev = Nuclear Development

ME = Transition to Market Economy
POS = Positive Linkage
NPT = Non-Proliferation Treaty

Notes: including refusal to announce newly committed amount of aid

Sources: Nakagawa 1993: 83; ODA-Annual Reports 1994/95, ODA Chapter Update by Nakagawa (Information of October 1996).

As Fig. 2. shows above, Nigeria as a nation, shared from this international turn down in 1994 when there was cancellation of new aid to Nigeria. This decision shows that aid was used as an instrument for specifying conditions of international legitimacy of any regime. Within the characteristic notion of sanctions, the countries that were sanctioned often go through situations that aggravate rather than alleviate the conditions that impede the society's improvement. The implication of this is that even in cases where leaders impose themselves on developing or aid recipient nations, the mechanisms of sanctions do not distinguish between the impostor and the recipients of imposition.

The plausibility of redistributionism at the global level changing the developmental trends in the developing nations seems doubtful. It is on account of this seeming fact that it is more appealing for a nation to facilitate a reorientation that is capable of facilitating self-evolved developmental strategies. Apparently, externally devised developmental strategies often have overlapping variants with internal alternatives that can enhance development.

The central concern of aid allocations has always been a child of international policies both in the economic and political terrains. Apparently, it becomes necessary for any developing nation to start nurturing a sense of responsibility that acknowledges international aid as complimentary to internal development policies. Bauer's position strongly confirms this assertion when he says that;

...Economic achievement has depended, and it still does depend, on people's own

faculties, motivations and ways of life. On their institutions and on their rulers. In short, economic achievement depends on the conduct of people, including governments. External donations have not been necessary for the development of any country anywhere (Bauer, 1984;294).

A developing nation similitude to Nigeria cannot but to explore all internal potentialities in the manner Bauer has presented it. A survey of declared programmes on poverty in Nigeria shows some degree of wilful liberalism governed by administrative distributive judgment. The principles of liberalism adopted by the Nigerian government have varied from one administration to another but all cases of poverty programmes were insulated in the personal opinion of the leadership. The Nigerian society ought to be seen by intellectual and policy elites as a collectivity bound together by sets of mutual rights and obligations which are rooted in some broader foundation.

In this kind of framework, there cannot be 'social exclusion' in which some are detached from this moral order. Williams and Pillinger make an interesting argument along this line when they say that;

...the concept of social exclusion has moved the focus from poverty as a relative condition, resolved through distributional mechanisms to an understanding of poverty as a relational dynamic. In other words, poverty is about more than access to material resources, it is about the social relations of power and control, the processes of marginalisation and exclusion and the complex and multifaceted ways in which these operate (Williams and Pillinger; 1996; 9-10).

It is by way of 'social exclusion' that the poor people can easily be abandoned in their poverty. The prevailing poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria illustrate some levels of seriousness but are characterized with barriers of polarization and marginalisation. These elements are

compelling to the need for a refocus in the poverty agenda in Nigeria by conceptualizing poverty in “social terms and reject the dominant paradigm that constructs ‘the poor’ as a group, or groups, which are different to the non-poor, separated and distanced from the rest of society by virtue of their own behaviour and difference”. (Becker, 1997;159). The background referred to so far is to show global efforts, by way of the liberalism entailed in foreign aid, that generate immense influence on the poverty problem in Nigeria. We shall allude into a brief review of these efforts here.

The Nigerian State and the agenda of Poverty alleviation

In recent years there has been a semblance of continuity of liberal tradition in Nigeria. Attitudes towards the systems of welfare that support the poor are rooted in our different cultural settings in Nigeria. The normative traditional approach to liberalism in the Nigerian society functions to promote social cohesion, solidarity and citizenship. The duty to share among Nigerians in our diversity is intuitive. This duty rests on the consideration of human worth. In this context we reason that others have human souls as we do and so we always choose not to be indifferent to the needs of others. Behind this ethical perception is the drive to place value on the needy and by this we choose to give to enhance our own moral worth. Apparently, Nigerians always choose to care for others which forms the moral basis for sharing with others. This duty comes from a sympathetic concern that others be able to make life. The government’s strategy to strengthen this liberalism, we insinuate, derived from the Nigerian normative tradition.

