

Effects of Social Protection Programs on Poverty Reduction, Inequality, and Human Development Outcomes in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigated the impacts of social protection programmes on poverty reduction, inequality, and human development outcomes for the people of Nigeria. The information on the social protection programmes in Nigeria and their impact on the well-being of the people was obtained from secondary sources. The discussion centred on the outcomes of the programmes which included poverty reduction, food security through increased agricultural production, and women and youth empowerment. The paper identified some major challenges of social protection programmes in Nigeria including lack of political will by the Government, the misconception of the programmes by the target population, corruption, and insecurity, among others. It was recommended that the Government and all Agencies involved in the programmes increase funding, and properly sensitize the target population. In contrast, security Agencies should adopt strategies that will end terror and insecurity in the country.

Keywords: Social protection programmes, Poverty reduction, inequality, human development outcomes

INTRODUCTION

Social protection and the right to social security are essential components of many international and regional organizations, including the United Nations (UN), World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), International Labour Organization (ILO), African Union (AU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and numerous bilateral partners. These principles are reflected in their agendas. According to the International Labour Organization/United Nations Development Goals (ILO/UNDG, 2016), the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals by all UN Member States reaffirmed the global commitment to prioritize social protection to achieve several SDGs agenda. Prominent among the SDGs agenda is SDG 1.3 which calls upon all countries to implement nationally appropriate social protection systems for all to prevent and reduce poverty across the life cycle and promote prosperity to ensure that no one is left behind (World Bank, 2022). This social protection and the right to social security involves programmes like cash transfers for children, mothers with newborns, persons with disabilities, those poor or without jobs, and aged persons in society.

According to the World Social Protection Database (ILO/WSPDB, 2017) published by the International Labour Organization, more than 55% of the global population does not have access to any form of social protection cash transfer. It is in this context that International Organizations and indeed all countries are encouraged to develop and adopt social protection programmes that will enable poverty reduction, reduce inequality, and enhance human development to ensure that no one is left behind.

Even though Nigeria is an oil-rich country described as Africa's largest economy, it is now home to several deprived people after surpassing India in 2018 and is currently battling with the highest prevalence of severe hunger and malnutrition attributed to acute food insecurity, rising insecurity, unhealthy environment, and absence of access to quality healthcare (Nigerian Economic Summit Group [NESG], 2023). These deplorable

social conditions of the poor and vulnerable groups in Nigeria call for concerted efforts by both Government and private sectors for a collaborative effort on the provision of national social protection frameworks geared towards achieving broad-based economic growth, creating jobs, reducing poverty, and inequality, and ensuring socio-economic prosperity for all Nigerians. The broad objective of this paper is to investigate the impact of social protection programmes on poverty reduction, inequality, and human development outcomes in Nigeria. Specifically, the paper identified some major social protection programmes in Nigeria; assessed their impacts on poverty, inequality, and human development outcomes; identified their challenges, and proffered solutions for the success of both existing and future programmes in the country.

Though Nigeria boasts the biggest economy in Africa, it struggles greatly with poverty, and inequality, and results in a human development crisis. Rising instability, extreme hunger, and widespread malnutrition call for social protection programmes as a required instrument for handling these societal concerns. This study addresses the following research issues to investigate Nigeria, social protection programme effects on poverty reduction, inequality, and human development: the following research questions are germane to this study:

- What are the most significant social protection programmes implemented in Nigeria, and how have they impacted poverty reduction and inequality?
- What are the primary challenges hindering the success of these programmes?
- What strategies can be implemented to improve the effectiveness of social protection programmes in enhancing human development outcomes?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social protection systems have gained prominence globally due to their role in mitigating socio-economic shocks, promoting inclusive growth, and fostering human development. Various international organizations, including the World Bank, ILO, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), have underscored the critical need for social protection policies to address poverty and inequality.

Olukoju and Lawanson (2021) explored the role of conditional cash transfer (CCT) programs in lowering gender inequality and enhancing educational opportunities for girls in Nigeria. Especially in rural regions where educational inequalities are more evident, CCT programs have been quite helpful in raising school attendance among females by giving families cash incentives. Although CCT programs have improved school enrolment, especially in closing the gender gap, the authors contend that their limited scope and poor national implementation limit their overall effectiveness even if they have positively impacted school enrolment. This is especially true concerning funding issues.

