

THE IMPERATIVE OF EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE IN CURBING ENDEMIC CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The spate and scale of poverty appear to have overstretched the capacity of many individuals in Nigeria. The apparently increasing cost of living resulting from hyper-inflation orchestrated by faulty economic policies tend to have pushed more people into pool of poverty. This suggests that tackling endemic poverty require a more effective democratic governance to formulate and implement proactive economic policies to stabilize the system. Therefore, this paper interrogates the imperative of effective democratic governance in curbing endemic poverty in Nigeria. Democratic governance is a mechanism to ensure inclusiveness, transparency and good governance, responsiveness and adherence to the rule of law to sustain the well-being of citizens in the state. Relying on the abstractions of the Elite theory and qualitative data, this paper argues that bad governance, characterized by primitive wealth accumulation, disjointed policies and inconsistencies, poor leadership and elite manipulations tend to increase poverty index in Nigeria. It is indicative that the Nigeria's government overtime failed to entrench practical measures in terms of security, industrialization and fiscal economic stability that can guarantee the effective implementation of poverty reduction programmes. The study concludes that the government's inability to enhance the people's collective well-being due to prebendal attitude towards governance in the country. The study recommends strong advocacy and enforcement of good governance, entrenchment of workable measures and sound policies that can greatly impact the economic well-being of the people in Nigeria.

Keywords: Democratic governance, endemic poverty, poverty reduction, underdevelopment, unemployment, insecurity

Introduction

The menace of poverty, though global, is most devastating in Africa. Human conditions in most African countries especially Nigeria tend to have greatly deteriorated. Real disposable incomes have declined steeply, malnutrition rates have risen sharply, food production has hardly kept pace with population growth and the quantity and quality of health and education services have also deteriorated (Hashim, 2015). In this regard, the report of the British Department for International Development (2023), opined that over 75% of Nigerians are poor and 85% of the extreme poor live in rural areas, while 30% of 36 states including are experiencing poverty above 70%. The country is confronted not just with pockets of poverty, disadvantaged or marginalized areas, groups and individuals, but with mass poverty. The Nigerian situation becomes even more pathetic when comparisons are made with other less endowed developing countries in Africa and other parts of the developing world.

The extent of poverty in Nigeria becomes even more alarming when the real wages of workers, especially those in the public service, are compared to the high cost of things in the market. Over 70% of the population of Nigeria had an income of less than one dollar a day (Hashim, 2015). Poverty and unemployment in Nigeria has reached its peak as manifested in the prevalence of acute hunger, homelessness, deteriorating and helpless situation of the people with severe consequences on social economic and political development of the country.

The spate and scale of poverty appear to have overstretched the capacity of many individuals in Nigeria. The apparently increasing cost of living resulting from hyper-inflation orchestrated by faulty economic policies tend to have pushed more people into pool of poverty. This suggests that tackling endemic poverty require a more effective democratic governance to formulate and implement proactive economic policies to stabilize the system. The government has introduced several measures to mitigate the level of poverty and ensure the economic well-

being of the people. The various poverty alleviation programmes have been geared towards improving the economic well-being of the people. Abdullahi (2003), Nwanolue and Ojukwu (2012) in their separate studies argued that Nigeria is trapped in poverty and underdevelopment. Also, the high poverty rate is a pointer to governance deficits in Nigeria.

There is no doubt that the system of government in any society determines the pace of socio-economic development of the people. For instance, Liberal Democracy is seen as one of the most popular forms of governance that appeal strongly to ordinary people, civil societies, and human rights activists for socio-economic development. The desired goal(s) of any democratic government is to make life comfortable for the citizenry's generality through providing food, adequate shelter, habitable housing, functional education, an accessible health care system, and functional public/social infrastructures, among others.

Aworawo and Ifedayo (2014) affirmed that democracy is the system of government that enhances good governance and socioeconomic development. However, despite the fact that Nigeria practices democratic governance, the citizens are still confronted with endemic poverty and associated socio-economic development amidst of abundant human and natural resources (Okeke, 2014). In many states across Nigeria, many people are living without access to adequate food, safe sources of water, healthcare facilities, education, basic infrastructure and shelter. This scenario is a pedestal for endemic poverty in the country. It is against this backdrop that this paper highlights the imperative of effective democratic governance in curbing endemic poverty in Nigeria.

