Dutse Business Review (DBR): Volume 1, Issue 1 (2026) ISSN Print: 3156-4062 eISSN: 3156-4852

EFFECT OF SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMES ON POVERTY REDUCTION IN NIGERIA: A MULTI APPROACH REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Government exists to provide essential services to the citizens. These services include provisions of basic social amenities and infrastructures, social protection services to the vulnerable such as children, the aged/elderly, people with disabilities, mentally challenged, support for unemployed, floods victims among others. However, assessment on provisions of these social services is still poor compared with the monetary investments for the implementation of social protection programmes in Nigeria by the government and other donor agencies, thereby increasing the poverty rate of the country. This paper examined the effect of social protection programmes on poverty reduction in Nigeria. This study adopted a survey approach in assessing some social protection programmes initiated by the federal government. The study's findings revealed that poor preparation and inadequate feasibility studies of programmes affect the implementation. Also, the study found out leakage of intended/targeted beneficiaries due to politicization and corruption by implementing agencies affect actualization of targeted goals of the programmes. It was observed that inadequate accurate data, poor funding, poor inspection and supervision, among others limit effective implementation of social protection programmes in making positive impact in poverty reduction. It is therefore, the conclusion of this study that for social protection programmes to make a sustainable success in the reduction of poverty, adequate pre-programme preparations should be done before launching programmes. Furthermore,

adequate funding of programmes and ensuring frequent periodic assessment of expenditures and progress achievements are important to audit the financial activities of the implementing agencies. It is also, the view of this study that introduction of social extension service workers would help to ensure effective follow-up with the beneficiaries of social protection programmes in their various communities and also help in identifying other areas of social problems which have been given attention by the government.

Key Words: Public Policy, Social Protection Policy, Poverty, Poverty Reduction Programmes

1.1 INTRODUCTION

One of the basic attributes of welfarist state is public provision of social amenities and essential services such as basic education, healthcare services, social security to the vulnerable groups (children, elderly/aged, disables), creation of employment opportunities, housing or provision of shelters, among others. In other words, government as an institution of the state exists for the welfare of the people (the citizens). As a social institution according to (Garland, 2014), its plays a fundamental role in the protection and promotion of the economic and social well-being of citizens. On this note, (Beveridge and Hayek, 2012) is of the view that government as an institution of the state exist to upholds and promotes the principles of equality of opportunity, equitable distribution of wealth, and public responsibility for those unable to avail themselves of the minimal provisions for a good life.

Today, in most advanced industrialized countries of the world, governments and non-governmental organizations have keyed in providing social services to the less privileged of the society. For examples, the National Insurance in the United Kingdom and the Social Security in the United States of America, the Article 20 of the Basic Law in Germany which provides social services and insurance for health, pension, accidents, nursing care and support to people who are unemployed or who have less paying jobs.

In the light above, Nigeria has introduced and implemented various social protection programmes which aimed at reducing poverty, improving support to vulnerable populations. The African Centre for Leadership, Strategy and Development (2024) highlights that in Nigeria under the military regimes and the democratic administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999 - to the present administration under President Ahmed Bola Tinubu, there are several intervention programmes in the that can be categorized as social protection prgrammes such as Vitamin A Supplementation Programme, National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), National Directorate

Programme (NDE), Pension Scheme, Nigeria Social Insurance Trust Fund (NSITF), National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), Community and Social Development Programme (CSDP), Child Development Programme (CDGP), Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES), Rural Infrastructural Development Scheme (RIDS), Natural Resources Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS), Special Agricultural Initiatives, Social Welfare Services Scheme (SOWESS), Seven-Point Agenda, Vision 20:2020, Niger Delta Amnesty Programme, Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P), Youth Enterprises with Innovation in Nigeria (YouWin), and Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA), Conditional Cash Transfer, National Social Safety Nets Programme (NASSP), National Social Investment Programme (NSIP), N-power, Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP), National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP), Poverty Intelligence Lab, Skill-Up Artisan Programme (SUPA), Consumer Credit Scheme, Student Loan Scheme, Renewed Hope Ward Development Programme, Renewed Hope Initiative (RHI), National Social Safety Net Programme, among others.

