

# [Rural poverty alleviation in nigeria](https://assignbuster.com/rural-poverty-alleviation-in-nigeria/)

RURAL POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN Nigeria In addressing this topic; Rural Poverty Alleviation, it is necessary to define each of the words in this phrase. Efforts will therefore be made to clearly describe/define the following words; Rural, Poverty, and Alleviation. WHAT IS RURAL? To define what is rural is daunting task, because the word rural is an inexact term that can mean different thing to different people. For example, what is considered rural in a place like United States of America and United Kingdom may not resemble what is considered rural in a place like Nigeria and other West Africa countries.

However, for the purpose of this paper efforts will be made to describe the word Rural and the general Characteristics of rural areas. Rural is the opposite of urban or city; it refers to a place with small population size and consists of homogeneous people whose primary occupation is agriculture. Rural area is characterized with open spaces and scattering villages. There are other features of rural areas that that are Nigeria specific but which may not qualify as standard feature of rural areas in other nations of the world like United States of America and United Kingdom.

For instance, illiteracy is one of the characteristics of Nigeria rural population; More than 90 percent of rural people are predominantly illiterates. Again, lack of safe water, and other basic infrastructure, such as primary health care, road network are all features of Nigeria rural areas. The United Kingdom National Statistics describe Rural thus; rural areas are generally observed to have particular attributes which give them distinctive character.

These attributes include tracts of open countryside, low population densities, a scattering of small to medium size settlements, less developed transport infrastructure and lack of access to services and amenities especially of the type provided in large urban centers. WHAT IS POVERTY? In order to know what helps to alleviate poverty, it is important to describe or define what poverty is. Poverty is hunger. Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty is losing a child to illness brought about by unclean water. Poverty is powerlessness and not being able to send a child to school. Poverty is also a lack shelter.

In the World Bank reports, 1995 and 2001, Barker made the following observation regarding poverty definition: ‘’ No one common definition of poverty is accepted by all countries. Poverty is generally categorized as material deprivation. Generally, poverty is defined as the state of being poor or deficient in money or means of subsistence (Barker 1995). Increasingly, the concept of basic subsistence is measured by the availability of infrastructure services, such as safe water, sanitation, solid-waste collection and disposal, storm drainage, public transportation, access roads and footpaths, street lighting, and public telephones.

In some countries, other neighborhood amenities such as safe play areas, community facilities, electrical connections, and social services become important in helping increase the standard of living so that the poor can break the cycle of poverty (World Bank 2001). Now breaking away from cycle of poverty is another way of saying alleviating poverty. WHAT IS ALLEVIATION? To alleviate is to make something less painful; it is to take measure (s) to cause reduction in the painful effect of something.

That something is poverty, and the essence of this work is to critically examine and conduct a research on Rural Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria. The research problems are: (1) What are the factors that are responsible for rural poverty and (2) How can rural poverty in Nigeria be alleviated. The objective of this research is to identify some of the factors that are contributing to the rural poverty and to come up with the recommendations on how the rural poverty can be alleviated in Nigeria. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO RURAL POVERTY

The dramatic increase in the magnitude of rural poverty in Nigeria in the last ten years is an indictment of government and other stakeholders in terms of counter-productive policies, poorly executed development programmes and lack of transparent integrity and public accountability. While advances are made in the area of communications and information technology and substantial growth recorded in this sector, but sadly no parallel investment was made by both the government and the private investors on poverty alleviation.

The aforementioned and those outlined below are some of the factors contributing to the rural poverty in Nigeria. Neglect of agriculture: Before the discovery of oil in Nigeria, agriculture used to be the main sources of revenue and foreign exchange earning for government but regrettably this has been neglected. And since this is the major occupation of the rural people, their income has been the decline ever since. Neglect of infrastructure: There has been a deliberate neglect of infrastructure facilities in the rural areas.

Basic amenities such as road network, piped water, primarily health care centers, electricity, schools etc are all contributing factors to the rural poverty. Lack of poverty programme coordination: Various levels of government are claiming to be doing one thing or the other to reduce the suffering of the rural dwellers; the Federal, the State, and the Local government, but lack of proper coordination of their programmes make the impact not be felt by the rural community. Lack of government commitment: No serious commitment on the part of the government to the rural poverty alleviation initiative.

Local power structures and vested interest: Many good rural poverty reduction programmes of the government are made un-implement able because of selfish interest on the part of government officials. So also is local power structure and lack inbuilt programme monitoring mechanism. All this accounted for rural poverty. RURAL POVERTY ALLEVIATION: Past  governments  have  engaged  in  the  past  time  of  glorifying  poverty  alleviation  on  the  pages  of  newspapers  and  news  conferences  but  have  failed  to  deliver. The earliest poverty alleviation programmes were the 1972 Gen.

Yakubu  Gowon’s  National  Accelerated  Food  Production  Programme (NAFPP) and  the  Nigerian  Agricultural  and  Co-operative  Bank,  entirely  devoted  to  funding  agriculture. The  NAFPP  turned  out  to  be  a  colossal  waste  and  nothing  was  achieved. There  was  the  much  publicised Operation  Feed  the  Nation  in  1976  by  the  then  military  strong-man,  Gen. Olusegun  Obasanjo,  “ which  expended  much  money  and  effort  in  getting  ill – prepared  university  undergraduates  to  go  to  the  rural  areas  to  teach  the  peasants  farmers  how  to  farm.

A  kind  of  teaching  an  old  dog  a  new  trick. A  theoretical  farming  graduate  teaching  a  farmer,  who  makes  his/her  living  out  of  farming,  how  to  farm. The  scheme’s  only  success  was  in  creating  awareness  of  food  shortage  and  the  need  to  tackle  the  problem. The  1979  Shehu  Shagari’s  Green  Revolution  Programme  had  the  twin  objectives  of  curtailing  food  importation  while  boosting  crop  and  fibre  production. The overall objective was big (mechanised) farming. Many  senior  civil  and  military  officers,  both  in  and  out  of  office,  used  their  access  to  the  state  to  the  advantage  of  the  wide  range  of  facilities  committed  to  the  Green  Revolution. These bureaucrats – cum – farmers were also joined by many private businessmen. Some  new-breed  farmers  were  only  interested  in  getting  Certificate  of  Occupancy  for  large  tracks  of  land. The  land  can  then  be  used  for  speculative  purposes,  for  example,  as  collateral  for  securing  loans”.