Conceptualization of democracy, democratic governance and poverty reduction

Democracy refers to the governmental system where there is the widest range of people's participation in governance. This can be achieved through elections and the citizens' involvement in formulating and implementing public policies for the collective good of all. On this premise, democracy is built on the rule of law, which negates arbitrariness and dictatorial tendencies in the art of governance.

Adeosun (2014) opine that democracy is a governmental system with elected representatives that operate under the rule of law in driving governance through effective representation in making governmental decisions and allocation of scarce resources. Appadorai (2004) opines that the concept of democracy is a system of government in which the people exercise their governing power through representatives periodically elected by them. By giving their mandates to leaders, the citizens, through their collective engagements, ensure that they deliver good governance. The democratic system places a premium on meeting the needs and aspirations of the citizens. It remains insignificant if it is not commensurate with people's economic well-being through poverty reduction and job opportunities (Otiye, 2011). From this standpoint, the concept of democracy connotes that political system with legal and institutional frameworks accord people the right to participate in governance through rules.

Democratic Governance

Democratic governance refers to the utilisation of state power through citizens' direct or indirect consent and support. This implies that democratic governance is citizen-based, and without citizens' input in governance, political leaders cannot engender the tenets of democracy. Democracy being the system of government that exercises government power, public policies cannot be implemented without its determination by the people directly or indirectly.

George-Genyi (2013) opines that the concept of democratic governance takes into account the principles plausible in a democratic setting, including participation and inclusiveness, transparency and good governance, responsiveness and accountability, regular free and fair elections, respect for human rights and life, adherence to the rule of law, etc. Put together, these principles help to sustain the well-being of citizens in the state.

Democratic governance is factored from the action-ability of the political institutions in a democratic system to perform certain responsibilities and to be accountable at all times, which can manifest through policy decisions and actions as well as laws carried out by the institutions, which include principally the legislature, judiciary and executive branch, and other political parties, private sector and a variety of civil society (Dahl, 1989; Held, 1996). From the foregoing, it is deductible that democratic governance involves transparency, accountability, low levels of corruption and a decentralized decision-making structure and programmes which have been critical contributors to one's country's development (David, 2010). In this sense, democratic governance brings to the fore the question of how a society organizes itself to ensure equality (of opportunity) and equity (social and economic justice) for all citizens. It connotes, the exercise of power under the rule of law, the respect for human rights and fundamental freedom; and, the transparency and accountability of responsible civil service, functioning at both the national and local levels (Momoh, 2010).

Democratic governance can be defined as the activities of the state and citizens or civil society to create partnerships, networks, coordination, negotiation, dialogue, consensus and inclusion in the process of formulating and implementing public policies. From the preceding, democratic governance can be considered the process of managing government institutions for the collective good of the citizens. This presupposes that issues bordering

on governance are handled without any primordial interest other than to promote unity, growth and development in the country.

Poverty

Poverty is all about the lack of resources which undermines the living conditions of people manifest in the inability to attend to their basic needs. Prominently, the basic needs in life, among other things, are shelter, food, clothing, and appreciable levels of health and education. Sen (1993) opines that poverty is not natural within a larger frame of issues created by inequality; rather, it can be reduced to the barest minimum if people are empowered to become independent from their needs. People's empowerment is through articulated strategies and programmes that leverage poverty reduction or alleviation. These help enhance economic growth and provide essential services to people experiencing poverty for their social and financial safety nets. Poverty can be linked with inequality and lack of economic power.