However, despite allocating billions of naira for the implementation of these programmes, poverty is increasing unabated with majority of the citizens unemployed and underemployed, unable to access to good healthcare services and lack essential social amenities such habitable housing/shelter, schools, pipe borne water, motorable roads and affordable means of transportation. The Report of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) in 2025, identified Nigeria and 12 countries in West Africa that are experiencing food crisis and projected more food insecurity to worsen in the future which is likely to further increase the rate of poverty, malnutrition, diseases and low life span of the citizens if noting tangible is done by the government. It is against this backdrop that this paper intends to examine effect of social protection programmes on poverty reduction in Nigeria.

1.2 STATEMNT OF THE PROBLEM

Over the years, Nigeria has committed billions of naira in the implementation of various programmes targeting to address issues of vulnerability, hunger, poverty, unemployment and underemployment, food insecurity, crime, poor healthcare, support to elderly and children, etc despite the huge monetary commitments much has not been achieved with the current rates of unemployment at 4.9 percent and poverty at 40.1 percent (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024). Most scholars strongly argued that the

problem of social programmes in Nigeria is not about articulation of policies but ineffective implementation framework and lack of commitment to funding of programmes as well as poor network of sensitization of the people (Onah, 2008; Bilkisu, et.al; El-yaqub and Segun, 2025). On the other, the process of selection of the intended beneficiaries of these social programmes and ensuring adequate coverage of the targeted social groups have remained a big challenge, leaving most of these social protection programmes to be politicized and hijacked by unintended beneficiaries. The systemic corruption in the Nigerian public service especially among the implementing agencies of the government poverty alleviation programmes remains one of the major reasons for frequent failures of efforts in the fight against poverty in Nigeria. This study intends to investigate the effect of social protection programmes on poverty reduction in Nigeria.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The broad objective of this study is to examine the effect of social protection programmes on poverty reduction in Nigeria. The specific objectives are:

(i) To assess the implementation strategies of social protection programmes especially the processes involved in selecting the intended beneficiaries in rural communities in Abuja FCT.

(ii) To ascertain the impact of the cash transfer programmes and skill acquisition based programmes on poverty reduction**.**

(iii) To identify implementation challenges facing social protection programmes in Nigeria.

1.4 METHODOLOGY

This study relied mainly on secondary source of data. In other words, this study is a literature based research which adopted qualitative method of analysis. The reviews were sourced mainly from peer-reviewed journal articles, newspapers, text books, government documents from the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Reduction, Federal Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning, Federal Ministry of Labour and Productivity, Social Investment Programmes Agency (NSIPA) and National Social Register (NSR) headquarters Abuja, FCT.

1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

It is a tradition in social and management sciences to adopt a theoretical perspective which can justify research studies. As a result, this study clinches on Distributive and

Elites Theories to examine social protection policies and programmes in Nigeria as well as their impact on poverty reduction.

The Distributive Theory: The distributive theory according to (Hobfoll, 1989) is a theoretical proposition which advocates that society is built on communal spirit and as such, it is expected that societal resources be evenly shared. On the other hand, (Harold, 1971) holds that existence of societal classes between the haves and have not, inevitably pushed the society into distributive policies. In other words, distributive theory perceives policies between or among classes or categories of the population as effort by decision makers of the government to bridge the gap between the richer and the poor.

The Elites Theory: The Elites theory according to (Geraint, 1969 and Bachrach, 1967), the elites dominate the societal structures and they are key instruments to policy making. This is because the elites have common interest in the preservation of societal status quo, policies are bound to be conservative. The elites dishes out socioeconomic policies to alleviate but not completely take people out of the poverty or societal class where they belong. Therefore policies may look attractive but can only bring short-term reliefs and not to lift the citizens out of poverty. The elites to preserve itself and to avoid change and stress, it concedes to some welfare policies and public demands (Ikelegbe, 1996).

1.6 LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents the literature review on the subject matter. The literature review relied mainly on journals, text books, government gazettes and other periodic like newspapers, magazines, etc.