When  the  programme  ended  in  1983,  2 billion  naira  tax  payers’  money  was  wasted. That  is  more  than  two  hundred  billion  naira  in  today’s  exchange  rate. Buhari’s  government  introduced  the  Go  Back  to  Land  programme  with  variations  such  as  the  former  Rivers – State  governor,  Fidelis  Oyakhilome’s  School  to  Land  programme  and  his  Lagos – State  counterpart,  Gbolahan  Mudashiru’s  Graduates  Farming  Scheme. Initially  the  Oyakhilome’s  scheme  worked  wonders  in  Rivers,  made  headline  news  in  some  newspapers.

But  like  everything,  Nigerian,  it  fizzled  out  and  died. There  is  a  believe  that  one  of  the  major  reasons  for  the  failure  of  all  these  agricultural/poverty  reduction  programmes  was  that  they  were  based  on  “ faulty  philosophy”. The  belief  is  that  food  programmes  such  as  the  Gen. Gowon’s  National  Accelerated  Food  Production  Programme;  the  Gen. Obasanjo’s  Operation  Feed  the  Nation;  the  Shehu  Shagari’s  Green  Revolution,  and  the  Gen. Buhari’s  Go  Back  to  Land  Programme  “ failed  because  of  the  far fetched  objectives  of  making  farmers  out  of  all  Nigerians,  and  that  no  country  attains  self – sufficiency  in  food  by  seeking  to  turn  all  its  citizens  in to  farmers,  that  farming  should  be  left  for  those  whose  business  it  is  to  farm”. In  1986  Gen. Babangida  established  the  Directorate  of  Food,  Roads  and  Rural  Infrastructure ( DFRRI )  for  rural  development. This  was  meant  to  provide  feeder  roads,  electricity,  and potable water and toilet facilities  for  the  rural  dwellers. The  projects  gulped  N1. b ( about  N80 billion  today’s  value )  without  Nigerians  benefiting  from  them. Various  projects  were  set  up  for  poverty  alleviation  purposes. Amongst  them,  are  the  Peoples  Bank  of  Nigeria  and  the  Community  Bank  of  Nigeria. Neither  did  these  financial  institutions  lived  up  to  their  expectations,  nor  did  they  actualised  their  aims  and  purposes. Babangida’s  wife,  Maryam,  also  went  in  to  the  business  of  caring  for  the  Nigerian  poor. She  set  up  Better  Life  Programme (BLP) and  ended  up  making  millionaires  out  of  the  BLP  officials  and  friends.

The  better  life  for  rural  women  became  the  better  life  for  rich  women. The  Nigerian  poor  did  not  know  what  hit  them,  before  the  poor  could  say  “ Food  At  Last”,  the  food  was  taken  away  from  them,  they  were  left  gapping  and  hungry  as  usual. In  1993  Abacha and  his  wife  found  a  gold – mine  in  the  business  of  pretending  to  care  for  the  poor. The  Family  Support  Programme (FSP) and  the  Family  Economic  Advancement  Programme  were  set  up. The  Nigerian  poor,  again,  were  taking  for  a  ride.

According  to  the  Tell  magazine  of  3/8/98  “ FSP  gulped  over  N10 billion  of  tax  payers  money  at  a  time  her  husband,  Abacha,  was  retrenching  hepless  civil  servants  nation-wide”. Poverty reduction is understood as a process of enabling people to gain access to basic goods and opportunities. In the report tittled ‘’ the state of the World Rural Poverty’’ published by the International Fund for Agricultural Development in 1992, starts from the premise that poverty may be reduced on a sustainable basis through productive investments in the capabilities of the rural poor.

Sustainable poverty reduction consists of broadly based economic growth to generate efficient income-earning opportunities for the poor and improved access to education, health care, and social services. It was not the intention of this work to suggest that the existing poverty programmes be abandoned, rather there was seen to be a need for the fine-tuning, better coordination of, and longer term commitment to the existing measure. METHODOLOGY: The method adopted in this research work is mainly review of literatures.

Written reports of previous work on rural development were considered and several text books that covered the subject – matters were reviewed. The books and the reports of the previous work reviewed during this research work are listed in the bibliograpy. BIBLIOGRAPHY Joseph, Mullen, Rural Poverty Alleviation: In association with the Institute for Development Policy and Management Lewis, T. , Preston, The World Bank, Washington, D. C. Poverty Reduction Catherine H. , Lovell, Breaking the Cycle of Poverty, The BRAC Strategy Anthony, Maduagwu, aka – Toniman, Africa Economic Analysis: Alleviating World Bank Reports. 1995 and 2001, Global Poverty The world may be categorized into seven major areas for ease of study and understanding. They are: Latin America and the Caribbean; the Middle East and North Africa; Africa—Sub-Sahara; Europe, and Central Asia; East Asia and the Pacific; South Asia; and North America. In a major study of global poverty, the World Bank (2001) estimated that 1. 2 billion people lived in poverty in these seven major areas. Additionally, UNICEF (2001) reported that in a $30 trillion global economy, this figure represents one-fourth of the human race that is living in conditions of almost unimaginable suffering and want.

Nearly 1 billion people in the world are illiterate. Approximately 1. 3 billion people lack safe water. Over one-half of the developing world’s population (2. 6 billion people) is without access to adequate sanitation. The United Nations Department of Public Information (1996) estimated that more than twothirds of the world’s poor people live in only ten African and Asian countries: Bangladesh, Brazil, central and western China, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Vietnam.

In Africa, the majority of the countries that are poor gained their independence from European colonial powers in the second half of the twentieth century. In Asia, most of the poverty is concentrated in the southern and eastern areas. More than a billion people still live on less than $1 a day (World Bank 2001). The majority of the world’s poor people are women and children. Most of these reside in rural areas. More than 110 million children of school age do not attend school.

Easily preventable diseases (pneumonia, diarrhea, malaria, and measles) account for the deaths of nearly eleven million children under the age of five each year. Between 600 million and 700 million children, representing about 40 percent of all those in the developing world, are poor (World Summit for Social Development and Beyond web site). Measuring Poverty Each country measures poverty according to its level of development, societal norms, and values. Because of these differences, the poverty level may change from country to country; thus, there is no uniformity in the poverty line.

