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The privatized state and mass poverty in Nigeria: The factor of economic development programmes since 1980s

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The Nigeria state has adopted many development options since 1960. In-built in these options are numerous poverty alleviation programmes aimed at reducing and or eradicating poverty within a given time frame. It is paradoxical that while these programmes are on course, poverty level grows geometrically. This paper explores the phenomenon with a view to establish the primary factor responsible for it and to establish whether there is a correlation between the poverty alleviation programmes and the increasing level of poverty. Using the pluralist political economy framework, the paper discovered that the privatized character of the Nigerian state is the primary factor responsible for the increasing level of poverty in Nigeria. There is a correlation between the implementation of poverty alleviation programmes and the increasing level of mass poverty in Nigeria. It therefore recommends sovereign majority rule and the abrogation of federal character principle as panacea for mass poverty in Nigeria.

Key words: Mass poverty, Nigerian State, economy framework, poverty alleviation programme.

INTRODUCTION

The synthetic overture of European quest for national wealth led to the penetration, deformation and restructuring of the state in the geographic expression known as Africa. This penetration changed the pattern and means of domination, laid the foundation for state crisis and the characteristic changes it has witnessed over the years. The divisive policies and the selective use and reward of Africans during colonialism orchestrated prebendalism, politicization of ethnicity and ethnicization of politics in Nigeria. Progressively, political power has been an instrument for individual wealth formation and capital acceleration. This has commoditized the processes of power acquisition, use and consolidation in most African countries particularly Nigeria.

The process of the evolution of this scenario began with the outburst of agitations, protests, and demand for self rule in Nigeria. The British Imperial power found favour with Northern Nigeria, and used the various population censuses conducted, territorial divisions made, to scheme and skew Nigeria's transition to independence in their favour. The consequences have been inter-

and intra- elite struggle across the ethnic nationalities, agitations against marginalization, poverty and demands for change. In response, over thirty five development programmes were introduced. These ranges from General Yakubu Gowon's National Accelerated Food Production, and the Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank Programmes of 1972, Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Green Revolution, the Directorate of Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructures (DFRRI), the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), People's Bank Of Nigeria, Vision 2010, Better Life For Rural Women Programme, to the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), among others (Maduagwu, 2006; Ajakaiye and Adeyeye, 2001). Yet, it is empirically true that the level and dimensions of poverty, and their consequential socio-political and economic crises have increased geometrically. Incidence of poverty increased from 28.1% in 1980 through 65.6% in 1996 (Onyesanmi et al, 2005:5) to over 70% in 2004 (World Bank, 2005). Nigeria was ranked 142nd poorest nation in the world (UNDP, 2000).

Extant literature attributed this negative correlation between the various economic development programmes and poverty alleviation to a number of factors. Oyesanmi et al. (2005) identified under provision of facilities and amenities, which are inadequate to match the growing demand of the urban populace, and the rural-urban movement, which has caused serious pressure on the existing infrastructural facilities, as the cause. Other factors include; the politics of personal rule, which is characterized by lack of accountability, corruption and pro-bourgeoisie projects (Maduagwu, 2005), the neglect of social and regional development, lack of project continuity on the part of incumbent government (Oyoze, 2003), political and policy instability (Adamu, 2006), neo-colonial influence and the millennium economic policies of liberalization (Mojubaolu, 2000), years of military rule and economic mismanagement (Okonjo-Iwuala and Osafo-Kwaako, 2007), policy reversals, non-transparent programme administration, occasional lack of funds (Nwafor, 2005:8), programme inconsistency, poor implementation, corruption of government officials and public servants, poor targeting mechanisms and failure to focus directly on the poor (Kankwenda et al., 2000; Ogwumike, 1998; Egbare, 1997), the conceptualization and the packaging of such programmes, high import content of most of the operations, inappropriate technology, politicization, personalization, and the none involvement of the people for whom the programmes are designed, and the erroneous assumption that the poor generally constituted a homogenous group (Tokumbo, 2003:2), top-down approach to initiating and implementing these programmes, lack of political will and commitment, policy instability and insufficient involvement of beneficiaries in these programmes, and political and ethnic instability (CBN Enugu, 1998). The extant literature fail to examine the primary cause of the negative impact of economic development programmes, which various regimes in Nigeria have initiated, on the rising poverty level. The factors raised in the literature are the bye-products of the primary cause, which is the character of the state. This paper therefore examines the Nigerian state and how its characteristics impacts on the progressive and geometric growth of mass poverty in Nigeria in spite of the economic development programmes it has pursued since 1980s.