Social protection systems all around are still shaped in great part by the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Among them, SDG 1.3 especially advocates the creation of nationally suitable social protection systems and policies including social protection floors to attain significant coverage for the poor and vulnerable by 2030. Though many nations, including Nigeria, still struggle to reach underprivileged groups, recent studies highlight that major progress has been made in the global expansion of these systems (United Nations, 2021). Despite being the biggest economy in Africa, Nigeria has battled political, economic, and structural issues to fulfil these goals.

Development Of Social Protection Programmes

The development of social protection programs has taken various forms. According to Stiftung (2018), social protection has emerged to address poverty, especially in developing countries. Lamidi and Igbokwe (2021) posited that the activities of social protection programmes are designed to support existing structures of the public and the structural functionalism of the social environment. Therefore, it is imperative to claim that social protection programmes emanated from the need to arrive at a resolution to subdue the strengths of anti-social phenomena such as hunger, poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, inequality, and conduct disorders in the society that constitute obstacles in human and economic development.

Definition Of Social Protection Programme

There are so many definitions of social protection programmes by different authors and organizations. We highlight some of the definitions that may enable us to define social protection programmes in the way we have.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2019) defines social protection within the framework of the SDGs Target 1.3 as "public measures that offer benefits to ensure income security and access to essential healthcare. These measures include unemployment insurance, disability benefits, pensions, cash and in-kind transfers, and other contributory and tax-financed structures.

Social protection is defined by the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management, and Social Development of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as "a mix of policies and programs designed to support individuals and households throughout their life cycle to prevent and reduce poverty, socio-economic vulnerabilities, and shocks while promoting sustainable livelihoods and a life of dignity." This revised definition results from continuous attempts to finalise a complete National Social Protection Policy, which seeks to match Nigeria's social programs with worldwide standards and solve the growing need for inclusive social safety nets (Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, 2020).

In other words, social protection programmes can simply be defined as a mix of policies and programmes developed by society to assist society in achieving resilience for the defenceless, equity for the poor, and opportunity for all to ensure the vulnerable against the impacts of different shocks, protect the poor against dire poverty and loss of human capital, promoting human capital development, and providing access to productive work for all people.

Types Of Social Protection Programmes

Social protection initiatives are classified in the most recent World Bank (2022) report into three main forms:

1. Social Safety Nets: These are non-contributory programs to provide regular and predictable support to the poor and vulnerable. They could be unconditional (e.g., direct cash transfers) or conditional, meaning children have to show up for class. Various tools including cash transfers, food aid, and public works projects comprise social safety nets, sometimes known as social assistance or social transfers. Safety nets are crucial for reducing the negative impacts of economic reforms on vulnerable populations, including social welfare programs that provide palliative care and support in times of crisis, according to the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG, 2023).

2. Social Insurance: Social insurance programs are developed to protect individuals from risks associated with life events such as old age, illness, disability, or loss of employment. Nigeria's well-known social insurance policies are the Contributory Pensions Scheme (CPS) and the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS). Particularly for individuals in official work, these programs guarantee financial stability and access to healthcare for insured populations.

3. Labour Market Programs: These programs emphasise on controlling labour markets to assure fair wages, secure working conditions, and protection for workers. Labour market initiatives in Nigeria include laws and policies addressing workplace safety (e.g., the Employee Compensation Act) and anti-discrimination policies (e.g., legislation shielding against discrimination based on HIV status) as well as ongoing revision of the National Minimum Wage. Micro-financing projects and skill-building programs also seek to increase workers' employability and assist self-employment.

Objectives Of Social Protection Programmes

Social protection initiatives mostly aim to defend people's rights to a life of dignity and advance both human and financial growth. The International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2021) claims that social protection is a basic component of both national and international policies meant to support human development, guarantee

political stability, and therefore enable equitable growth for all. Social protection programs encourage sustainable economic development by offering a safety net, therefore helping to lower poverty and inequality.