The poverty line is a measure of the amount of money a government or a society believes is necessary for a person to live at a minimum level of subsistence or standard of living (Barker 1997). In the United States, the poverty line measurement was developed in the mid-1960s by Mollie Orshansky (1965). Essentially, a poverty level (line) was determined by figuring out how much a family needed to maintain a minimally adequate diet and then multiplying by three (represents the number in a family). The United States government adopted this standard, and, with minor yearly adjustments, has used it ever since (Ellwood 1988).

The establishment of a poverty line has political implications. Poverty lines are established at given points of time, and they are usually adjusted, minimally, on a yearly basis. The question of who to count and what to count remains important because a poverty line reveals what a country does and does not do in addressing the needs of its poor citizens. When estimating global poverty, the United States poverty line is not used. Although there are disagreements on its use, the World Bank uses poverty lines that are set at $1 and $2 per day (U. S. ollars) in 1993 Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) terms. The PPPs measure the relative purchasing power of currencies across countries. It was estimated that in 1998, 1. 2 billion people worldwide had consumption levels below $1 a day—24 percent of the population of the developing world—and 2. 8 billion people lived on less than $2 a day. For purposes of analysis, the World Bank uses the poverty lines that are based on the norms for respective countries (World Bank 2001). Welfare Response Welfare is defined as a condition of physical health, emotional comfort, and economic security.

The term also characterizes the efforts of a society to help its citizens achieve that condition, and is used as a synonym for public assistance or other programs that provide for the economic and social services needs of poor people (Barker 1997). Welfare refers to government efforts that provide money, programs, medical care, food, and housing, for instance, to those who are poor. All countries differ, however, on how much they spend on welfare as compared to social insurance or the size of the overall economy (Garfinkel and Waldfogel 2001).

Typically, European countries have universal programs that provide free medical and hospital care, family allowances, and retirement pensions. The Scandinavian countries, such as Norway and Sweden, have extensive government programs; these are so comprehensive that poverty is considered practically nonexistent. Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom all spend large shares of their economies on the needs of the poor. Aid is provided by employers and families in East Asian countries, such as Japan, South Korea, and Singapore.

Less developed countries in Africa, Latin America, and Asia have lower overall budgets for welfare than other nations. South Africa, however, has one of the most developed social welfare systems, with a particularly comprehensive health care system. Uruguay has a well-developed welfare system. India and Sri Lanka provide smaller benefits and serve fewer recipients (Garfinkel and Waldfogel 2001). Categories of Dependence Dependence can be divided into two categories: generational welfare dependence and situational welfare dependence.

Welfare families who raise children who, in turn, become welfare recipients are the generational welfare dependent. Generational welfare dependency is the hardest type of poverty for a family to overcome. Over time, this kind of poverty creates a poverty of spirit that can affect a person’s and family’s entire being. The last thirty years of social welfare history in the United States, for example, reveal that such poverty usually destroys the family unit. In the worst cases, poverty of this sort overtakes entire neighborhoods, towns, and communities by thrusting them into hopelessness and despair (Carlson 1999).

Situational welfare-dependent families are those who have moved from a state of financial independence to welfare dependence, generally due to crises. Causes of sudden financial hardship include abandonment, divorce, debilitating illness, economic recession, natural disasters, and civil strife (Carlson 1999). A Welfare Program Example In the United States, federal cash assistance for dependent children began in 1935 with the enactment of the Social Security Act. At that time, most poor single mothers were widows, and the cash assistance appropriation was designed to help mothers stay home with their children.

Through the years, that initial program, which was called Mother’s Pension, changed in both the titles of the cash assistance programs and the requirements placed on the mothers who participate in these programs. During the 1960s, the United States Congress passed laws that provided incentives to poor mothers to find jobs or to be in job skills training programs. Efforts were also made by the federal government to require fathers of poor children receiving governmental aid to pay child support.

By the 1980s, the generalized picture of most poor single mothers revealed that they had never been married or were separated or divorced. Two decades of moderate to conservative governmental leadership resulted in the U. S. Congress making major changes in the nation’s welfare system in 1996. It passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). Within this act, the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program also replaced the former federal program of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC).

Under AFDC, the federal government required the states to provide aid to families whose income was below the poverty line. Under TANF, the federal government distributed cash payments directly to the states. The respective states determined the recipients of the cash assistance. The major shift in TANF from AFDC was that recipients must be working within two years, with five years being the maximum time that poor families could remain on government aid. The results of this ideological paradigm shift were mixed. Some statistics reveal decreases in the welfare caseload.

Other statistics revealed that more poor people, especially women, were employed although many of the jobs paid only minimum wage. Anecdotal evidence abounded about to the number of poor women with children who had to choose between paying their utilities and purchasing food. Some estimates suggested that by the early twenty-first century, TANF would result in 2. 6 million more people living below the federal poverty line (OneWorld web site). Understanding Poverty What is poverty? Poverty is hunger. Poverty is lack of shelter.

Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty is not having access to school and not knowing how to read. Poverty is not having a job, is fear for the future, living one day at a time. Poverty is losing a child to illness brought about by unclean water. Poverty is powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom. Poverty has many faces, changing from place to place and across time, and has been described in many ways (for a collection of readings, see Poems and Personal Accounts of Poverty). Most often, poverty is a situation people want to escape.

So poverty is a call to action — for the poor and the wealthy alike — a call to change the world so that many more may have enough to eat, adequate shelter, access to education and health, protection from violence, and a voice in what happens in their communities. | Alleviating  Poverty  in  Nigeria | | By  Anthony  Maduagwu ( aka -Toniman ) | | The  Nigerian  government  is  once  again  embarking  on  another  attempt  to  alleviate  poverty.

This  present  one  looks  | | like  it  is  heading  the  same  way  the  past  ones  headed  and  subsequently  failed. Amongst  the  reasons  why  the  past  | | poverty  alleviation  attempts  failed  were  – ( 1 )  the  politics  of  personal  rule –   a  distinctive  type  of  political  | | system  in  which  the  rivalries  and  struggles  of  powerful  and  willful  men,  rather  than  impersonal  institutions,  | | ideologies,  public  policies,  or  class  interests,  are  fundamental  in  shaping  political  life.