The history of foreign aid is another important source of influence on the Nigerian government’s policies on poverty alleviation programmes. For example, the development doctrine of donor nations in the 1970s and 1990s imposed on aid recipient nations the establishment of poverty alleviation programme a criterion for benefiting

from foreign aid. Indeed if we are willing to accept the latter as the source for poverty alleviation drive in Nigeria we cannot deny the relevance of the former for the sake of our moral image.

Under the influence of both factors, the Nigerian State has steadily developed developmental strategies that centred on the reduction of poverty in Nigeria. Two partially overlapping variants of a distributional oriented strategy surfaced since independence in Nigeria. These were redistribution ‘en route’ strong support for agriculture and rural production and redistribution with growth in basic needs. These two redistribution strategies came well after independence.

The Nigerian State did not put in place any poverty alleviation programme between 1960 and 1966. Immersed in an acquisitive and pecuniary society those in the poverty category were united in the persuasion that the gap between the ideal society and the reality on ground would necessarily preoccupy the sense of duty of those in the political class. There was a serious case of alienation of a large number of the poor from the political process with the promise that all shall be well. The poor were of the belief that the successes of their educationally talented children would influence possible shift of category from poverty oriented to a well to do category.

Apparently, there was no known massive war on poverty which was ethical nor politically oriented except the encouragement of agriculture which was labour intensive noticeably seen to have achieved divergent results from one region of the country to another. As the Nigerian state continued to pride in the attainment of independence, the citizens became more concerned with forms of participation which stressed self-help as a way for development. On account of this formation, poverty alleviation became the responsibility of each according to ability which, in turn, placed the poor in a vicious circle of causation. In this period,

there were no dramaturgical procedures prescribed for therapeutic purposes aimed at confronting poverty nor were there emotional demonstrations that suggested open hostility against poverty.

As time went on, it gradually became clear that the poor in Nigeria obviously remained poor for a long time because of the changing socio-political structure which shouldered the poor aside. Furthermore, the transitional trends that governed the Nigerian polity between 1966 and 1975 relegated the care of the poor to the background. This period was not repressive to the moral conditions of people but it threatened them to the extent that basic moral principles only had understanding among peers and family relations. With all this, three serious shortcomings warrant critical attention.

First, the political trend became an institution that had no national antipoverty plan. Second, there was no well defined systematic planning and implementation of reforms and third, there was a significant lack in the improving and coordinating of existing services. From these standpoints, even the most casual observer easily recognized that the doorway to the poor Nigerians, at this period, opened into a daily struggle with deprivation. In all, those running the polity used variety of strategies, some because they come to hand and some in which there was a measure of choice. For example, the operational mechanisms and the objectives set for the National Youth Service Corp were not for purposes of solving the problem of poverty.

Indeed, when one looks beneath general improvements over time, the view is grimmer when 'Operation feed the nation' was put in place. The operation was so ambitious on paper and significantly diminutive in reality. No one was fed by this operation since the programme was abstract in the lives of the poor, a gap consequently opened between obligations of government and the rights of the people. This gap made, a great

difference to action-centred reasoning about poverty. Unless obligations to feed the impoverished are a matter of justice rather than indeterminate beneficence, the impact of poverty programme cannot be felt by the poor. Indeed at the point where what became to be known as Universal Primary Education was inaugurated, the proponents of free primary education probed into the contextualist criticism and the paradigm that emerged was incompatible with quality education.

As clearly reflected in the Nigerian agenda on poverty, free education was not a distributive measure because it transferred quality education from public to private schools where theoretical rearticulation of education was informed by adequate financial support. In spite of conventional notions that the poor are served in public schools, it is evident that the offsprings of the poor receive education in poor environments coupled with poor infrastructures. In the long run, the value neutrality of free education programme has not given sufficient benefits to the poor.