The Nigerian Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management, and Social Development (2020) outlined the objectives of social protection programs in its updated National Social Protection Policy. These objectives include: (1) reducing poverty among those vulnerable to economic hardship; (2) empowering individuals and households who are susceptible to economic shocks; (3) enhancing human capital development to ensure a dignified life for all citizens; (4) promoting gender equity and inclusive growth; (5) guaranteeing access to basic social services and infrastructure for everyone; (6) improving food security and nutrition; (7) ensuring decent employment and sustainable livelihoods; and (8) protecting individuals and households from falling into extreme poverty due to unforeseen shocks.

Concepts Behind Social Protection Programmes

Founded on ideas of human rights, dignity, access to essential services, and market control, social protection programs These initiatives, according to the World Bank (2022), seek to guarantee that every person—especially the most vulnerable—has access to basic services and is shielded from social and financial shocks. Social insurance, social assistance, and labour market policies—as described below—are the main social protection tools supporting these goals.

1. Social Insurance: This involves risk pooling for old age pensions, disability, unemployment, maternity, health, and informal savings.

2. Social Assistance: These are transfers in the form of conditional, unconditional, and public works cash transfers, and in-linked transfers such as school feeding, fertilizers, and seed provisions. Others are free waivers, tax incentives, and subsidies.

3. Labour: Labour in this context consists of active labour programmes and regulations designed to regulate the labour market and protect the workforce against shocks.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the combined principles of Amartya Sen's Capabilities Approach and Social Justice Theory. These two concepts provide a comprehensive lens through which the impacts of social protection programmes can be thoroughly evaluated.

1. The Capabilities Approach:

Originally developed by Amartya Sen in the 1980s, the capabilities approach changes the emphasis of poverty research from income and resources to the real freedoms and capacities people have to lead the lives they value. Sen (1999) claims that poverty is more than just a loss of cash; it is a deprivation of fundamental rights including access to social security, healthcare, and education. This method stresses improving people's capacity to overcome structural obstacles and attain lasting well-being; hence it is rather useful for assessing social protection programmes.

The capabilities approach can be used in Nigeria to evaluate how social protection measures (e.g., cash transfers, health subsidies, and educational grants) improve people's capacities to ensure food, and access to education, and preserve respectable health standards. These initiatives help to reduce long-term poverty by increasing people's chances and liberties, therefore addressing more than just temporary income disparities.

Application to Nigeria's Social Protection Programmes

Programmes like conditional cash transfers (CCTs) directly boost household economic capacity by giving financial resources that let them make investments in nutrition, health, and education. This is in line with Sen's perspective that reducing poverty calls for enabling people to make decisions enhancing their quality of life rather than depending solely on economic progress.

Social protection systems that guarantee individuals can keep a basic standard of health, which is a prerequisite for fully engaging in economic and social life, such as the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), fit the capabilities approach by guaranteeing access to healthcare.

Sen's approach implies that social protection in Nigeria should concentrate not only on raising income but also on enhancing people's actual chances to obtain education, health, and other basic resources that help contribute to well-being. Expanding social protection to many rural Nigerians would significantly improve the general results of human development since many of them lack these fundamental capacities.

2. Social Justice Theory

The Social Justice Theory of John Rawls offers even another crucial prism through which one might view the need for social protection initiatives. Rawls (1971) defined a fair society as one in which inequality was set such that the least advantaged members would benefit. From this point of view, social protection programmes are vital in helping to remedy market-driven disparities that disadvantage underprivileged groups.

According to Rawls' "Difference Principle," social and economic inequalities are only permissible if they help the least fortunate people in society the most. This idea strongly relates to the Nigerian situation, where the rich elite and the destitute majority live apart as well as between urban and rural people. By guaranteeing that the most disadvantaged groups have access to fundamental social services and safety nets, effective social protection programmes can function as redistributive tools to remedy these disparities.

Application to Nigeria's Social Protection Programmes

Programmes like the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) seek to give the most underprivileged, especially young people and women, financial aid and job possibilities. These initiatives fit Rawls' idea that policymakers should give the least advantaged priority.

Designed to help the underprivileged have the fundamental means to exist, social safety nets like the Subsidy Reinvestment Program (SURE-P) are meant to lessen the consequences of economic shocks. Fundamental to Rawls' theory of justice, these initiatives aim to close the disparity between the rich and the poor fostering a fairer society.