1.6.1 Concept of Social Protection Policies and Programmes

Public discourse is saturated with the advocacy or criticism of various policies and programmes. Policies are intended actions or inactions of an organization or government while, programmes are integrated activities aimed at achieving policy intentions or objectives.

Social protection policies are group of selected intentions and actions guiding governmental and non-governmental organizations as regards to human welfare, fundamental human rights, security and economic support for the less privileged in the society, healthcare and educational rights, among others. Social protection programmes are according to view of (Soremekun, 2025) are essential chain of activities initiated by government of any country, as they help to reduce poverty, improve living conditions, and boost economic stability. These programmes aim to reduce the inequality gap,

encourage financial inclusion, and provide safety nets for vulnerable individuals and groups in the society. To him, these programmes are strategically designed to address the challenges of unemployment, poverty, and social injustice through collaboration with other organizations outside government which included foreign organizations and non-governmental bodies.

1.6.2 National Social Protection Policy and its Objectives

Social protection policy just like any other public policy forms an integral chain of actions or in-actions of governmental activities towards addressing litany of social problems in the society. From the National Planning 2021 document, social protection is a multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary approach that contributes to poverty reduction, articulating policy priorities of government towards sustainable development. It is in this context that the Ministry of Budget and National Planning, the coordinating organ of all projects, programmes and policies of government, was given the task to anchor the production of the National Social Protection Policy with the active participation and contribution of all stakeholders in both public and private sectors at the federal and sub-national levels. It is, therefore, a national policy derived from national consultation and consensus.

1.6.3 Objectives of the National Social Protection Policy

From the National Social Protection Policy document, the objectives are:

a. To reduce poverty among the people vulnerable to being poor;

b. To empower the poor and people vulnerable to economic shocks;

c. To enhance human capital development to ensure a life of dignity;

d. To provide guiding principles for managing social protection projects and programmes; e. Promote social cohesion, equity and inclusive growth;

f. To ensure citizens have access to basic social services and infrastructure;

g. To provide social welfare and improve food security and nutrition;

h. To ensure decent employment and sustainable livelihood;

i. To protect individuals and households from shocks that can make them fall into extreme poverty; and

j. To promote synergy and coordination among all social protection intervention agencies.

1.6.4 Implementing Agencies and Partners for Implementation of Social Protection Programmes in Nigeria

The implementing agencies and partners of social protection policies and programmes in Nigeria are the Federal Government of Nigeria through Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Reduction, Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, Federal Ministry of Education, Federal Ministry of Environment, Federal Ministry of Health, National Primary Health Care Development Agency, Disaster Management and Social Development, the National Social Investment Office, the National Cash Transfer Office, and other extra-ministerial departments agencies MDAs while the State Governments, Local Governments play significant roles. The major partners are: World Bank, United Nations Children's Fund - (UNICEF), European Union - (EU), Non-governmental organizations like Catholic Relief Services, Save the Children, etc.

1.6.5 Factors that Necessitated Call for National Social Policy

There are various reasons that made social protection programmes inevitable government responsibility in every society. Among them are:

High Poverty Rate: Nigeria poverty rate over years has continued to rise unabated. According to the National Bureau of Statistics - (NBS), 2022, Nigeria is a rich country with a booming population of over 200 million people. While this richness is an advantage, the country's human development has, however, been severely impacted by multidimensional poverty. Going by the available record on the Nigeria Multidimensional Poverty Index - (MPI) Survey in 2022 reveals that about 63 percent (estimated 133 million people from the total population) are multi-dimensionally poor. Poverty in any society has a multifaceted cause and according to (World Bank, 2022) poverty is multifaceted in nature and can be see in many ways, including a lack of material wealth sufficient to ensure a high standard of living, hunger and undernourishment, illness, a lack of access to adequate education and healthcare, a steady rise in the mortality and morbidity rate from disease, homelessness and inadequate housing, unstable environments, and social exclusion and discrimination.