In all of this, there is no continuity in policy arrangements between succeeding governments. Apparently, poverty programmes became a reaction to moments of realism and troubled conscience. When realism collides with troubled conscience all plans always seem to work while none is effective. This is why it becomes difficult to recognize 'Ethical Revolution' 'Green Revolution' and 'War Against Indiscipline' as neither war against poverty or strategies designed to register the relevance of indiscipline to the fight against poverty. Among the central facets of this problem is the question of just what programmes are to count as poverty programmes?

Understanding that this is the case enables us to grasp immediately a more focused programme which was named "Better life". The aims and objectives of 'Better life Programme' were designed to raise social consciousness of

women about their rights as well as their social, political and economic responsibilities. To mobilize, motivate, educate, enlighten, improve and encourage women in the empowerment profile. This programme sensitized women sufficiently to make men irrelevant in the Nigerian society. The programme, perhaps, inadvertently created a subtle confrontation between men and women in Nigeria under the aegis of diplomatic maneuvering.

The platform on which 'Better life Programme' operated was narrower than that of the 'Directorate of Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructures' (DFRI) and the National Directorate of Employment (NDE). The objectives inherent in the principles that set up these directorates were intended to strike deeply into the lives of ordinary people affecting their preferences and desires. There was a well entrenched political courage embedded in these Directorates but the various inroads which unethical actions had on the spending strategies did not allow fruitful conclusion.

Although all these efforts lacked continuity, the Nigerian state remained unrelenting in the desire to put in place structures that could address poverty issue. This insistence can be explained from two possible dimensions; namely, that it derived from the interrelationships between development theories, models and policies which were major criteria for foreign aid allocation; or that it derived from the Nigerian moral character which places value on others which compel help when others are in need. In any case, it is reasonable to assume that both dimensions as we have said before are at work in this insistence since each is distinguished in terms of reform significance.

There is already a cacophony arising from some self-proclaimed analysts who declared that no claim of success, however, qualified, in the antipoverty effort has any real merit. Confronted with the reality of poverty, there were a few other programmes put in place in Nigeria not only to show concern but also to direct programmes and projects

leading to redistribution with growth and basic needs fulfillment. It was this key focus that formed the basis for the establishment of the 'Family Economic Advancement Programme' (FEAP). By way of reference, "FEAP's main pre-occupation was to build economic bridges, between the haves and have-nots, put meaning into people's life by bringing them comfort as well as security". (FEAP Brochure).

The liberal springboard of FEAP's objective share an emphasis on the domestic structure (family groups) and on economic local culture (cooperative systems) as primary determinants of distributive measures. Indeed, the planners placed great faith in the capacity of Nigerians for rational action at the local community level. It was thought that the availability of new large sums of money for planning and program assistance would reform the existing institutions and could make plausible distribution to the grassroots. Realistic understanding was absent in the execution of FEAP's distributive objectives which consequently created a substantial gap between the local and national capacity to reach the poor effectively.

The current on-going programmes share considerably with FEAP's principle of development doctrine; namely, maximization of role of government in terms of intervention in distributive liberalism. The 'National Poverty Eradication Programme' (NAPEP) represents an important programme that shares identity with FEAP even though there is no claim of continuity. For example, the main policy of FEAP was to give loans through some meticulous and complex application process for cooperative groups to be given financial resources. There was no denial that some groups took approved loans while at the instance of NAPEP any recipient of loans returned any money. This gap shows a significant case of discontinuity both in principle and purpose but only share identity on complimentary grounds.

This same 'discontinuity factor' is well represented in all the Nigerian Poverty alleviation programmes. Apparently, programmes aimed at meeting the needs of disadvantaged people were typically fragmented but unrelented. To this end, it can be said that despite the mixed success of some of the projects or programmes and the outright failure of several others, the experience threw a spotlight on the following problems;

- (1) The welfare principles of these programmes were and are not reaching the poor.
 - (2) Realistic understanding by government and community leaders of the problems faced by the poor is unfortunately limited.
 - (3) Each programme was designed in encapsulated fashion without showing awareness of previous programmes.
 - (4) Services aimed at meeting the needs of the disadvantaged people were typically hijacked by professional and elite leadership.
- and (5) Each programme is characteristically structured and rooted in differing opinions of leaders not on legitimization.