3. Structural-Functionalism

Structural-functionalism developed by Talcott Parsons helps one to understand the function of social protection initiatives in society. According to this theory, social institutions (such as social protection systems) function to maintain social stability and order. Programmes for social protection help to solve social problems including poverty, unemployment, and inequality, thereby promoting general social stability.

Social protection initiatives in Nigeria help to meet society's functional needs by reducing social instability and guaranteeing the ongoing inclusion of underprivileged groups, therefore ensuring their continuous productivity. When these initiatives fail, as they usually result from corruption and inadequate execution, societal dysfunctions including poverty, crime, and social inequality endure and increase the level of instability.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research approach, drawing from secondary sources, including government reports, international organizations' publications, and academic journals. With an eye on their effects on poverty reduction, inequality, and human development outcomes, data were compiled on social protection programmes carried out in Nigeria between 1970 and 2023.

Data collecting included reliable sources such as the World Bank Reports, the Nigerian Ministry of Budget and National Planning, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), and the International Labour Organization (ILO). Programme efficacy was evaluated using particular reports and statistics on poverty rates, social protection coverage, and human development indicators.

Content analysis was used in the study to help understand the data from several studies and papers. Comparative studies of Nigeria's performance against other African nations also drew on statistical data from sources such as ILO's World Social Protection Database and the World Bank's poverty estimates. Examined additionally were historical trends to assess the change in social protection coverage and results.

Impacts Of Social Protection Programmes in Nigeria.

Generally, Social protection programmes are said to contribute to gender equality, improved nutrition, and access to education/health among the poor and vulnerable in society. For example, according to the World Bank (2022) claims that Gender equality programmes such as transfers/public works for poor women empower them, assist in raising their capabilities, and provide them with improved access to education for girls as well as maternal care for women. In the same vein, improved Nutrition helps to increase resources for poor families thereby reducing hunger and malnutrition among them with a huge impact on their future incomes/productivity while access to education/ health which involves transfers and school feeding helps meet implicit and opportunity costs of education, boost enrolment and attendance, while transfers during shocks preserve human capital. ILO (2019) stated that global trends in social protection have shown significant progress over time in contrast to the situation that existed several decades ago such that today, there is practically no country where at least the basic measures of social protection have not been implemented. However, it claims that the current situation is far from optimal.

In Nigeria, there is a lot of evidence to show that Social Protection Programmes have recorded some level of achievements in the areas of livelihood enhancement, employment, education, health services, infrastructure, housing, and social insurance schemes among others, thereby improving the social qualities of many Nigerians, especially at the rural areas (Agboola & Lamidi, 2017). For example, the World Bank (2022) reported that over 80% of the Nigerian population live and farm in rural areas. Hence, the Agro-based social protection policies of the Nigerian Government have helped to empower the rural population who are endowed with agrarian economic activities thereby reducing their poverty level, and inequality gap and improving their living standard. However, a record from a 2023 special research report of the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG) indicates that Nigeria has one of the lowest social protection coverage rates globally and in Africa and has not fared well in her various forms of social protection programmes (NESG, 2023).

Table 1: World/Africa/Country Share of Population with Social Protection Coverage as of 2015 (Percent)

World/Africa/Country	Social Protection Coverage (%)
World	45
Africa	17.8
South Africa	48
Cape Verde	30.4
Malawi	21.3
Niger	20.6
Ghana	18.3
DR Congo	14
Ethiopia	11.6
Mozambique	10.9
Kenya	10.4

Cameroun	8.7
Burkina Faso	7.5
Gambia	6.1
Nigeria	4.4
Uganda	2.9

Data: International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2017). **Chart:** NESG Research

From Table 1 the report shows that as of 2015, all forms of social protection programmes in Nigeria could only cover 4.4 percent of her population. This implies that with the projected population of 184 million people in 2015 (NBS, 2022), 8.1 million people had some form of social protection coverage. Also, Akinyetun & Osariyekenwem (2021) reported that 82.9 million Nigerians live in multidimensional poverty as of 2019. This means that out of the 82.9 million Nigerians who live in poverty, about 74.8 million (82.9 – 8.1 million) of them were not covered by one form of social protection or the other.