CONCEPTUAL NEXUS: THE STATE

The concept of state emerged from two traditions, namely: the Marxist (Marx and Engels, 1852/1958:243 - 344) and the Weberian (Weber, 1964:333 - 347) traditions. While Marx perceived it as the product of the social system characterized by class contradictions, struggle and domination, Weber sees it as an institution sui generis, existing to safeguard and regulate the social system. Scholars of these two orientations have analyti-

analytically identified the state to be of different forms such as the capitalist state, socialist state, overdeveloped state, colonial state, neo-colonial state, rentier state, prebendal state, collapsed state, juridical state, predatory state, and the fictitious state among others (Sandbrook, 1986; Leftwich, 2000; Zolberg, 1995; Joseph, 1987). The different features of the state and their social impact found across the continents, account for these variations.

However, Stein (2007:6-7) and Giddens (1985:17) classified these varieties into two. These are: (a) the conceptualization of the state based on the indices of structure, apparatus of power and their functions. This is called the state-centered approach, a realist outlook that perceive the state as a unitary actor with interests to pursue (Waltz, 1971; Levi, 1988; Nordlinger, 1981), an organizational statism (Munro, 1996; Niskanen, 1974), and as an analytical concept (Migdal, 1988; Mitchell, 1992). (b) The conceptualization that perceives the state as a consequence of the character of the society, that is, class structure, social norms and the civil society. This approach called the society-centered approach encompasses the pluralists, who perceive the state as an arena for competition among interests (Held, 1989; Dahl, 1971; Bendix, 1967). It include also the structural-functionalists who perceive the state as instrument of social integration (Skocpol, 1979; Almond and Powell, 1966; Parson, 1965), and the Marxists who see the state as an expression of class struggle and domination (Jessop, 1990; Poulantzas, 1978; Wood, 1995). The common feature of these sub-groupings is their appreciation of the fact that the state is derived from or reduced to the society. Thus, any state is a reflection of its society, a consequence of the dynamics of its interests, and norms hegemonization among competing inter-and intra-class and ethnic groups. The character of these configurations and the outcome of their rivalry structure public institutions, their roles and power structures, and programmes. Thus, Ake (1985b) defined the state in this perspective as modalities of class domination. This society-centered theoretical approach is very relevant to this study because of its ability to employ the instrument of class, its formation and politics to elucidate the persisting scenario of poverty in Nigeria. It shall enable the paper to establish the character and impact of class formation and consolidation on the evolution of economic policies, development projects and poverty alleviation programmes, and their correlation with the rising trend of poverty in Nigeria. Precisely, the approach highlights the fact that these economic development programmes are generated to satisfy personal goals.

Ikpeze et al. (2006), who called this approach the pluralist school of political economy noted;

More often than not, the distributional consequences of public policies are intended result of the private interests

which have been instrumental in their design, passage and implementation. (And referring to Nigeria, they observed,) For the entire country, the manipulation of public policy for private purposes comprises yet another disjunction in our fractured history. In this case, power consolidation is ensured by attracting and rewarding supporters, and favouring certain groups. In which case, the entire process is characterized by corruption and wealth formation through policy formulation and implementation. The process is highly inimical to collective interest and development.

THE NIGERIAN STATE

Bayart (1993) noted that the state in Africa is determined by the heterogeneous character of its society. This was influenced by the logic of European imperialism to synthetically determine the emergence of modern state system in Africa. Thus, scholars have conceptualized the states in Africa from the perspective of their inherent socioeconomic and political relations as dependent and rentiering (Graft, 1988:219, Turner, 1976; Ake, 1981). Consequently, Ibeanu (1998:8 - 9) argued that the character of Nigerian state should be understood in terms of the geneology of global capital accumulation. The penetration of European merchants, led to intensive capital growth that resulted to the development of capital market and centralization of state system. The state became a tool in the hands of capital (Okolie, 2001:196), which never worked for the complete destruction of institutions, solidarity and social forces of the pre-capitalist order as long as they allow for accumulation (Zolberg, 1985, Ibeanu1993). The power of the state and capital are used to keep these pristine forces apart, while the state intervenes powerfully in all sectors with arbitrariness, and absolute totalitarianism (Ekekwe, 1986; Ake, 1995). The dialectics of these social forces and the process of wealth accumulation led to the continual transformation of the Nigerian state. It is pertinent to assert that the Nigerian state regardless of these transformations, maintained one fundamental character. It has never been a popular-national state and has never represented the interest of the masses (Ibeanu, 1997:8).