According to World Bank (2015), poverty is a pronounced deprivation in well-being with many dimensions, including material deprivation (measured by an appropriate concept of income or consumption) and low levels of education and health but also vulnerability and exposure to risk and voicelessness and powerlessness. This means that poverty can be material and otherwise. Poverty is also said to be a fluid state and not a stable characteristic. The persistent nature of poverty in Nigeria, like other less developed countries (LDCs), shows that 53% of her population lives on less than \$ 1.25 per day, and 78% live on less than \$ 2 per day (Eleagu, 2018). Despite strong growth, about 100 million Nigerians live on less than \$ 1 per day due to the high rise of poverty (UNCTAD, 2011). It is indicative that the concept of poverty connotes the inability to meet a given standard of living as humans. This is precipitated by the lack of resources to meet these needs. In its extreme form, it is the inability to meet the basic needs of human existence, such as food, clothing and shelter. This scenario calls for urgent measures for poverty reduction mechanisms in Nigeria

Poverty Reduction

Bununu (2020) posits that poverty reduction refers to the improvement made over individuals or groups in terms of their monetary expenditure being above the poverty line. This improvement guarantees the people's access to healthcare, information, education, secured land tenure, economic opportunities, and other attendant deprivations in life. The total well-being of the people in a society is underpinned by economic growth, which invariably reduces poverty (Vasquez, 2001). Poverty reduction is geared towards permanently lifting the poverty line of people. This must be anchored on two bases: the immediate and future needs of the people. This is so because many people are trapped in chronic poverty, which subjects them to experience deprivations in all works of life. Poverty has made many people die prematurely due to poor nutrition, hunger, and lack of potable water and basic healthcare services.

In order to achieve poverty reduction for immediate and futuristic purposes, it is ideal to adopt different measures. It is in the light of this that Ames, Brown, Devarajan and Izquierdo (2001) argue that poverty reduction is a multidimensional problem not limited to economics but political, social and cultural issues. The solutions to poverty reduction require a set of comprehensive and well-coordinated measures, not only economic policies. The essence is to improve security, facilitate empowerment and capacity building of the people.

Theoretical Anchorage: Liberal Democracy theory

This paper adopted the liberal democracy theory in examining the imperative of effective democratic governance in curbing endemic poverty in Nigeria. The major exponents of this theory are: John Locke, J.J. Rousseau, John Stuart Mill, Adam Smith, Baron De Montesquieu, etc. The essential basic tenets of the Liberal democratic theory as espoused by (Mohammed, 2013) revolve around compliance with the Rule of law in governance process. In line with the above assumptions, the liberal theory of democracy sets out to design a political system which encourages individual participation and enhances socio-economic development of the citizens.

Although, the liberal theory has been criticized on the grounds that it is merely a decoration over an oligarchy, the utility of this theory as a framework of analysis lies on the fact that democratic actors undoubtedly play significant roles in advancing the democratic process through the provision of public goods and services that improve the well being of the citizens. Evidently, Nigeria since the return to democratic governance has been relatively stable and has been making steady progress towards enhancing the well being of the citizens by ensuring job creation and poverty alleviation. The hope of the Nigerians for a just and egalitarian society was awakened with the institution of a democratic government in 1999, and it gave Nigerians hope as they looked forward to a new era of stability, peace and prosperity (Olu-Adeyemi, 2012).

This is because Democratic governance presents a range of processes that brings about the implementation of regulations, human rights, laws and policies that ensures justice, welfare and environmental protection. This view is predicated on the fact that democratic governance is a social contract framed around the primacy of the people in the decisions and actions of government (Almond et al, 2007). Democratic governance

has been credited with improvements in social welfare services that guarantee a gradual but steady improvement in the living conditions of the people.

Empirical Literature Review

Several studies have been conducted to examine democracy, democratic governance and poverty in Nigeria. For instance, Ayuba (2015) conducted study on democratic governance and socio economic development in Nigeria looking at education, health and empowerment programmes using twelve states (two from each geo-political zone). Data were collected through questionnaire, interview and non-participant observation. The data were analysed using chi-square alongside tables and percentages. The study discovered that, democratic governance failed to deliver true development at the grass root level. This was buttressed by using the physical infrastructures before the fourth republic and during the fourth republic. He also discovered that party politics and party motivated programs are what characterized the democracy in the fourth republic. The findings went further to describe the democratic governance in Nigeria as too expensive as it failed to passion socio-economic development. The researcher uses Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA) to measure the performances through input output ratio. However, this study is limited as it relies on physical infrastructures without looking at manpower provision in the area of study.