Aware of the growing importance of social protection in realizing citizens' rights to a life of dignity and advancing human and economic development, successive governments in Nigeria have produced several social protection initiatives meant to maximize human and natural resources to reach fast economic growth and translate the development into fair social development for all citizens with equal opportunity for improved living standards. (2016 Nigerian Ministry of Budget and National Planning).

Investigating some notable social protection programmes in Nigeria since after the unfortunate civil war that lasted from 1967-1970 (which claimed many lives, and rendered many Nigerians homeless with poverty and malnutrition ravaging the country), indicates that the programme contents were laudable, made some impacts on poverty reduction, inequality, and human development in the country. Some of these notable social protection programmes include:

1. The Three “Rs” of Reconciliation, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction

The three Rs strategy of Reconciliation, Rehabilitation, and Reconstruction introduced by Yakubu Gowon’s military junta immediately after the war in 1970 was aimed at reconciling the two sides of the warring groups, rehabilitating homeless Nigerians, and reconstructing the structural ruins of the war (Mbara & Gopal, 2021).

2. The National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP), Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), the Green Revolution (GR), and Free & Compulsory Primary Education (FCPE).

These were agricultural and educational programs of the Federal Government that took place from 1976 to 1980. The aim was to increase local food production to ensure food sufficiency and provide primary education to all children. The NAFPP, OFN, and GR were basically for local food production to ensure food sufficiency by introducing modern technology into the country's agricultural sector such as high-yielding varieties of seeds, fertilizers, and tractors. These programmes were claimed to have made an appreciable impact in enhancing self-sufficiency in food production in the country (Ogwumike, 2001 as cited in Stiftung, 2018). The FCPE was also adjudged a success as it was claimed to have helped to improve the educational quality of lives of many Nigerians who live and work in rural areas (Agbola & Lamidi, 2017).

Notwithstanding the impact of these programmes on the lives of the people, lack of continuity, poor political will, social instability, inherent corruption, and lack of commitment were identified as some major reasons for the failure of the programmes.

3. The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP)

SAP was designed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and adopted by the Nigerian Government in 1986. The aim was to diversify the economy to reduce the over-dependence on the mono-economy of the oil

sector, to stimulate a paradigm shift from Government set-ups and to stimulate vibrant private sector participation (NBS, 2019).

Rather than producing the expected outcome of increased prosperity for the people, the programme led to a high inflationary trend which harmed income redistribution in the Nigerian economy.

4. Better Life Programme (BLP) and the Family Support Programme (FSP)

The Better Life Programme (BLP) was designed for gender equality by refining the quality of lives of rural women with the expected outcome of sensitizing them to the realization of their full economic potential (Agboola & Lamidi, 2017). The programme was claimed to have failed with little impact due to over-dominance by Government functionaries and elitist women who took advantage of the funds to enrich themselves. It was subsequently substituted by the Family Support Programme (FSP) which suffered the same fate.

5. National Directorate of Employment (NDE)

The National Directorate of Employment was established in 1986 to implement the social protection programme of reducing the level of massive unemployment among the productive youths in Nigeria. It was targeted at encouraging self-employment, and skills acquisition and providing training courses for graduates to enable them to secure direct employment in various organized sectors of the economy (Agboola et al., 2017).

As is the case with Government programmes in Nigeria, the programme could not produce the desired outcome due to corruption in the system and the failure of the beneficiaries to retire the loans.

6. Peoples Bank of Nigeria (PBN)

The programme was instituted in 1993 to provide credits for commerce and agriculture to rural dwellers who have no access to conventional bank loans and encourage savings among them. It was claimed that the programme failed due to poor management and large-scale corruption in the system, as well as abuse of the benefits by the benefactors (Ndema, 2022). However, the outcome of the programme was the birth of community banks which has stood the test of time.

7. Family Support Programme (FSP) and Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP)

The above two programmes were meant to provide health service delivery, childcare services, youth engagement, and a balanced diet for rural families to improve the quality of life of the rural poor. Lack of effective supervision/monitoring and corruption were fingered as being responsible for the failure of the programme.

8. Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) and the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP)

The PAP was established in 2000 to create jobs for unemployed youths in the country. The youths were engaged in environmental sanitation, vegetation control, and public building maintenance activities, among others. The PAP gave rise to the NAPEP which involved the adoption of a holistic approach by engaging all stakeholders on the poverty eradication mantra in the country (Adamaagashi et al. 2023). Poor implementation, misappropriation of project finances, poor funding, and inherent corruption were among the challenges that led to the collapse of the programmes.