These transformations went through different stages. First, the pristine forces wrestled power from the colonial masters on behalf of sectorial pristine interests. Secondly, inter and intra sectorial pristine interests struggle, followed. This led to various crises of nation building and struggle for hegemony among these sectorial pristine interests. In the period preceding independence, party formation was characteristically along ethnic lines, while the post-independent period witnessed the crisis of revenue allocation, power and or position sharing and a consequent civil war that threatened the corporate existence of Nigeria. Ever since,

claims of marginalization and separatist agitations have characterized politics in Nigeria. The need to arrest these crises, promote national unity and command the general loyalty of all, led to the introduction of the federal character principle and the quota system among other policies as yard stick for national wealth and power distributions. The federal character principle demands that government activities and institutions must reflect the diverse ethnic groupings that characterize the geographic expression called Nigeria (1999 Constitution, Section 14 (3 - 4). Specifically, this section of the Constitution provides that;

The composition of the Government of the Federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or any of its agencies. The composition of the government of a state, local government council, or any of the agencies of such government or council and the conduct of the affairs of the government or council or such agencies shall be carried out in such manner as to recognize the diversity of the people within its area of authority and the need to promote a sense of belonging and loyalty among all the people of the federation.

Consequently, the Federal Character Commission was established by Decree no.34 of 1996 to implement the above provisions. In all the sections of Nigeria's political and public life, states, senatorial districts, local governments, and wards became functional units for distribution of government amenities and positions. This practice was extended also to all forms of recruitments, promotions, and appointments- The quota system.

The practice led to what Ibeanu (2006:7) called machine politics, which involves the parcelling out of parts of the state, including territories, to a group of individuals, usually under the leadership of one or two nobles or indeed a family who maintain their prebend essentially by force. They were made to recommend and or appoint people to fill their quota in any government dealings.

These people according to Smith and Zurcher (1944:190) subject both the ruling party and government officials to its will, operate and reproduce wealth by exploiting government activities and programmes for private gain of its members. Thus, Ibeanu (2006:8) studying Nigeria argued;

with time, wielding the federal character power increased their access to state funds, which in turn further extended their political influence. They began to sponsor candidates

to high political positions in order to expand their federal character power and capacity to appoint people to government positions.

Consequently, systemic out put, ascendancy to positions of power and influence, wealth acquisition, are determined by these few individuals. Government businesses and activities became personalized and are piloted even from individual homes. Laws became personified; any dissent or opposition amounted to suicide. Therefore, the state in Nigeria is parcelled out and privatized. Consequently, the Nigerian state is characteristically a privatized state.

MASS POVERTY

There is a plethora of literature on the concept of poverty. Poverty is seen as humiliating dependence (Narayan et al., 2000:30), a state of deprivation (Nigerian Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development, 1992), lack of basic necessities of life (Aluko, 1975; Aboyade, 1987; Nuhu, 2002), inability to satisfy the basic requirements for human survival (Aliyu, 2003), and inadequate satisfaction of basic needs of life (Central Bank of Nigeria, 1999). However, World Bank (2000) inductively gave a more comprehensive definition of poverty as;

The lack of what is necessary for material well-being especially food, but also housing, land and assets. In order words, poverty is the lack of multiple resources that lead to hunger and physical deprivation.

Such necessary materials or factors include; purchasing and consumption power, availability and access to good/qualitative education, health care delivery, basic infrastructures and welfare facilities. In this direction, when a major proportion of the population of any country experiences insufficient access to these materials, we have mass poverty. Current and available statistics reveal that Nigeria is experiencing pervasive and high level mass poverty. According to Ogwumike (2002) and World Bank (1999-2005) Reports, in 1994, 43%, 1996, 66% and 2004, over 70% of Nigeria's population live below poverty line. Thus, we have mass poverty in Nigeria.

THE NIGERIAN STATE, DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES AND MASS POVERTY SINCE 1980s

The transfer of power to comprador bourgeoisie in 1960, the experience of deficit balance of payment, and the politics of capital formation, led to the abandonment of state lead economy for market reforms in Nigeria.