Pam, (2015), also conducted study on the Role of public bureaucracies under democratic governance in some selected federal institutions. Data were collected from the sample of 400 public officials and analysed using chi-square. The findings showed that public bureaucracies are more effective during military era than during democracy. It was also discovered that public bureaucracies are characterized with indiscipline during democracy than under military. It was also found that democratic governance is weak in process of provision of social services and economic infrastructures that can enhance growth and development. This study is also limited as it relies on federal institutions only, neglecting the other levels of government that are more closer to the people in terms of provision of goods and services.

Diamond (2016) also conducted study on the relationship between democratic governance and socio economic development taken education, health and agriculture at grass root level. Data were collected and were analysed using theoretical approach. The findings revealed that democracy is just a system that can make or mar development. The study found that development can be attained under different system of government which are not democratic. The findings showed that some countries like Libya, Saudi Arabia and Iran Republic have achieved high level of socio-economic development under non democratic government. While some countries under democratic regimes such as Niger Republic, Nigeria and Kenya were unable to accelerate the provision of goods and services that ensure socio political and economic development. It was concluded that, the nexus between democracy and development is neither positive, nor negative.

Suraj (2016) carried out a study on how democratic governance actualizes development through effective service delivery in local governments of Katsina State using employment, water supply and education – using questionnaire on a sample of 384 respondents. Three hypotheses were tested using sample percentage and chi-square tools. The findings revealed that democratic government in Katsina State was very effective as it provide the physical socio-economic infrastructure. The study found that political participation, accountability and transparency are passionate in Katsina state. It was also found that, periodic election, rule of law and non-partisan politics are very present in the state. This study is limited as the researcher used questionnaire only as a tool for data generation as it uses simple percentage only which will never shows the level of relationship.

Mato and Jacob (2011) carried out a study on the Nexus of democracy and development In Nigeria. Data were collected and analysed using theoretical approach. The finding revealed that there is no good governance that guarantees development which Nigerians Crave for. Unemployment, inequality poverty as well as all other indices of low/poor quality of life are experienced and present in this country. The study found that although Nigeria practices democracy, Nigeria is still under developed. However, this work is constrained by its inability to generate empirical data that can be used to base the analysis. More so, there was no scope and specific sample in the course of the work. Therefore, theoretical literatures might be insufficient to conclude on the nexus of democracy and development

Omotola (2008) conducted a study on democratization, Good Governance and Development in Africa: the Nigerian experience. It examines the nexus among the embattled trinity, using a contextual analysis of Nigerian experience under the fourth republic; but within a broader framework of African democratization hoodless. The study found that while democracy has been on course, it has not taken a firm root, because it has so far been pursued and predicated on alien institutions. The study found that democracy has arrived in Africa but without democratic governance. It was also argued that democracy is constrained by the ethno religious conflicts, party politics and high cost of governance which will never allow development to take place.

Jamo (2013) worked on the link between democracy and development in Nigeria relying on poverty reduction, employment generation, health care delivery, revenue and expenditure, good governance, Gross domestic product (GDP). Human right development index (HDI), foreign exchange rate as bases of analysis. The finding showed that there is no clear relationship between democracy and development in Nigerian context. It was

lamented that, the first fourteen years of democratic dispensation in the country has in no way improved remarkable development. This study is limited as it was unable to domesticate the study and there were no primary data to support the findings of the study.

Madu, Ruhana, and Suyatno (2015) carried out a study on Democracy and Rural development in Nigeria 's fourth Republic: challenges and prospects. The methodologies adopted in obtaining data for the research are content analysis, empirical and secondary. The study found that democratic performance to bringing the desired changes and development in Nigeria remained abysmal and insignificant. The study found that rural poverty, illiteracy and corruption in governance and policy inconsistency and implementation remain the major challenges on democracy to bringing the desired transformation and rural development in Nigeria. This study is also limited as it was unable to domesticate to a specific area.