9. The Seven Point Agenda.

This programme came into existence in 2009 to reinvigorate the key sectors of the economy which include land reforms, agriculture, and food security, employment creation, education, transportation system, security as well as energy and power.

The programme was short-lived due to the death of the then President late Umaru Musa Yar'Adua and the lack of continuity by the succeeding Goodluck Jonathan's Government.

10. Subsidy Re-investment Programme (SURE-P)

Established in 2009, SURE-P was aimed at improving public sector works as well as youth and women empowerment. It is expected to bring about a reduction in unemployment and gender parity among the youth and women respectively through skills acquisition. Unfortunately, the programme was accused of targeting educated youths without consideration for the poor ones who did not have access to tertiary education. This was also short-lived due to the change of Government in 2015.

11. National Social Investment Programme (NSIP)

This was established to empower young graduates with semi-skilled and unskilled labour via a multidimensional approach. The N-power Teachers Corp, N-power Agro, N-power Health, and N-power Knowledge were components of NSIP (Lamidi & Igbokwe, 2021). The N-Power Knowledge has as its sub-components the N-Power Creative, N-Power Hardware, and N-Power software.

The poor increase in the human development levels in Nigeria in 1970 and 2023 based on the three basic human development indices (HDI) of quality of life indicated by life expectancy, level of knowledge represented by literacy level, and standard of living determined by gross national income per capita as shown in table 2 shows that there is the poor performance of social protection programmes on the well-being of the people.

Table 2: Human Development Levels in Nigeria in 1970 and 2023

HDI	1970	2023	Percent Increase Per annum
Life Expectancy	40.38 Yrs.	56.05 Yrs.	7.17
Literacy Level	54.77%	62.02 %	24,96
GNP per capita	USD225.84	USD2460.29	18.66

Source: Author computation from NBS (2024) database

From Table 2, life expectancy increased from 40.38 years to 56.05 years showing a narrow rise of 15.67 years. Literacy level increased from 54.77% to 62.02% which indicates an annual increase of 24.96% since the introduction of social protection programmes in 1970. GNP per capita shows that people's standard of living increased by 18.66%, indicating a low increase considering the level of inflation and exchange rate of Nigerian currency to the dollar. It is therefore pertinent to conclude that the numerous social protection programmes introduced by successive Governments in Nigeria between 1970 and 2023 did not have a reasonable impact on the well-being of the citizens, especially the rural poor.

CHALLENGES OF SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA

Notwithstanding the laudable goals and some level of impact of social protection programmes among the Nigerian people, studies have shown that they have fallen short of their expectations. Some of the factors that might have contributed to the failure of previous social protection programmes are:

1. Inadequate funding: There is a lack of financial commitment to social protection programmes in Nigeria among partners and stakeholders as shown in the limited funding by the government for social protection programmes. This indicates that social protection programmes are not a key priority in the Nigerian Government's policies (Alamu, 2022).

2. High-profile corruption: The problem of diversion of funds and high-profile corruption among Government Departments and Agencies have been recurrent in the running of governments in Nigeria. Consequently, they have continuously aggravated the level of poverty in the country and led to other forms of vices that eroded the impact of social protection programmes on poverty reduction, inequality, and human development outcomes in the country.

3. Lack of reliable database: There is a lack of updated databases in Nigeria. This is evident in the World Bank (2022) report which asserted that only 18.1 percent of the poor and vulnerable Nigerians have a National Identification Number (NIN). This implies that the majority of the social protection target population cannot be reached due to a lack of reliable database.

4. Lack of political will by the Government: There is a lack of political will on the part of the Government resulting in poor funding and discontinuity by successive governments. Consequently, the programmes are not only financially frustrating, but the short-time nature does not allow enough time for the programmes to produce their expected or desired impact.

5. Poor design, faulty implementation, and lack of effective collaboration/coordination: The poor design and lack of effective collaboration and coordination among government departments and civil society organizations contribute to the poor outcome of the programmes. Most of them lacked the mechanisms for their sustainability.