Gender Inequality: Gender inequality is seen as a situation of uneven economic opportunities, social segregation from cultural practices and beliefs and other forms of deprivation against women when compared with men. In Africa, especially in Nigeria, gender inequality is caused majorly by cultural practices and beliefs system. From the view of (Oladunni, 2003), culture is the main cause of female poverty and underdevelopment. From her finding, stereotype on gender role and unequal distribution of household resources are the main causes of women's poverty. In other words, social institutions or its structures and social norms generate unequal access to

opportunities, services and and resources within the society and wage discrimination in the labour market.

a. **Unemployment and Underemployment:** The rising unemployment rate in Nigeria has further worsen the poverty situation. Nigeria's unemployment rate for the second quarter of 2024 stood at 4.90 percent (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024). This percentage represents people with job loss, new graduates, housewives/stay-at-home household. On the other hand, according to (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024; International Labour Organization, 2024) underemployment survey within the second quarter stood at 9.2 percent and about 9 percent of the labour force in Nigeria worked under 20 hours a week and are poorly paid or underpaid.

Table 1: Unemployment Rate Assessment in Nigeria: Quaterly Review (2022 - 2024)

Key Labour Market Inicators	**Q4 2022**	**Q1 2023**	**Q2 2023**	**Q3 2023**	**Q1 2024**	**Q2 2024**
Labour Force Participation Rate	77.8	79.9	80.4	79.5	77.5	79.5
Employment-to-Population Ratio	73.6	76.6	77.1	75.6	73.2	76.1
Share of Employed People in Self-Employment	84	86	88	87.3	84	85.6
Time-related underemployment	13.7	12.2	11.8	12.3	10.6	9.2
Unemployment	5.3	4.1	4.2	5	5.3	4.3
Labour Underutilization 2[1]	18.2	15.8	15.5	17	15.3	13..0
Labour Underutilization 3[3]	9.5	6.7	6.9	7	7.8	5.9
Labour Underutilization 4[3]	21.9	18.1	17.8	18	17.6	14.5
Subsistence farmer	5.6	3.9	4.8	4.1	4.5	3.7
Youth Unemployment Rate	8.3	6.9	7.2	8.6	8.4	6.5
Urban Unemployment Rate	6.3	5.4	5.9	6	6	5.3
Rural Unemployment Rate	4	2.9	2.5	4	4.3	2.8
Informal Employment	93.5	92.6	92.7	92.3	92.7	93.0

Source: National Bureau of Statistics: Unemployment Rate Assessment Report, 2024

From the table above, unemployment rate remains high and has constituted one of key social problems confronting Nigeria. The table presented essential figures from the Nigeria labour market including the urban and rural areas.

Insecurity: The security situation of the country has worsened within the few past years. Insecurity has become a major challenge affecting social and economic lives of the

people. Insecurity is key driver of poverty counting up to 21% of differences in multidimensional poverty across the states directly affected by insecurity. It has disrupted the livelihood activities of many families, job loss, lost of farmlands, closure of schools, companies/industries, and has denied many citizens access to meaningful basic needs and livelihoods.

Poor Healthcare: Nigeria's healthcare sector also faces significant challenge from government negligence, poor funding to acute manpower. The sector according to (Segun, 2025), lacks adequate funding, poor infrastructure, shortage of skilled manpower and professionals, and limited access to citizens who are in need of healthcare services. The figures on Malaria, HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and other infectious diseases are on the surge in Nigeria indicating high vulnerability to diseases and infections. This has contributed to Nigeria's low life span which is currently at 50 years to 53 years from the World Health Organization (WHO) report in 2024.

Food Insecurity: Food crisis is another problem facing majority of Nigerians. In recent time, Nigeria has witnessed food crisis resulting to severe malnutrition and diseases among the poor citizens with over 20 million people at risk of food insecurity (United Nations, 2023). Access to food has been severely affected by insecurity and other forms of violence especially in states like Benue, Adamawa, Borno, Yobe and Niger. On the other hand, the climatic change has affected agriculture outputs thereby reducing farming produce to 65% to 70% (Tunji, 2024).

Child Abuse and Vulnerable Adults: The need to care for children and vulnerable adults both at national and international level have necessitated urgent calls and promulgation of social policies and programmes. The issues of sexual abuse, emotional and psychological abuse, infant mortality, gender discrimination, among others are key campaigns by global organizations like United Nations, UNICEF, EU and other non-governmental organizations.