It  is  a  monopolistic  | | politics  as  against  pluralistic  or  multiparty  politics. It  is  usually  a  civilian  one – party  state  or  a  military  | | dictatorship  ( There  is  overwhelming  believe  that  Obasanjo’  PDP  government  is  shifting  towards  a  full  blown  one – | | party  state ). It  is  the  politics  of  Big – Men  who  are  a  considerable  distance  from  the  ordinary  people. Politics  | | of  no  accountability,  transparency  and  responsibility.

Other  practices  in  personal  government  are  conspiracy,  factional | | politics,  clientelism,  and corruption, purges and rehabilitations and secession manoeuvres. In  this  type  of  monopolistic  | | politics  there  is  little  or  no  time  for  the  governed. When  the  governed,  the  ordinary  people,  are  eventually  | | remembered,  a  not – well – thought  of  system  is  put  in  place  to  alleviate  their  sufferings. At  the  end  the  | beneficiaries  of  the  systems ( Poverty  Alleviation  Programmes )  are  the same  big – men  that the  political  system  is  made| |- up  of. Nigerian  politics  since  independence  (  perhaps,  with  the  exception  of  the  Balewa  government )  to  the  last  | | military  rule  have  been  monopolistic  in  practice. Hence  the  lukewarm  attitudes  towards  the  impoverished  majority  and  | | the  badly  managed  programmes  that  supposed  to  alleviate  their  sufferings. |                                      | |( 2 ) the  top-down-big-man  from  Lagos  (and  now  Abuja) approach –  the  master  and  servant  relationships  associated  with  | | the  programmes  to  alleviate  poverty. Government  claims  to  know  and  understand  what  poverty  is,  who  the  poor  are  | | and  what  they  need  in  order  to  alleviate  their  poverty. The  Abuja  big  men  can  not  possibly  claim  to  understand  | | what  it  is  to  be  poor.

Only  the  poor  understands  poverty  and  it  is  also  the  poor  that  knows  how  their  poverty  | | could  be  alleviated. A  sick  man  knows  where  it  hurts  him. So  it  stands  to  reason  that  the  viable  alternative  to  | | the  big  man  telling  the  small  man  what  to  do,  is  the  ordinary  man  telling  the  big  man  his  problems  and  how  he  | | thinks  the  problems  could  be  solved. The  fact  is  that  the  poor  usually  have  quite  good  perceptions  of  their  own  | | needs  and  goals  and  of  what  would  be  required  to  satisfy  and  make  progress  toward  them.

According  to  the  theory  | | of  Humble  Approach  to Development,  it  is  appropriate  for  government  “ to  ensure  their  citizen’s  active  participation  | | in  formulating  and  implementing  projects  of  which  they  are  supposed  to  be  the  beneficiaries”. | | | | Government  should  not  presume  that  they  know  what  will  benefit  the  poor  better  than  the  poor  themselves. Projects  | | should  be  embarked  upon  because  the  people  need  them. ,  not  because  some  contractors (who  stands  to  profit  from  the  | | projects) are  pushing  for  them. If  development  is  about  people,  it  cannot  happen  without  the  participation  of  the  | | people. The  citizens  should  clarify  their  own  needs  and  priorities. They  should  speak  up  and  stand  up  for  what  | | they consider  their  priorities,  and  speak  and  act  against  white  elephant  projects”.

It  is  also  reasonable  that  | | before  forms  and  loans  are  dished  out  to the  public,  the  government  should  do  well  to  take  stock  of  the  past  | | attempts  at  alleviating  poverty  in  this  country. The  point  is  that  when  a  program  has  been  failing  each  time  it  | | is  attempted,  the  ideal  thing  to  do  would  be  to  study  the  past  attempts  to  see  where  the  mistakes  lies. The  | | concept  of  the  above  analysis  is  sometimes  referred  to  as – participatory  development,  bottom – up,  sustainable  | | livelihoods,  humble  development  approach,  and  so  on. | Past  Attempts  to  Alleviate  Poverty  in  Nigeria | | | | Past  governments  have  engaged  in  the  past  time  of  glorifying  poverty  alleviation  on  the  pages  of  newspapers  and  | | news  conferences  but  have  failed  to  deliver. The  earliest  poverty  alleviation  programmes  were  the  1972  Gen.

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The  projects  gulped  N1. 9b ( about  N80 billion  today’s  value )  without  Nigerians  benefiting  from  them. Various | | projects  were  set  up  for  poverty alleviation  purposes. Amongst  them,  are  the  Peoples  Bank  of  Nigeria  and  the  | | Community  Bank  of  Nigeria. Neither  did  these  financial  institutions  lived  up  to  their  expectations,  nor  did  they  | | actualised  their  aims  and  purposes. Babangida’s  wife,  Maryam,  also  went  in  to  the  business  of  caring  for  the  | | Nigerian  poor.

She  set  up  Better  Life  Programme  and  ended  up  making  millionaires  out  of  the  BLP  officials  and  | | friends. The  better  life  for  rural  women  became  the  better  life  for  rich  women. The  Nigerian  poor  did  not  know  | | what  hit  them,  before  the  poor  could  say  “ Food  At  Last”,  the  food  was  taken  away  from  them,  they  were  left  | | gapping  and  hungry  as  usual. | |    | | In  1993  Abacha and  his  wife  found  a  gold – mine  in  the  business  of  pretending  to  care  for  the  poor.

The  Family  | | Support  Programme  and  the  Family  Economic  Advancement  Programme  were  set  up. The  Nigerian  poor,  again,  were  taking  | | for  a  ride. According  to  the  Tell  magazine  of  3/8/98  “ FSP  gulped  over  N10 billion  of  tax  payers  money  at  a  time  | | her  husband,  Abacha,  was  retrenching  hapless  civil  servants  nation-wide”. | | Would  this  present  measure  by  Obasanjo  be  any  different? Would  there  be  succour  at  last  for  the  poor? The  | | previous  measures  all  started  like  today’s  own.

The  Better  Life  for  Rural  Women,  the  Family  Support  Programme  and  | | the  Peoples  Bank  were  particularly  interesting  because  they  were  directed  to  the  poor. Shame  that  the  government’s  | | objectives  and  purposes  ran  parallel  to  the  Nigerian  poor  expectations. Shame  that  they  were  bent  on  taking  the  | | Nigerian  poor  for  a  ride. | | Corruption  and  Poverty  Alleviation | | I  was  one  of  the  Nigerians  who  sincerely  believed  in  Babangida’s  economic  policies.