6. Wrong perception of the programmes: There are a lot of misconceptions about the programmes by the people. For instance, conditional social protection transfers in the form of unsecured credit extended to the rural poor are misconstrued as a share of their national cake by the beneficiaries. This was evident in the poor retirements of the peoples' bank credits and Agricultural micro credits extended to the rural poor aimed at improving their poverty level, inequality and living standards. This contributed to the failure of these programmes.

7. Insecurity and Terrorism: In Nigeria, beginning from the second democracy in 1999, there has been a rising level of terrorism and insecurity. These include the rise of religious extremists and Boko-haram terrorists, resource control militant groups, marginalization and self-actualization agitators, and farmers/herders clashes. These forms of violence contributed to the ineffective implementation of social protection programmes in Nigeria. Also, the huge budgetary allocation to defence aimed at fighting insecurity is a source of concern because some part of this fund would have been used to fund social protection programmes to alleviate the poor living standards of the rural people.

8. Disequilibrium between human skills and the requirement of labour markets: Aside from these policy and human factors identified as some of the causes of the social protection programme failures in Nigeria, it has been argued that the failure of many social protection programmes in Nigeria is simply "the multiplier effect of the disequilibrium between available human skills and the requirement of labour markets" (Soludo, 2004 as cited in Lamidi & Igbokwe, 2021). This assertion is supported by an investigation of the determinants of labour market needs in Nigeria reported by NBS (2017). The report revealed that approximately 44 percent of the 20 organizations rated Nigerian science graduates as average incompetent. Fifty-six percent rated them as average in innovation, and 50 percent rated them as average in rational judgment. Additionally, 63 percent rated them as average in leadership skills, and 44 percent rated them as average in creativity. while 60 percent of them were rated as poor in needed skills like literacy, oral communication, information technology, entrepreneurship, analysis, problem-solving and decision-making. This situation impacts negatively on the success of social protection programmes that require creativity, innovation and top-notch leadership skills to drive the entire process to achieve the set goals.

CONCLUSION

The result of the investigation of some of the outstanding social protection programmes in Nigeria between 1970 and 2023 shows that the programmes made some impacts on poverty reduction, reduction in the wide gender equity gap, and improving human capital developments. These were observed in the areas of food and

agricultural production, income generation among rural people, women and youth empowerment, education, and healthcare. However, almost all the programmes recorded less than expected outcomes which were far below their optimum, and some with outright failures. The poor outcomes were attributed to policy problems, high-profile corruption, lack of reliable demographic data, structural problems, and insecurity, among others.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the investigation of social protection programmes in Nigeria with respect to their outcomes on poverty reduction, equity, and human development, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Government should increase the budgetary allocation to social protection programmes and separate the programmes from political manoeuvre such that laudable programmes are not ended prematurely.
2. There should be effective collaboration and coordination between Government departments and other Agencies involved in social protection programmes from the programme design to implementation.
3. There should be effective sensitization of the target population on objectives and expected outcomes of the programmes on their well-being.
4. The Government and its departments should shun the urge to corruptly enrich themselves with the funds meant for social protection programmes. Failure to do this should attract penalties that could serve as deterrents to the practice of primitive amassment of wealth.
5. The security agencies saddled with the fight against terror and insecurity should adopt an effective defence strategy to end terrorism and insecurity in the country. This will enable the operators of the programmes to reach the target population without fear of danger, loss or destruction of any sort.
6. The quality of programmes initiated by and policies made by the government should be improved by getting the best-trained brains in the art of policy-making to review policies and programmes before being approved and implemented. This will entail a re-evaluation of the expected outcomes and likely fall-outs from the programmes that may necessitate changes.
7. The importance of reliable demographic information cannot be overlooked if our policies and development programmes will yield the desired outcomes. It is of the essence, therefore, for the government to ensure there is available comprehensive and reliable demographic information about the citizens of the nation. Effective planning of social protection programmes begins with the knowledge of the target population, their peculiar attributes, their needs and weaknesses to ensure the achievement of such initiatives.

It is our conviction that careful implementation of these suggestions will be germane to achieving a more equitable society and an improved well-being of especially, her vulnerable people through the implementation of her social protection policies and programmes. This way, the sustainable development goals of the decade aimed at reducing human suffering and improving citizens' welfare will be feasible in Nigeria.

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