Prominent among these reforms are the introduction of Bretton Wood development orthodoxies and the introduction of poverty alleviation programmes to cushion there effects. Central to the Bretton Woods recipe for development are enhanced productivity and exports, reduction of government financing requirements and liberalization (Green, 1989:40). These caused power shift towards the export oriented segments of the national ruling class and strengthened the grip of multinational corporations on the Nigerian state. Two important developments that later complemented each other to usher in the privatized state occurred. First, inter class struggle for state power, which in itself led to political instability, conflicts, marginalization and polarization, occurred. Second, supporters of the incumbent were rewarded with illegal and jumbo contracts, appointments to key positions, and the introduction of new policies /programmes to favour them (Graft, 1988:220 - 222). Political struggle among the middle class became an expenditure competition in support of the powerful for an expected appointment and or contract reward. Many clients within the group have to buy their position either with money or gangsterism. The services they render subsequently, that is, after winning a place, become commodities which must be paid for by their recipients. Ihonvbere (1989) noted objectively that such officers pay lip service to social capital and pursues only those programmes that reproduce their survival and domination. This monstrous patronage system made subsistence and wealth formation in Nigeria to revolve around the activities of state (Migdal, 1988:39). State development programmes and activities tacitly reflect this individual interests (Sklar, 1979:546). The institutions of the state and their programmes became tools in private hands for achieving personal interests, making politics an end in it (Leftwich, 2000:94). Consequently, State intervention in economic programmes becomes an exercise planned by few individuals to service private interests at the detriment of the masses (Diamond, 1987:586, Watts, 1984:409). The operation of Economic Development Programmes, resultantly, becomes an exercise in the robbery and impoverishment of the masses.

The experiences of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) and its affiliate policies elucidate the above position clearly. SAP, the brain child of IMF, was introduced in 1986 as a macro-economic policy to arrest the increasing trend of underdevelopment, inflation, balance of payment deficit, poverty and inability to finance imports. Central to this is the suspension of federal government loans to states, reduction of grants, subventions and loans to parastatals, massive reduction of government expenditures, and retrenchment of workers, allocation of 40% of federal revenue to debt repayment, and liberalization etc (Olukoshi, 1989:228).

Tokenbo (2003) in his pilot study of macro-economic

policies and pro-poor growth in Nigeria noted that this programme failed to achieve significant desired result. He argued that SAP enhanced diminution in living standard and the exacerbation of poverty. To cushion the pervasive negative effects of SAP policies, many other programmes were introduced to positively influence poverty and development in the rural areas. These include the Directorate for Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI), Better Life Programme (BLP), The People's Bank of Nigeria, Community Banks, Mass Mobilization for Social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER), Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF), and the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) etc. On these, Babangida wasted over three hundred million naira (Elumilade et al., 2006:3 - 4). DFFRI was introduced to develop the rural areas through the provision of feeder roads, toilet facilities, shelter and clean drinking water, and rural electrification. It was to mobilize and organize rural farmers into cooperative societies and educate them. According to Ogwumike (2002), DFFRI had tremendous impact on the rural arrears between 1986 and 1993 because it completed over 278,526 Km of roads and electrified over 5000 rural communities.

However, it failed to sustain its original tempo and became defunct (National Planning Commission, 1994). NDE was another programme introduced to tackle mass unemployment and articulate policies aimed at developing work programmes through training, finance and guidance. This programme has achieved remarkable progress in respect of its projects, though it has not been able to cope with the needs of the ever increasing unemployed graduates. It has trained over 766,783 persons in the national Open Apprenticeship Scheme, 106,854 persons in the Resettlement Scheme, 15,317 persons in its Wheels programme and created 154,910 jobs (Central Bank of Nigeria Annual Report, 1992 - 1997). BLP on its part was formed to enhance the quality of life of rural women, initiate self-help projects, rural development programmes, provide skill acquisition and health care, adult literacy and family planning to rural women. The BLP formed 11,373 women corporative societies and established 3,613 processing mills. These were pro-urban projects as none was located anywhere in the rural arrears. However, Ogwumike (1988/2002) noted that the BLP was hijacked by position-seeking individuals, who diverted its resources for personal rule.

The experience of PBN was not different. The programme was introduced to provide support for savings and credit facilities to the underprivileged. But it did not achieve most of its goals due to Executive rascality and corruption. Its first Executive Chairman, Dr Tai Solarin resigned because of it, and shortly after the bank collapsed. In all, only few scholars like Obadan (1994); Faraquee (1994) and Canagarajah et al. (1997) are of the opinion that Nigerian Poverty Alleviation Programme made high positive impact on poverty alleviation in the

country. However, they have failed to explain why the level of poverty is geometrically increasing in the midst of this high positive impact. Recent surveys and research have shown that the entire programmes failed to impact positively on poverty reduction. Such works include; NCEMA (2007), Aigbokhan (2000), Oyesanmi et al (2005), Tokunbo (2003), Ogwumike (2002), Elumilade et al (2006), Bulama (2005), and Oyemomi (2003) among others.