Since democracy is rooted in governance, Oni (2017) studies: 'Governance and Prebendalism in Nigeria: The Past, the Present and the Future'. His study assumes that good government is achievable with transparent, accountable and inclusive governance and the fight to eradicate corruption. It adopted documentary and thematic methods of data analysis. It utilized two public and prebendalism theories of Ekeh (1975) and Joseph (1987). The study found that the main problem of governance in Nigeria is corruption. It, therefore, recommends the practice of true fiscal federalism to reduce the concentration of excess economic resources, which breeds patronage politics in Nigeria.

Another study on governance is that of Lawal, Imokhuede and Johnson (2012) on: 'Governance crisis and the crisis of leadership in Nigeria'. The study assumes that good governance in any political system depends on quality leadership. They see Nigeria as a country endowed with both human and natural resources yet, suffers from a crisis of governance and leadership. Using secondary and qualitative analysis, the study revealed that the causes of crisis in governance and leadership are: corruption, lack of accountability and transparency, lack of oriented leadership, lack of rule of law, electoral malpractices etc. It recommends merit in appointing public officers and a fair playground for every contestant in public offices.

Ojo, Aworawo and Ifedayo (2014) study Governance and the challenge of socio-economic development in Nigeria'. They considered the factors for underdevelopment in Nigeria to include: historical colonial experience, monolithic economy, political instability and lack of commitment among the political elites. The study adopted a secondary and qualitative method of data analysis. The study concludes that there is a link between governance and the achievement of socio-economic development which corruption has undermined in Nigeria. It recommends solving corruption by enforcing legal restraints on government officials and enforcing the principle of accountable governance.

Democratic Governance and Socioeconomic Development in Nigeria

The careful analysis of socioeconomic development from a broader perspective shows that it is intrinsically linked to good governance in a democratic regime. According to United Nations Organization (UNO) (1980), the enjoyment of economic and social rights is inherently linked to the enjoyment of civil and political rights. This means that there is a nexus between the realization of human rights and socio-economic development. The conference established that most people live in poverty, suffering from squalor, disease and illiteracy. This leads to sub-human existence, constituting a denial of human dignity. The Teheran conference resolution also recognized an ever-widening gap between the standard of living in economically developed and developing countries and that universal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms would remain a mere hope unless the international community succeeds in narrowing this gap.

Abdullahi (2003) analysed the prevalence of poverty in developing continents like Asia, Latin America and Africa. He summarized the various dimensions of poverty as lack of opportunity, empowerment and security, which affects the democratic process of most developing countries, e.g., Nigeria. Godiya and Atsiya (2013) analyzed Democracy and Mass Poverty Reduction in Nigeria. In their analysis, they argued that democratic governance in Nigeria from 1999 to 2019 has not ushered in the necessary and desired development. The democratic experience in Nigeria has been a sharp departure from a people-oriented paradigm of governance to that of the interest of those in the corridors of power.

Democratic governance has many shortcomings in Nigeria, resulting in poverty, increased crime, sectarian violence and prebendal tendencies. The country is in a dismal state; only when there is political will on the side of the leaders that the country can stand out. UNDP (2002 index report has it that Nigerian is still trapped in poverty and underdevelopment. The report said Nigeria painfully and sadly was ranked 148 out of 173 countries surveyed for the yearly Human Development Index (HDI). Based on the helpless and factual situations, it now behoves all lovers of our common heritage for all-around-appraisal, collective re-examination and national re-awakening in Nigeria.

Democratic governance has not positively impacted the economic development of the Nigerian state; hence, there is the need for the present democratic system to be restructured in a way that will integrate people and involve them in policy and programmes at the party level, communal and national levels, to take up development strategies to better the lives of the citizens. Coupled with the above is the need for vibrant political

opposition to provide functional alternatives to issues that border poverty, performance and national integration (Omodia, 2013).

Effective Democratic Governance and Poverty Reduction in Nigeria

Madu, Yusof and Suyatno (2015) opine that democracy is linked to the political and economic empowerment of common people in society as they are allowed to participate in decision-making in matters that touch their lives and determined how they are governed. The Nigerian state is not governed this way, as public policies are made to favour the elite against the masses. The citizen's welfare is neglected because of the government's insensitivity to their plight. Nigerian democracy epitomizes arbitrariness and authoritarianism instead of protecting the personality and values of the governed (Victor & Allen, 2009; Ake, 1996).