When,  in  1986,  he  embarked  on  | | the  structural  adjustment  programmes  and  some  people  criticised  the  idea,  I  was one  of  those  who  believed  Nigeria  | | needed  SAPs  because  I  had  (and  still  have)  the  opinion  that  if  each  time  “ Peter” (Nigeria)  is  in  need  of  money  | | he  goes  to  his  neighbour  “ Paul” (USA  or  Europe)  to  lend  him  some  money  and,  frequently,  Peter  does  not  honour  his | | debt  repayment,  the  neighbour,  Paul,  has  the  moral  and  economic  right  to  seat  the  frequent  borrower  down  to  | | discuss  the  terms  of  the  next  lending.

Terms  such  as,  Peter,  no,  I  am  not  lending  you  money  this  time  unless  | | you  tell  me  what  you  intend  to  do  with  the  money, ( for  I  believe  you  have  not  been  using  the  previous  lending  | | judiciously  well,  and  that  is  why  you  keep  coming  back  for  more  and  also  you  have  not  been  honouring  your  debts) | | and  if  I  do  not  like  your  plan,  I  will  advise  you  on  what  I  think  will  benefit  you  and  me. On  take  it  or  | | leave  it  bases. I  understand  that  bilateral  and/or  multilateral  lending  is  not  as  clear  cut  as  is  put  here. | There  are  much  more  to  country  lending  than  just  Peter  and  Paul. | | The  fact  was  that  Babangida  inherited  a  steadily  declining  economy  from  his  predecessor,  Buhari,  who  ran  out  of  | | new  ideas  on  how  to  revamp  the  recalcitrant  economy. The  regime’s  counter – trading  economic  policy (exchange  of  oil  | | for  raw – materials,  spare – parts,  machinery  and  consumer  goods)  was  worsening  the  economy,  international  debts  were  | | not  being  honoured  and  IMF  conditionalities  did  not  appeal  to  Buhari  and  Idiagbon.

Babangida  implemented  the  | | conditionalities  and  the  rest  as  they  say  is  history. Nigerians  are  quick  to  criticise  SAPs  for  the  country’s  woes | | but  the  question  is,  did  SAPs  fail  Nigeria  or  did  Nigeria  fail  SAPs? I  think  Babangida  failed  Nigerians,  not  the  | | other  way  round. Babangida  wasted  more  than  100  billion  naira  in  phantom  projects.

Projects  such  as  his  wife’s  | | Better  Life  Programmes  for  the  poor,  DFRRI,  People’s  Bank  of  Nigeria,  two  democratic  transition  experiments,  big  | | time  corruption  in  which  members of the Babangida regime  enriched  themselves. So  it  goes  without  saying  that  according  | | to  the  book  implementation  of  SAPs  would  do  any  country  good. | | When  also  the  Peoples  Bank  was  established,  I  supported  the  august  idea,  hoping  that  the  measure  would  do  well  to | | ease  the  plight  of  the  Nigerian  poor. | My  optimism  was  premised  on  the  knowledge  that  the  idea  had  been  tried  and  tested  somewhere  in  the  world  and  it  | | worked  and,  guess  what,  the  idea  is  still  thriving  now  as  you  are  reading  this  article. The  country  in  question  | | is  Bangladesh  and  their  own  Peoples  Bank  is  called  Grameen  Bank. In  fact  Nigeria  got  the  idea  of  the  Peoples  | | Bank,  as  an  effective  way  of  alleviating  poverty,  from  the  Bangladesh’s  Grameen  Bank.

So  one  is  forced  to  ask  why | | is  it  that  when  something  is  working  perfectly  well  in  one  country, when  the  idea  is  imported  to  Nigeria  it  stops | | working. As  my  mother  used  to  say,  it  is  not  what  you  do,  but  how  you  do  it. The  Nigerian  problems  lie  in  the | | lacklustre attitudes  to  execution  of  government  projects. If  Obasanjo  can  correct  that  ugly  aspect  of  the  Nigerian  | | factor  (lacklustre  execution),  the  country’s  problem  is  half  solved.

A  tall  order,  maybe,  but  the  success  of  this  | | country  movement  forward  or  backward  hinges  on  three  things :  ideas,  implementations  and  executions. | | Had  Buhari  been  honest  in  his  management  of  the  petroleum  trust  fund,  PTF,  the  amount  of  money  that  was  in  his  | | disposal,  he  would  have  alleviated  Nigerian  poverty  ten  fold. Obasanjo  has  earmarked  N10 billion  to  fight  poverty,  | | but  according  to  a  newsmagazine  report ( Newswatch ),  Buhari  had  an  average  of  N52 billion  every  year  to  spend  on  | | Nigeria.

At  the  end  of  the  PTF  reign  Nigerian  poverty  and  underdevelopment  level  remained  the same,  if  not  worse,  | | as  prior  to  the  establishment  of  the  PTF. Nigerians  were  fooled  by  the  two  former  Head  of  States,  Buhari  and  | | Abacha. Dr  Haroum Adamu’s  interim  report  says  that  N135 billion  out  of  the  N146 billion  was  squandered,  possibly  | | through  over  invoicing,  over  supplies,  supplying  expired  materials,  wrong  project  priorities,  settling  perceived  | | trouble  spots,  like  the  army  and  the  police,  and  blatant hievery. | | It  was  like  Buhari  was  out  to  punish  Nigerians  for  God – knows – what. As  one commentator  put  it,  “ In  a  country  | | where  poverty  has  remained  pervasive  in  spite  of  the  oil  wealth,  such  a  huge  amount  could  have  provided  succour  | | to  millions  of  Nigerians  by  way  of  the  provision  of  basic  infrastructure. For  decades  after  independence,  Nigerians  | | cannot  even  have  potable  water  despite  the  huge  sums  of  money  sunk  into  boreholes.