The failure of these programmes was not just because of corruption, because corrupt officials can be probed and adequately sanctioned. Rather, their failure is as a result of the character of the state and its politics. Tokumbo (2003:31) noted;

Many of the programmes were politically motivated, designed more to buy legitimacy for the government rather than being primary function and genuine in their intention to help the poor.....those who benefited from these various programmeswere the rich and powerful.

The method has been the federal government practice of providing money to state and local governments to empower them to employ the unemployed (Elumilade et al., 2006:5), create agencies and institutions outside the existing ministries and design policies and programmes for them. The machine system of politics that has characterized the struggle for state power and its use, and the personalized modalities of domination in Nigeria, made appointments to these agencies and institutions a cliental reward. Each beneficiary, thus, conceive the post, its responsibilities, allocations and revenue as the 'net surplus' of their past political contributions. Thus, through shady deals in well articulated programmes, they embezzle and misappropriate funds meant for the provision of social services and goods. In most cases, these projects are ill-done, abandoned and or looted by sponsored criminals. The masses consequently pay for the provision of such services that would have been provided free by government (Ahonsi-Yakubu, 2001:83 - 84). Joseph (1991) succinctly observed; the system is often wasteful, unproductive, and contributes to the increasing affluence of the relative few, paltry gains for a larger number, and misery for the great majority of the people. The expected socioeconomic transformation then becomes a mirage. Rodee et al. captured the whole scenario in the following manner;

What is disturbing is that government and local government political functionaries and other Party leaders are claiming that they are sourcing funds for the operation of their parties from the following avenues:

- 1.) 10% levy on prices of all contracts awarded at state and local government level.

2.)there is another 15% known as the executive distribution pool which is shared by the chairman and members of his executive. The chairman uses his own share to generate fund to recoup his own past election expenses.

3.)legislatures insist on getting another 5 - 10% of the contract price to recoup their own election expenses.

4.) The party executives at the local government level get fertilizers (meant for the rural farmers from government agencies) and sell them at 300 - 400% profit.....

5.) There are allegations that prospective public servants now pay substantial sums as bribes....in order to obtain sponsorship for appointment.....

The above have triple debilitating consequences for poverty in Nigeria. First, the incidence of political corruption necessitated by the privatized character of the Nigerian state squandered the very revenue that would have been used to provide human development services to the masses. The consequence is consolidated poverty. The phenomenon increased the prices of commodities thereby reducing the purchasing power of the masses. This reduced both the quantity and quality of goods and services previously enjoyed by them, thereby increasing the level of poverty. Thirdly, it incapacitated institutional and systemic ability to maintain itself and pursue its goals. Most of the institutions responsible for poverty alleviation programmes run into insufficient fund not by virtue of budgetary allocations but by fund availability. The consequence has been non-payment of salaries and allowances, labour conflicts, retrenchment of workers and subsequent closure of such institution. Dr. Tai Solarin (the chairman of the People's Bank of Nigeria-one of the poverty alleviation programmes) resigned as a result of the level of corruption in the Bank and executive rascality (Ogwumike, 2002:10). Today, PBN has folded. Between 1987 and 1993, DFFRI, which is another programme, lost # 135 billion out of #146 billion allocated to it to political corruption (Elumilade et al., 2006:4). Similar accusations of corruption were leveled against ministry of Internal Affairs between 1999 - 2003 for #300 billion (see Adekeye, 2004), the Senate contract scams of over #400 billion (Newswatch, August 23, 1999 and August 14, 2000), ministry of Aviation contract scam of #40 billion (Newswatch, February 28, 2000), the endless list of state Governors corrupt practices of over #6 trillion (Tell, March 3, 2003). These serious allegations of corruption were neither investigated nor taken to court of law. Fawehinmi (2000:18 - 19) succinctly observed;

Not one single officer has been arraigned before our court on charges of corruption, stealing, embezzlement or brigandage.