The essence of effective democratic governance is to promote the collective well-being of the citizens. This involves driving governance in line with democratic tenets like the rule of law and popular participation in government policy inputs and outputs. The importance of social amenities in improving the economic well-being of the people cannot be underestimated. Effective democratic governance serve as boosters to socioeconomic development and the sustainable livelihood of the people. Some indicators of socioeconomic development, like job creation, quality healthcare centres, affordable education and housing schemes, and training and skill acquisition programmes, are achieved through effective governance.

A democratic government that prioritizes the collective well-being of its citizens plans well for the people and achieves tremendous socio-economic development through eradicating poverty. Nigerian democracy has failed to guarantee fundamental freedom, equity, and justice to the people (Okeke, 2014). In terms of power, resource distribution and access to opportunities, only a few people enjoy at the detriment of the majority. This has exacerbated the poverty level in the country. Primitive wealth accumulation and Hobbesian politics define the nature and character of the Nigerian state. Public policies tend to be beneficial to the elite. The Nigerian state's Hobbesian politics has contributed to people's migration to foreign countries. This political repression forces the talented and educated to seek refuge in other nations, undermining national development. Poverty cannot be reduced on this premise. Its reduction or elimination requires distributive justice, where goods and services are distributed equitably (Ake, 1996; Manjoro, 2017).

However, Nwanegbo & Odigbo, (2013) are of the view that structural inadequacies, environmental and cultural imperatives inherent in recipient societies have continued to shape and reshape the principles and operations of democracy for adaptability. As a result and perhaps in their opinion some scholars in an effort to proffer a generally accepted definition tend to suggest attributes that qualifies a system of government as democratic (Nwanegbo and Odigbo, 2012). In fact, beyond basic assumptions of democracy such as participation, transparency, equity, justice and periodic elections, etc., it is important to note that the functionality and success of democratic practice is essentially determined by the ability of such democracy to provide the basic needs of the people (Nwanegbo & Odigbo, 2013). For them, this makes it people oriented.

Shehu (2015) states that Nigeria is more corrupt than most African countries. Globally, Nigeria is ranked 150 out of 180 countries (Transparency International, 2022). Poverty has a linear relationship with the rate of looting that leaders afflict on their countries, particularly Nigeria. The Nigerian economy had been a victim of gross abuse and wasteful diversion of resources that could have been used to foster a virile and viable development process through corruption. This accounts for why Odeh (2010) agrees that inefficiency and lack of professionalism in public services are due to corrupt practices. This pathogen has been the bane to poverty reduction in the nation's democratic governance. It leads to poverty and unemployment, among other indicators of bad governance.

The political leadership's policies and attitude to private wealth accumulation have ruined the economy. A good political leader is linked with goal orientation through policies that will improve the nation's welfare. A leader is expected to be goal-oriented to enhance the public good. The essential oil that lubricates the wheel of government is quality leadership. Leadership is the art of influencing people to achieve their objectives.

Strategies for Poverty Reduction in Nigeria

Bad governance is the causative factor for the high incidence of poverty in Nigeria as administrators mismanaged public affairs and funds for their good against the masses through the primitive accumulation of wealth. Any state desirous of development cannot achieve it when public funds are not judiciously utilized and accounted for as principles of democratic governance. Many strategies can be implemented to reduce poverty for the overall good of the people in the area. The people would continue to face difficulty in meeting their needs, except these strategies are made for the public good and not just for the elite in the area.

Most of the communities in Nigeria are faced with the problem of sustainable livelihood due to the high rate of poverty in the country. Adefolalu (1992) insisted that poverty is caused due to both exogenous and endogenous forces. Exogenous forces are not-individualistic-based but rather occur because of a high standard of living, over-population, high cost of living, unemployment and environmental degradation, among others. On the other hand, the endogenous forces are the ones that are individualistic-based. This occurs when individual

members of the society engage in religious and political conflict leading to the loss of lives and destruction of property that could contribute to national development. The incidence of poverty can be reduced through some strategies explicated below.