Safe  for  some  few  roads  | | lopsidedly  selected  by  the  PTF,  the  roads  network  in  the  country  especially  in  the  eastern  parts,  can  only  draw  | | tears  even  from  the  man  with  the  heart  of  stone. The  educational  sector  has  even  suffered  more  degradation  despite | | the  intervention  of  the  PTF  under  Buhari”. | | The  whereabouts  of  the  Babangida’s  Gulf – war  windfall  is  still  a  mystery  to  Nigerians. “ Earnings  from  the  sale  of  | | crude  oil  during  the  Gulf  war  was  put  at  $12. billion  but  government  eventually  declared  deficits  of  N21. 7 billion  | | and  N35. 31 billion  in  1990  and  1991  respectively”    Pius  Okigbo – led  panel  set  up  in  1994  to  look  in  to  the  | | matter  “ returned  a  verdict  of  a  gross  abuse  of  public  trust  and  of  payments  that  were  surreptitiously  and  | | clandestinely  done”. A  French  paper  put  the  overall  worth  of  IBB  at  N450 billion. IBB’s  ministers,  generals,  | | contractors  and  indeed  Abacha’s  ministers  and  generals  are  all  untouchables.

John  Fashanu  found  $6 billion  debt  buy | | back  scam  that  was  perpetrated   by   IBB,  is  once  again  reminding  Obasanjo  that  IBB  should  not  be  left  untouched. | | When  you  see  gloomy  political  and  economic  statistics  from  the  World  Bank  or  any  other  august  body  on  Nigeria,  | | you  know  why  and  how  Nigerian  came  to  that  sorry  level. Statistics  such  as  $250  GDP  per  capital,  life  expectancy  | | of  about  50  with  illiteracy  rate  of  45%,  that  between  1985 – 1986,  34. 1%  of  Nigerians  lived  below  poverty  level. | That  figure  had  jumped  to  56%  in  1996. The  same  report  also  revealed  that  26  million  Nigerians  were  core  poor  in | | 1996  unlike  13 million  in  1985,  an  indication  of  rising  poverty  level. The  figure  also  show  that  60%  of  rural  | | dwellers  and  close  to  48%  of  urban  dwellers  are  in  poverty. The  report  ranked  Nigeria  as  the  12th  poorest  country | | in  the  world,   ranks  146  out  of  174  in  the  Human  Development  Index,  has  112  per  1, 000  (live  births)  infant  | | mortality,  50%  of  the  population  has  access  to  clean  water. 0%  of  Nigerians  have  access  to  electricity. ( Sunday  | | Vanguard  30-1-00 ). | | The  Demise  of  the  New  Initiative | | | | Obasanjo ,  perhaps  to  correct  the  wrongs  of  the  operation  feed  the  nation,  or  to  prove  to  the  Nigerians  that  his  | | government  can  actually  alleviate  poverty  in  the  country,  has  vowed  to  improve  the  welfare  of  the  poor  lot  and  in | | so  doing  stop  the  rot  of  the  country’s  economy.

But  the  signs  are  that  this  quest  to  alleviate  poverty  may  go  | | the  same  way  as  the  past  attempts. It  is  becoming  obvious  that  this  administration  maybe  paying  lip  service  on  | | the  question  of  the  plight  of  the  Nigerian  poor. The  new  administration’s  policy  and  law  makers  are  already  | | enmeshed  in  corruption,  allegations  and  accusations  of  corruption. The  rate  of  official  profligacy  in  this  | | administration  is  fast  approaching  the  level  of  the  Shagari’s  administration.

Obasanjo  and  his  elected  members  are  | | running  haywire  with  the  tax  payers  money. The  law  makers  “ senators  welfare”  allowances  as  contained  in  the  | | Senators  Committee  on  Insurance  and  Allied  Matters  Budget  proposal  for  insurance  cover  on  109  Senators  are  seen  by  | | ordinary  Nigerians  as  a  rip-off  by  the  government. There  are  also  ridiculous  allowances  under  the  2000 Recurrent  | | Expenditure , which  covers  such  things  as  over-head  costs  for  self,  aides,  family,  children  and  other  dependants. | These,  in  addition  to  the  N5 million  each  law  maker  received  for  furniture  allowances. Governing  Nigeria  has  become  | | business  as  usual. Direct  and  indirect  appropriation  of  public  funds. The  poor yet  again  are  being  left  behind,  as | | if  they  are  not  part  and  parcel  of  Nigeria. The  big-men  are  sharing  the  spoils  while  the  poor  looks  on. Just  | | like  the  old  saying – the  rich  are  getting  richer  while  the  poor  are  getting  poorer.

The  proposal  would  enrich  the | | law  makers  each  to  the  tune  of  several  million  naira,  serving  or  retired. ( See  May  6  2000,  Weekend  Concord  for  | | an  exhaustive  details  about  these  rip-offs  )    | | The  anti – corruption  policy  stance  of  this  administration  can  only  be  achieved  if  greed  mentality  is  addressed  | | through  proper  management  of  the  national  wealth  and  through  proper  implementation  of  the  on-going  poverty  | | alleviation  programmes.

The  fact  is  that  it  is  poverty  and  greed  that  breeds  corruption,  so  it  goes  without  saying | | that  where  poverty  is  alleviated,  corrupt  practices  would  be  minimal  or  alleviated  as-well  (for  corruption  can  never | | be  eradicated,  and  never  has  it  been  eradicated  in  anywhere  in  the  world). As  one  commentator  put  it,  “ poverty  | | makes  people  compromise  on  moral  values  or  abandon  moral  values  completely. Poverty  has  created  frustration,  loss  of | | hope,  prospects  and  value  for  life.

Loss  of  the  meaning  of  life,  purpose  of  living,  something  to  live  for  and  | | disillusionment  about  morality  because  criminals  are  living  best. In  order  words,  poverty  is  a  cause  of  corruption  | | while  corruption  is  a  consequence  of  poverty  and  loss  of  moral  values”. | | On  the  issue  of  Obasanjo’s  anti-corruption  crusade  or  selective  crusade,  as  it  is  beginning  to  look  like. It  is  | | true  and quite  pleasing  to  know  that  the  administration  is  making  good  their  promise to fight corruption in Nigeria. | Nigerian  Monies  are  frequently  being  identified  and  recovered  from  all  over  the  world. It  is  also  true,  or  so  it  | | seems,  that  Obasanjo  is  carefully  picking  his  battles. Those  battles  that  he  thinks  he  might  lose,  he  develops  | | selective  amnesia  and  refuses  to  know. All  the  corruption  probes  today  seem  to  be  centred  on  Abacha  and  his  | | government  alone,  no  probes  on  Babangida  and  Abubakar’s governments. These  people  are  untouchables,  in  the  sense  | | that  Obasanjo  has  chosen  not  to  probe  them.