Recently, some of these Governors like Alamesieye of Bayelsa State, Chimaroke Nnamani of Enugu State,

Joshua Dariye of Plateau State, Orji Uzor Kalu of Abia State, and Idris Abubakar of Kogi State, were arrested and charged to Court by EFCC over such crimes. Correctly, political analysts have attributed these arrests to the stiff opposition of the victims to former President Obasanjo's Third term bid. They were either presidential aspirants or strong supporters of Atiku Abubakar project. Even when Civil Rights Activists and anti-corruption crusaders petitioned the Presidency and or EFCC to prosecute pro-Obasanjo leaders for corruption, example: Chief Andy Uba, nothing happened. The said politician and Special Adviser to Obasanjo on Domestic Affairs was accused of money laundering, a similar accusation that led to the removal of Governor Dariye and Alamesieye. None of the President's men and kinsmen who served loyally as ministers, special assistants/advisers and governors, and or legislators that was accused of corruption has been arrested and prosecuted. Reason; they served the interest that owned the country within that period', one that parcelled out political positions during the said 2007 General elections. To buttress this point, after the 2007 general election that ushered in another clique within the ruling elites, the former Governor of Bayelsa State (Alamesieye) was release and pardoned in the 'name' of suing for peace in the Niger Delta region. Why were others not released also? Alhaji A. Dokubo (the leader of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta), who was standing trial for treason together with Chief Raph Uwazurike (the leader of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra), was released. Till date, Uwazurike is still in prison.

The entire crime and anti-corruption agencies turned blind eyes to these cases and deaf ears to people's agitations over them. They were all appointed by the same individual(s) that sustains the political system. However, the exist of President Obasanjo paved the way for EFCC that previously removed Obasanjo's men from its list, to begin their arrests. These people include former Governors James Ibori of Delta State, Lucky Igbinedion of Edo State etc. There is also a call to arrest and try the former Governor of Rivers State, Peter Odili and Obasanjo himself. The same story is prevalent in the various poverty alleviation agencies set up by the government. The Better Life for Rural People's programme is a case in point. This organ for rural development was located only in the cities wherein the various wives of local government chairmen, commissioners/ministers, legislators and chief executives of various institutions and parastatals converge under the chairperson of the 'First Lady', to share allocations to the ministry of women affairs and for the implementation of the rural life development programmes. They equally initiate projects to attract fund from their husband's government offices. It is a common knowledge that these projects after heavy fund raising ceremonies were hardly

executed. No single programme has been initiated for any of the rural communities in Nigeria by this organ and even those cited in the cities are hardly completed in spite of huge allocations for them. Funds meant for the provision of public utilities are squashed away by private individuals. Individuals grow at the expense of the masses.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Marx (1970) asserted

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitute the economic structure of the society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life.

The Nigerian state is a product of Western imperialism and has continued to be structured and transformed by the transformation of the productive forces it created. Central to this is the fact that state power was established as instrument of capital formation and wealth development. Consequently, the various pseudo bourgeoisie prevalent in the socioeconomic system, compete in a zero-sum game for the acquisition, use and consolidation of state power. The multiple ethnic configurations of Nigeria, and its politicization, provided a fertile ground for the struggle. The logic of federalism, unity in diversity, equity and justice, led to the introduction of divisive policies such as federal character principle and the quota system. Through this, positions at the federal, state and local government levels, and federal allocations were determined. The various economic and political elites from these ethnic nationalities struggle among themselves to fill and or provide candidates for available positions in an excruciating manner that leads to the allocation or parcelling out of these positions to specific arrears. Individual bourgeoisie from such places now provide candidates, normally under agreement, to fill the positions. These political 'godfathers' determine not only the activities of those in power but also their duration and those that will replace them. The entire process is structured by their material advantage. Therefore, government policies and programmes were designed to satisfy this material interest and not that of the masses. Thus, all economic programmes meant to improve the living standard of the people are exercise in decapitalization of the masses and expropriation of public

fund into private purse. Therefore Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Nigeria are instruments for private material acquisition due to the privatized nature of the Nigerian state. There is a high correlation between these programmes and the increasing trend of mass poverty in Nigeria. They aggravate poverty as they enrich the private treasury of the very few that structure and maintain the mode of dominance in the social production of material subsistence.

It is therefore the position of this paper that poverty alleviation in Nigeria should begin with the application of the liberal revolutionary framework, which is the institution of popular democracy. In this, sovereign majority reigns. The people who are suffering the sting of poverty decide who represents them, control their activities, and participate both in the articulation and implementation of economic development programmes. Then, poverty alleviation programmes should be completely centered on 'basic needs' approach. Secondly, the nefarious and divisive policies of quota system and federal character principle should be abrogated.

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