One strategic way to reduce poverty in a country is through productive employment. Unemployment cases in Nigeria are persistent, raising concern from international communities in the global economy. The country is blessed with human and natural resources, yet, they are not managed well for the good of the citizens. It is germane to harness these resources (human and natural) in order to enhance the nation's economic growth and development. This can be achieved by employing people without considering their religion, tribe/ethnicity, or economic or political affiliation.

Economic growth through productive employment remains a major instrument that can guarantee to reduce and pull the poor out of poverty. The positive impact of economic growth from the increase in the revenue generation is that it provides the window through which government uses to address the basic needs of the poor like education, healthcare, and housing (Ambarkhane, 2013). When people are employed to contribute to the economic growth and development of the country, the poverty level will drastically reduce. This is not the case in Nigeria, as people are employed based on political patronage or/and through kickbacks.

The introduction of micro-finance programmes cannot be undermined to eradicate or reduce poverty in the country. This is strategic as it lifts poor people from the poverty line. So, any country that means well to its citizens provides them with funds to engage in one economic activity or the other. Access to micro-finance is believed to be the best strategic way to empower the poor in a developing country like Nigeria. This mostly benefits women because it increases their income, reduces their vulnerability, and encourages their entrepreneurial spirit. The effectiveness of micro-finance depends on introducing policies and programmes like education, skill development training, health, and technological support. (World Bank, 2007; Banerjee & Jackson, 2017).

Another way to ensure poverty reduction is through social security in an economy. This is achievable in a state whose leaders are not driven by prebendal agenda and primitive wealth accumulation but occupy public offices for the people's good. Under the social security strategy, governance is driven so that the citizens are provided access to health care services and their income security is guaranteed. With this in place, the unemployed, sick, aged and families that lose their breadwinner to survive in the society they belong to will feel secure. As a public action, social security is designed to reduce deprivation, inequality, risk and vulnerability. People can access packages without recourse to their gender status but within the context of the country's social, economic and political activities (Elkins, 2014).

Good governance is one of the basic tenets of democratic governance, germane to poverty reduction in an economy. Poverty can be reduced when political leaders are preoccupied with selfless service in navigating governance for the public good in the country. Bad governance is antithetical to development predicated on good governance. Thus, countries suffer from development and governability deficits due to bad governance and increasing poverty. Nigeria, like other developing economies, is potentially weak in the area of governance that is characterized by challenges in security and social services (Grindle, 2004; Kwon & Kim, 2014; Davis, 2017). Through good governance, countries can receive foreign aid and grants for poverty reduction. Quality leadership is linked to good governance, and it goes a long way to improve the economic well-being of the people through an accountable and transparent leadership style in governance.

Conclusion and recommendations

This paper has established that poverty will be prevalent when the political leaders or administrators in charge of public affairs do not accord a premium to effective democratic governance. Bad governance leads to primitive accumulation by the ruling class through over-bloating contract sums, diversion of public funds, and non-payment of staff salaries, among others. The various poverty reduction programmes in Nigeria seem not to have impacted the economic well-being of the citizens due to the prevailing lack of job opportunities, security and human capacity building. Haphazard implementation of poverty reduction programmes exacerbates poverty and development crises. People-centric programmes are key to reducing poverty in the study area and the nation.

No society can develop with the preponderant cases of bad governance, which causes poverty and development crises. The clamour for poverty reduction would continue to be mere rhetoric, except effective democratic governance is given adequate priority to mitigate poverty. Good governance leads to more effective and equitable policy-making, aiming to achieve human development and economic growth. There should be good programmes for poverty reduction that can equally impact the economic well-being of the people of the people.

There should be mentoring, orientation and education of the poor on skill acquisition and training, starting and growing small businesses, building community networks and resources, and access to credits and savings from microfinance programmes. These would help them build capacity and curb poverty without depending on the government. There is need for community-based development programmes, social protection measures, and other targeted interventions in reducing poverty and promoting economic development.

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