Would  Obasanjo  be  preaching  anti – corruption  today  if  Abacha  was  | | alive? So  long  as  this  administration  continues  to  pick  their  battles  on  whom  to  probe  or  not  to  probe  in  their  | | anti-corruption  stance,  so  long  will  the  sincerity  of  the  probe  remains  questionable. | | Essentials of Poverty Alleviation | | | | Inflow  of  foreign  investments  cannot  materialise  in  an  environment  of  political  and  economic  instability.

Officially  | | Nigeria  is  politically  an  unstable  country. As  a  newspaper  put  it –  “ From  the  far  north  where  forces  campaigning  | | for  sharia  seem  to  have  all  the  governors  in  agreement,  the  south-east  where  MASSOB  holds  sway,  to  the  south-west  | | where  the  Oodua  Peoples  Congress  had  been  championing  a  violent  form  of  ethnic  nationalism,  right  down  to  the  | | creeks  of  the  Niger  Delta  where  the  youths  are  in  a  virtual  state  of  rebellion. The  trend  has  been  to  pull  | | away,  not  pull  together”.

As  the  saying  goes  “ money  is  a  coward,  it  does  not  go  where  it  is  not  safe. Nigeria  | | is  directly  calling  foreign  investors  to  come  and  invest  in  the  country,  while  indirectly  letting  the  would – be  | | foreign  investors  know  that  they  and  their  money  are  not  safe  in  Nigeria. | | On  the  economic  front  the  government  is  not  making  clear  it’s  economic  policy. Past  regimes  had  their  economic  | | policies  spelt  out  for  Nigerians  and  the  world  to  know.

Buhari  had  his    trade – by – barter  policy  ( counter – | | trading ),  Babangida  had  his  structural  adjustment  programmes,  and  Abacha  had  one  economic  policy  for  every  other  | | year  until  his  death. There  were  structural  adjustment  programmes  for  one  year,  controlled  economy  for  another,  | | guided  economic  policy  for  one,  and  sundry  others. The  point  here  is  not  whether  these  policies  worked  or  not. | | Nigerians  know  that  they  all  failed  badly,  either  because  the  policies  were  not  implemented  in  good  faith  by he  | | Nigerian  leaders  or  that  the  economic  policies  were  not  suitable  for  Nigeria  The  point  is  that  Nigerians  knew  | | which  economic  policies  their  governments  were  implementing. And  that  made  it  possible  for  government  watchers  to  | | criticise,  suggest  an  alternative (s)  or  praise  a  particular  policy (s). | | Obasanjo  at  this  moment  in  time  do  not  have  a  clear  cut  economic  policy  for  the  Nigerian  economy. As  at  now  all | | that  the  government  have  as  economic  policy  are  poverty  alleviation  and  loot  recovery.

The  policy  of  providing  jobs | | for  the  unemployed  without  stimulating  production  is  tantamount  to  papering  the  wall  cracks. Money  will  be  provided  | | to  the  states  and  the  local  governments  so  as  to  be  able  to  employ  the  unemployed. What  happens  when  the  | | stipends  from  the  federal  government  dries  up  or  late  in  coming,  like  it  is  usually  the  case,  retrenchment  | | surfaces  again  and  back  to  square  one.

But,  as  an  observer  put  it,  “ if  production  is  stimulated  in  a  market  as  | | huge  as  ours,  jobs  will  automatically  be  created. In  fact  many  of  those  who  are  now  unemployed  are  likely  to  | | become  the  job  creators  and  employers”. | |    | | No  doubt,  Nigeria  is  the  most  attractive  country  to  do  business  with  in  Africa. The  largest  market  in  Africa,  | | with  population  of  around  120 million  people,  twenty  percent  of  them  with  qualitative  education.

But  at  present  the  | | truth  is  that  Nigeria,  since  the  Buhari  government  to  this  day,  have  become  the  most  dangerous  country  to  do  | | business  in. In  addition  to  the  already  enumerated  catalogues  of  woes  that  besiege  the  country,  political  | | instability  is  the  most  serious  of  them. Forget  about  the  chicken  or  the  egg  debate  of  which  one  comes  first,  | | political  stability  or  economic  growth.

In  the  developing  world  where  foreign  investment  is  the  pillar ( the  be  all  | | and  end  all )  of  economic  growth  and  sustainable  development,  political  stability  comes  first. Investors  do  not  feel | | save  in  a  volatile  environment,  hence  the  Nigerian  problems in  attracting  them. But  in  the  rich  western  world  | | where  foreign  investment  is  important,  but  not  as  crucial  as  is  the  case  in  the  poor,   economic  growth  and  | | political  stability  have  equal  position. One  compliments  the  other. |   | | Fiji’s  tourism,  and  perhaps  other  aspects  of  economic  activities,  are  today  suffering  from  lack  of  patronage  due  to | | the  political  instability  in  that  country  today. The  country’s  much  needed  foreign  exchange  is  fast  drying  out. The | | country  may  face  international  isolation,  much  more  serious  to  the  one  Abacha  government  faced. | | Why  do  you  think  the  South-Africa’s  Nelson  Mandela  chose  peace  and  reconciliation,  in that  country’s  post – apartheid  | | government,  to  political  vendetta.

The  reason (s)  being  to  avoid  instability,  protect  the  economy,  attract  new  | | foreign  investors  and  encourage  the  ones  that  flee  the  country,  due  to  apartheid,  to  come  back. | | Recent  reports  have  it  that  there  are  signs  that  foreign  companies  have  completed  plans  to  haemorrhage  out  of  the  | | northern  region  for  fear  of  sharia. The  report  said  that  thousands  of  employees  may  lose  their  jobs  in  the  | | process. So  much  for  the  government  that  has  employment  creation  as  one  of  the  ways  of  alleviating  poverty  in  | | Nigeria.

In  Kano  20  companies,  amongst  them,  Impresit  Bakolori  Plc,  the  KLM  Royal  Dutch  Airline,  Pulama  Associates,  | | and  Star  Model  Paper  Mills,  are  on  their  way  out  of  the  region. So  much  for  the  government  that  globe-trot  round | | the  world  convincing  potential  investors  to  come  to  “ business  friendly  Nigeria”  and  | | invest. | | The  instability  in  the  Niger-Delta  region  is  probably  the  most  crucial  concern  for  the  country’s  survival.