In the light of these problems, all efforts designed to achieve some goals in the alleviation of poverty in Nigeria call for careful diagnosis in order to reach the poor in the nation. All these are worthy attempts since they speak directly to some sense of distributive justice. If this sense becomes a national culture, then distribution to rectify inequalities in benefits will derive strictly from national resources.

The departure from the opinionated poverty programmes to the poverty programme governed by the sense of distributive justice (i.e. the sense of justifying

economic inequality) that derives from law can become powerful engine for national growth and development. This is because the touchstone of value is persons in this shift. When we talk about persons as source of value we recognize that the yardstick for measuring national development is persons who are values that create values. It is persons who have capacity for judgment about national development, it is persons (rational persons) who form a collectivity upon which motivations are defined.

To this extent, it is the development of persons that can guarantee economic achievement necessary for the development of any nation. Consequent upon this, Nigeria's poverty alleviation programmes must focus on persons.

The focus on persons can come by way of complementing investment intensive poverty programme with structured social drive programme. It is the persistence on building poverty programmes on investment drive that forms the basis for 'ethical despair' among Nigerians. Under the weight of this circumstance, the poor are curiously silent embroiled in total despair but being guided by the principle of self-dependence.

The Concept of 'Politics of ethical despair'

Before we go on to examine in more detail who or what, is responsible for the poverty of the poor, it might be a good idea to state unequivocally what is not responsible. The present level of poverty in the Nigerian State is not caused by population pressures although these do aggravate the situation. It might be objected that a family of four is most likely to be able to take care of itself much more than a family of ten persons. This objection is acceptable but in the Nigerian current profile, it is clear that the problems that a family of four faces are identical to that of ten persons. It is from this sense that we can articulate what we mean by 'population pressures' and the way they aggravate poverty situation and not necessarily the cause.

So far in Nigeria, climate or national weather has not been the cause of poverty. Even if we accept that climate can be a qualified candidate as an exacerbating factor it is not necessarily a cause. The latitude of friendship between the Nigerian State and the prevailing national climate is interestingly elastic sufficiently to say that we have not had what can be called ‘Nigerian drought’ over many years. To this extent, climate and the vagaries of nature will doubtless be useful scapegoats for lack of planning, lack of investment and lack of justice’ in the understanding of the cause of the Nigerian poverty.

If our propositions here are true, it apparently means that there are no external forces that impose poverty on the Nigerian State in spite of the fact that the world is still full of famine flashpoints. Furthermore, there is no Nigerian Culture that promote the ethic of poverty rather each is by description a moving escalator reflecting some values that threaten self-interest. The same variables apply in the normative setting of our various ethnic groupings in Nigeria which are repository of certain moral patterns of behaviour that are interventionist within the ambit of solidarism.

This is manifested in the reciprocal recognition of goodwill with the aim of protecting mutual interest. If the sources or causes of poverty in Nigeria are not the functions of any external forces, then, it is incumbent on us to assess this problem internally. This internal assessment requires allowing our norms to have a meeting point with our criteria of distributive justice. As Gordon puts it, “the idea of...a criterion of distributive justice is based on the proposition that no member of society should be lacking in what are regarded as the minimum requisites of life”. (Gordon, 1980;11).

As shown at different points above, the trend that is common in our normative systems in Nigeria is sharing to place value on others who are in need. This system, understandably, does not eradicate poverty among us but it

points to one important fact of morality; viz that the touchstone of value is persons in our society. It is at this point that our norms have a meeting point with the principle inherent in the criterion of distributive justice. This meeting point illustrates the moral tendency that all members of the society should, necessarily have a share from the wealth of the nation.