1.6.6 Some Social Protection Programmes in Nigeria

Though, Nigeria from precolonial, colonial and post-colonial epochs have had different types of social supports from families, communities, and government to people who are in needs. This study focused on the assessment of recent social protection programmes in Nigeria initiated from inception of the National Social Protection Policy in 19 July, 2017 to the present democratic administration.

National Social Investment Programme (NSIP): The National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) is a programme launched in 2016 which aimed to tackle poverty

and hunger among (the vulnerable groups), the poor and low income earners through equitable distribution of resources (Onah and Olise, 2019). It is estimated that over 4 million Nigerians have benefited from the programme. However, this figure could be verified through face-to-face interview of the beneficiaries.

N-Power (Job Creation and Empowerment Programme): The past administration of late President Muhamadu Buhari introduced the programme in 2016 as a component of the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) as a means of alleviating poverty and unemployment rate in Nigeria with the aim of creating employment opportunities. The programme according to (ANEEJ, 2012; Amadi and Ogidi, 2024) has various sub-components as follow: (a) N-Power Volunteer Corps (NPVC), (b) N-Power Knowledge and (c) N-Power Build, N-Power Teach, N-Power Tech, N-Power Agro, and N-Power Health. The programme targets to engage graduates and non-graduates to various job creation and employment training courses through online recruitment process (Onakoya and Fabiyi, 2020). The N-Power Volunteer Corps, and N-Teach were recruited to work as instructors, teachers in primary and secondary schools while N-Agro were to work as agricultural extension service workers in various rural communities. On the other hand, N-Tech and N-Power were trained in various skills such as tailoring, electrical and welding, furniture, hair dressing, catering services, phone/computer repairing etc with graduates receiving N30, 000 stipend and non-graduates on N10,000 stipend for a period of two years (Olawale and Adebayo, 2020; Onakoya & Fabiyi, 2020).

Conditional Cash Transfer Programme: The Conditional Cash Transfer Programme was launched in Nigeria between 2007 and 2008 following the devastating impact of poverty and targeting the unemployed and low income earners (Ogundele, 2021). According to Adetutu (2025), the programme aims to support low-income households across Nigeria, providing financial assistance to help them cope with economic challenges. It is important to stress that Conditional Cash Transfer was nurtured on the acronym ‘Care Of The People’ - COPE. Its coverage targets widows and single mothers, elderly people without means of support, persons with disabilities (PWDs), households living in extreme poverty and families without stable income sources. As a requirement for eligibility, it is mandatory for all intended beneficiaries to meet up with certain requirements as outlined by the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Reduction (Federal Republic Government, 2021).

Youth Employment and Social Support Operation (YESSO): The Youth Employment and Social Support Operations (YESSO) is a flagship operation that aims at strengthening the state level social safety net systems and reducing vulnerability of poor youth and women.

National Cash Transfer Programme: The National Cash Transfer Programme is an initiative of the government to assist households living below the poverty line to live a better life. The programme was launched in 2016 with aim of alleviating people from poverty through cash transfer for different categories of beneficiaries ranging from N5, 000 and N10,000 usually paid bi-monthly (National Social Safety Report, 2024).

FarmerMoni: This is programme initiated under the Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme Fund (ACGFS) to assist farmers who are in need of loans to grow their agricultural business.

TraderMoni: Tradermoni was initiated by the federal government to enhance financial inclusion , provide a lifeline to the most vulnerable category to trade, reduce poverty, and boost the economy (Ogbulu and Ukeje, 2024).

1.6.7 Financial Budgets on Some Selected Social Programmes in Nigeria

Funding of public programmes goes a long way to determine their implementation efficiency and impact assessment. The table below examines the budgetary allocations for social protection programmes under the National Social Investment Programme from 2016 - 2021.