This  | | region  is  where  the  Nigeria’s  GNP  is  based,  where  the  country’s  foreign  exchange  is  earned,  where  the  country’s  | | budget  is  based,  where  this  government  poverty  alleviation  fund  is  obtained  and  yet  the  region has  one  of  the  | | worst  forms  of  marginalisation,  only  second  to  that  of  the  Ibos. If  Niger-Delta  region  were  to  be  in  the  Hausa  | | land,  Hausas  would  have  gone  their  separate  ways  for  long,  the same  goes  for  the  Yoruba  land.

I  am  not  from  the  | | Niger-Delta  region  but  I  know  that  they  have  been  hard  done  by. The  Ibos  (Oguta  in  particular)  have  a  saying  | | that  “ as  the  rain  beats  the  goat,  the same  rain  is  also  beating  the  person  who  is  dragging  the  goat”. The  | | Niger-Delta  region  is  the  bread  winner  of  Nigeria,  it  is  imperative  that  the  region  is  well  fed  if  everybody  in  | | the  country  is  to  expect  continuous  food  from  the  region.

Nigeria  will  never  be  at  peace  as  long  as  the  | | Niger-Delta  question  is  not  settled  to  the  satisfaction  of  the  Deltians. | | The  Nigeria’s  age  old  problem  of  inadequate  business  infrastructure  is  begging  for  proper  attention. Erratic  power  | | supply,  water,  telephone,  fuel  (more  so  as  Nigeria  is  an  oil  producing  country),  inefficient  civil  service,  | | inadequate  crime  control,  poor  judicial  system,  inadequate  primary  health  care,  and  less  than  average  educational  | | system.

Nigerian  infrastructure  problem  is  legion,  but  has  to  be  tackled  squarely  if  any  economic  development  is  to | | occur. All  these  public  services,  since  independence,  have  been  consistently  inconsistent  in  their  service  to  the  | | public. Another  dimension  to  this  constant  inconsistencies  in  the  public  service  is  the  fact  that  a  good  number  of | | these  public  services  problems  are  contrived. They  are  being  manipulated  by  powerful  group  of  people  who  gain  | | enormously  by  the  ineffectiveness  of  these  authorities.

NEPA  and  oil  refineries  are  two  of  the  fingered  authorities  | | that  are  being  manipulated. It  is  the  job  of  the  government  to  fish  out  these  elements  of  anti – progress  and  | | deal  with  them  accordingly. | | To  illustrate  the  importance  of  one  of  the  important  public  services,  electricity. Lets  assume  a  would – be  business | |- man,  lets  call  him  “ Onesi”,  borrowed  money  from  the  alleviation  fund  and  set  up  a  barbing saloon.

Due  to  the  | | electrical  nature  of  the  equipment  in  use  these  days,  it  goes  without  saying  that  constant  supply  of  electricity  | | would  be  one  of  his  major  requirements  and  with  today’s  Nigeria  epileptic  electricity  supply,  his  barbers (assuming  | | he  employed  one  or  two  barbers  to  help  him)  and  himself  could  be  idling  about  most  of  the  days,  not  making  | | money  because  there  has  been  no  electricity  supply  for  days.

At  the same  time  Onesi  is  still  expected  to  pay  the  | | barbers,  feed  his  family,  pay  the  land-lord  and  honour  his  loan  repayment. Power  failure  is  just  one  of  the  | | numerous  epileptic  public  services  Onesi  could  be  facing. Obviously  with  these  experience  Onesi  would  not  be  able  | | to  make  ends  meet,  not  to  talk  of  repaying  the  loan. It  would  not  be  long  before  customers,  landlord  and  hard  | | life  force  him  out  of  business.

The  state  that  gave  him  loan  to  better  his  life,  to  be  out  of  poverty,  the same | | state  has  indirectly  aided  him  back  to  where  he  was,  poverty  line,  by  relegating  on  the  social  contracts  signed  | | by  the  government  and  the  governed. | | The  fact  is  that  the Nigerian State  today  is  collapsing. Some  say  the  state  has  already  collapsed,  that  the  state,  | | like  the  other  embattled  African  states,  remains  relevant  only  in  the  juridical  sense.

The  state  has  relinquished  | | it’s  functions  and  obligations  to  the  highest  bidder (s). There  are  now  120  million  miniature  states  in  Nigeria. | | Each  providing ( or  hoping  to  provide )  their  own  electricity  supply,  water  supply,  education  for  their  children,  | | security  of  life  and  property,  roads  and  air-port ( Ibos,  through  voluntary  and  involuntary  contributions  have  built  | | roads  and  air-port,  to  alleviate  their  transport  problems ).

Nigerians  now  rely  on  vigilante  groups,  like  the  | | Onitsha  Traders  Association,  the  Bakassi  Boys,  the  O’odua  People’s  Congress  and  sundry  associations,  to  protect  their | | lives  and  property. The  state  has  no  legal  answer  to  the  all-powerful  armed  robbers,  ritual  killers,  hired  | | assassins,  swindlers  and  sundry  life  and  property  threatening  crimes. Even  the  government’s Police  Affairs  Minister,  | | David  Jemibewon,  and  the  Anambra  State  Governor,  Chinwoke  Mbadinuju,  are  strongly  in  support  of  vigilante  alternative | | to  the  proper  rule  of  law.

Their  support  for  illegal  methods  of  combating  crimes  in  Nigeria  demonstrates  the  | | height  of  loss  of  confidence  in  the  ability  of  the  government,  they  are  serving,  to  provide  sufficient  security  | | for  lives  and  property. | | Proper  rule  of  law  is  primary  for  economic  growth  and  development. This,  not  only  ensures  life  and  personal  | | security,  it  also  provides  a  stable  framework  of  rights  and  obligations  which  can  help  to  reduce  political  risk  to | | investors  and  to  cut  down  transportation  costs.

Lack  of  proper  rule  of  law  not  only  drives  away  foreign  | | businesses,  but  also  hinders  domestic  businesses. Business  do  not  thrive  in  an  environment  of  unchecked  abuses  of  | | political  power,  unchecked  violence  by  security  personnel,  and  unchecked  corruption ( official  and  non-off