Where all have values and are to share by way of ‘decent minimum’ from a common source, it is reasonable to acknowledge Fried’s view when he says that; “a person has a claim...to a standard package of basic or essential goods – housing, education, health care, food; i.e. the social (or decent) minimum – if by reasonable efforts he cannot earn enough to procure this minimum himself (Fried, 1983:52). Apparently, from the standpoint of Fried’s position, all should have a share (minimum share) from what is owned by all since what is owned by all is not owned by one person.

The concept of the politics of ethical despair’ is explained within the context of the noticeable absence of the principle of decent social minimum in the agenda of poverty alleviation in Nigeria. The point here is that the politics put in place in the poverty alleviation profile is a reflection of the will of government to engage in some forms of distribution criteria. As Nnamani puts it “each with the fillip of heavy media presence and national might without the requisite locality touch and instant viability”. (Nnamani, Tell No. 45 2003:64).

Sequel to this political understanding, we turn in this section to what we mean by ‘ethical despair’ here. The understanding of ‘ethical despair’ is within the contexts of the following points;

- (i) There is the claim of will to distribute but no defined decent social minimum from which all members benefit by way of the criterion of distributive justice;

- (ii) Arising from (i), it is not the bulk of the population that enjoys a decent minimum of essential goods;
- and (iii) The great majority has to earn their way each day dictating opportunities that regularly sink into misery. This majority has no claim on government to subsidize their existence.

As there is no hope of lessening the influence of these emotions or feelings, the populace are despaired particularly when there is what we termed ‘concomitant outrage’ with which more and more people are becoming acquainted. Therefore, the concept of politics of despair is drawn from this outrage which, in turn, inaugurates in the minds of the Nigerian poor that they have no share in the wealth of the nation.

It is common knowledge that a crucial factor in poverty reduction rests on the performance and pattern of economic growth and also on the expansion of productive employment. Although this position is what is widely accepted, it is often not sufficient. As Riddell rightly argues that “it is also necessary, for the benefits of growth to spread outwards ...so that more and more people can participate in the growth process through productive employment and so that the poor, especially the unproductive poor, can be provided with the basics”. (Riddell, 1999:318).

A careful study of all the poverty alleviation programmes already put in place in Nigeria shows that there is a drive in the direction of making more people to work by encouraging ‘small scale businesses’ on one hand and on the other the choice to make them investment intensive. These attempts point directly to productive employment strategies but they do not respond to the basic needs of the ‘unproductive poor’. It is from this standpoint that it can be said that the dilemma that these trends present is clearly profound.

The response that can make a long term ethical difference is for the Nigerian State to accept the function of collective responsibility built on the principle of resource sharing. *This principle provides that each person is entitled to a share from the total value of all natural resources of the Nigerian State.* The normative content of the ‘principle of resource sharing’ is a reunion with our typical Nigerian moral character which places value on persons. From this standpoint, the principles and ideals of our liberal tradition are apparently allowed to influence our political culture.

For expository purposes (and without claiming to be comprehensive) the Nigerian moral character constitutes a convincing parallels with democratic principles in some moral practical dimensions; namely, the principle of one person, one value; everyone counts for being part of the whole, and the whole exist at the instance of the parts. It is important to say that these dimensions are well entrenched into the African (Nigerian) moral character. It is the pursuance of distributive policies which place value on persons that can show palpable benefits and it is on these that our recommendations are built.

Recommendations.

The alleviation of poverty in Nigeria is not an intractable problem. This problem is first and foremost a political and ideological challenge requiring a recurrent effort for sustainability. There is a strong optimism that in our collectivity we can make Nigeria ‘a better place’ or a more ‘just society’ for all citizens including the poor and the poorest.

The principle that motivates the various poverty programmes in Nigeria is insulated in leadership opinions as pointed out before. This insulation accounts for the lack of continuity in the programmes from one administration to the other. Genuine concern for the poor in our collectivity can only be possible when there is a commitment to continuity.

To this extent, the first recommendation is that the Nigerian State should constitutionalise poverty programmes and make such programmes from the point of view of a sustainable law. On this ground, it is recommended that what is termed 'The poor Law' be passed in order to transform poverty programmes into political obligation. It is within this political obligation that the limits of legitimate political actions are defined and continuity assured.