Table 2: Nigeria Federal Government Budget and N-SIP's Allocation (2016 - 2012)

Year	Designation (Budget	Total FG Budget N	N-SIP Budget N	% Allocatio for N-SIP
2016	Change	6.08 trillion	500 billion	8.22
2017	Recovery and Growth	7..441 trillion	500 billioon	6.72
2018	Consoolidation	8.612 trillion	500 billion	5.81
2019	Continuity	8.916 trillion	500 billion	5.61
2020	Sustaining Growth and Job Creation	10.805 trillion	30 billion	0.28
2021	Economic Recovery and Resilience	13.588 trillion	765 billion	5.63

Source: African Network for Environment and Economic Justice (ANEEJ), Report, 2021

Table 3: Current Coverage of N-SIP

Programme	States	Beneficiaries

N-Power	36 + FCT	549, 500 N-Power graduates, non-graduates, 7 Technology Hubs
NHGSFP	33	9,963,762 pupils, 107,862 cooks, 54,952 primary schools
NCTP (NSR by NASSCO)	33	620,947 cash transfer beneficiaries, 1,648,967 households in National Social Register
GEEP (BO1 managed)	36 + FCT	2,279,380 TraderMoni, MarketMoni, FarmerMoni beneficiaries

Source: African Network for Environment and Economic Justice (ANEEJ), Report, 2021

Tables 2 and 3 presented above examined the budgetary allocations to the National Social Investments Programme and current coverage of social protection programmes in Nigeria. Evidence from the table revealed that the NSIP received the highest budgetary allocation in 2021 with 765 billion naira which covers only 5.63% of the total national budgetary allocation. On the coverage, data generated from various government agencies as contained in the tables mentioned above namely: National Cash Transfer Programme (NCTP), National Home Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP), Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP), National Social Register (NSR) and Bank of Industry (BOI) showed that the three highest are in school feeding which recorded 9,963,762, tradermoni and marketmoni recorded 2,279,380 while cash transfer recorded 1,648,967.

1.6.8 Implementation Problems of Social Protection and Poverty Reduction Programmes in Nigeria

Inadequate Funding: Most of the public programmes initiated by government suffer inadequate funding. Expenditures for most public programmes usually rose remarkable against a background of poor and unpredictable resources. The implementing agencies in most times are plagued by enormous financial difficulties and huge budget deficits. In other words, financial figures in the programme budgets do not always reflect the actual amount released by the government for actual implementation of the programmes.

Poor Inspection and Supervision: The considerable expansion in social protection and poverty reduction programmes calls for an increased role in inspection and supervision by government especially by the inspectorate units in the supervising ministries, MDAs and Commissions. Unfortunately, the above is not always the case in

public programme in Nigeria. Finding shows that most staff of implementing agencies are interested in their salaries and other monetary gains either through allowances or embezzlement of programme funds rather the success of the programmes. In other words, inspection and supervision suffer, thereby creating serious problems in achieving the desired goals of the government for initiating those programmes.

Poor Strategies for Implementation: It is one thing to initiate public programmes and it is another thing to ensure there is implementation efficiency. Poor strategies for implementation can hinder progress of implementation of public programmes in many ways. For example, (Ikelegbu, 1991) noted that public programmes can be characterized with contradictions between strategies for implementation and objectives. Citing example from the school programmes initiated by government, he stated that were directed at quantitative achievements rather than quality achievements.

1.7 CONCLUSION

The study maintains that despite huge financial investments on national social protection programmes, a large percent of Nigerians are still poor and live below poverty line. Unemployment, hunger, poor healthcare, school dropouts, violation of fundamental human rights, violation of labour rights, etc are still on the increase. It is expected that government should diversify the social protection programmes to alleviate the lives of the poor Nigerians that languish on poverty.

The study is of the view that government should design programmes targeting towards poverty reduction to be skill based rather than cash transfer to people. The skill based programmes stand to help people build careers that will sustain them to have employment values in the society. There is also need to ensure that the selection of the intended beneficiaries target the poor and not by politicization of who knows who. Government can introduce social extension service workers who will ensure effective follow-up on beneficiaries and bring vital information on the achievements and challenges of programmes, as well as in identifying other areas of social problems which have not given adequate attention by the government. It is believed that adequate feasibility studies on sociocultural and economic environments of people would help in designing the type of social programmes to address issues of poverty in Nigeria.

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