Arising from this first recommendation is the second which calls for the establishment of 'The Poor Commission'. Political obligation of significant dimension such that poverty problem represents in our collectivity requires adequate management coupled with policy formulation within the dictates of 'The poor Law' 'The Poor Commission' is to manage allocations designed to fulfil the goals of the 'principle of resource sharing'.

From the provisions bearing on the 'principle of resource sharing', the distribution paradigm should extend beyond the boundaries of the productive poor (i.e. those who are poor but have energy to participate in the growth process through productive employment) to the unproductive poor (i.e. those who, perhaps, once participated in the growth process but can no longer do so for age reasons). Furthermore, the unproductive poor in one other sense might not have been gainfully employed but are old. The productive and unproductive poor are of the same variety in a fair system on grounds of citizenship or by way of exposure to the benefits of cooperation.

Against this background, it is recommended that all elderly people of sixty-five years and above be allocated some benefits as entitlements. Today, statistics show that 3% of the Nigerian populace represent those who are sixty-five and above. There is nothing static about the figure.

In a society that cares for a fair system, it is not inconsistent to hold that all members of that society are

participants to its growth. This participation may be unequal. This depends on the measuring criteria for values in the society which may be subject of vagaries of manipulations. Be it as it may, when all members are participants to the societal development the well-being of individual participant is what finally matters from the moral point of view.

In an arrangement in which all are participants all must as well be beneficiaries of the advantages of the society even at the instance of the '*law of diminishing return*' on the part of some participants. The '*law of diminishing return*' is not a denial of participation but only an affirmation of having participated actively in the past. The diminishing or depreciating participation is a disposition imposed on the one time active participant to which all shall be subject. Since the '*law of diminishing return*' is not a denial mechanism but of affirmation then all participants should benefit from the 'principle of resource sharing'.

From the point of view of this theory it is recommended that all Nigerian elderly people (sixty-five years and above) be given a token benefits as entitlements each month to justify fairness in the Nigerian State. Indeed all these recommendations are within the ambit of ensuring a minimum standard of well-ordered political institution necessary for a society that is just and fair.

Conclusion

Mr. Vice Chancellor, distinguished audience there is the need to take cognizance of the fact that the Nigerian State acknowledges the need to care for the poor. At present the approach adopted in the designed poverty alleviation programmes only demonstrates the will to do but the poor are yet to be reached. The recommendation for the establishment of 'The Poor Commission' is a pointer to the need to promote the 'principle of resource sharing'. One important implication of this is that the functions of the Commission will be characterized by flexibility by way of achieving positive goals.

In obedience to the feeling of reality, human nature always fathom in the world of decency with the persistent desire to achieve the best for self. The desire to create comfort for self is an important project in moral discourse since the duty to self, in itself, is immoral when it is secondary to the duty to others. Indeed such behaviour is not required since it is supererogatory. However, if there is no conflict between what *reason* perceives to be right and what *morality* advocates to be correct then the dilemma on the duty to self gets solved. This is because the sacrifice involved in the duty to others must necessarily look reasonable and also ideal in morality concept.

The protection of self has limits in the interest of others. The intention to ignore the interest of others in the struggle to achieve maximum goals for self always result into acts of corruption. In this way, the corrupt mind takes all at the expense of others in order to serve self. This is the bottomline of the struggle against corruption in Nigeria. The management of *The Poor Commission* must aim *only* at distributing the percentage of the budget allocated to it and for emphasis only for distribution. Those who manage *The Poor Commission* must have pleasure in the pleasure of the poor and should care for their affection.

Apparently, the distinction between the management of current poverty alleviation programmes and the call for ‘The Poor Commission’ corresponds to a crucial difference in the mode of realization of reaching the poor giving them an impression that they belong to this nation. In summary, if entitlements become indispensable as a last resort, it is a perversion of moral purpose to turn things around as modern society always apply them as a first resort.

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