

## LEADERSHIP ROLES AND POVERTY REDUCTION IN THE NIGERIA STATE SYSTEM: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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### Abstract

This paper examined the leadership roles and poverty reduction in Nigeria with an empirical mindset. In view of the apparent failures of poverty reduction policies and programs despite the apparent exhibition of poor governance. The descriptive research design was used thus; primary and secondary sources of data were used for this paper, and the collected data were presented using tables and simple percentages. The study was anchored on the TLT. The findings revealed that the lack of effective and committed leadership affects poverty reduction in Nigeria. The study further recommends that all tiers of governments should ensure the continuity of programs, projects, transparency, and accountability in the management of PRPs.

### Background of the Study

Poverty is one of Nigeria's most persistent and deeply rooted socio-economic challenges. Despite being Africa's largest economy and a nation endowed with abundant human and natural resources, a significant proportion of the Nigerian population continues to live below the poverty line. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, more than 40% of Nigerians live in multidimensional poverty, lacking access to basic needs such as healthcare, education, clean water, and housing. This paradox of poverty during abundance has remained a troubling reality for decades. Leadership, being a central determinant in the formulation, execution, and monitoring of public policies, plays a pivotal role in determining the success or failure of PRC efforts. For most Nigerians, poverty is endemic, real, and devastating. The daily struggle against inhumanity in Nigeria involves hunger and inadequate housing and health facilities (Udofia, 2015). From 1999 to 2019, the federal government of Nigeria has instituted different poverty reduction programs. According to Anumudu, Umar and Madu (2013), despite the country's much orchestrated demonstration of its commitment to poverty reduction, evidence on the ground points to the fact that the poverty "virus" is getting more entrenched and spreading wider among the citizens. If nothing tangible appears to have been achieved despite the huge financial and

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physical resources committed by successive governments into poverty reduction programs, then there is justification for a critical appraisal of the policies/strategies.

However, what has remained unanswered is the extent to which these programs have impacted the poor-the target population. The outcomes of poverty reduction agencies appear not to reflect or justify the substantial financial resources allocated to them. Some believe that poor governance, corruption, low productivity, unemployment, debt burden, and conflicts are associated with the failure of poverty reduction. Others attributed the high level of poverty to macroeconomic distortion, globalization, high population growth rate, and poor human resource development. Over the years, Nigeria has witnessed numerous interventions, such as the National Poverty Eradication Program NAPEP, NDE, Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Program (SURE-P), the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), and the National Social Investment Programs (NSIP). However, these initiatives have largely failed to produce sustainable outcomes, primarily due to corruption, poor governance, policy inconsistency, and lack of accountability. However, despite all these schemes initiated by past and present leaders, a large majority of Nigerians are still living in abject poverty. This paper seeks to examine leadership roles and poverty reduction in the Nigeria State System: Issues and Challenges.

### **Research Questions**

1. What specific leadership roles are involved in the planning and implementation of poverty reduction initiatives in Nigeria?
2. How has quality of leadership influenced the success or failure of past and present poverty alleviation programs?
3. What are the major institutional and structural challenges affecting the effectiveness of leadership in poverty reduction?

### **Objectives of the study**

This study aims to critically analyze the relationship between leadership roles and poverty reduction in Nigeria. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To assess the roles and responsibilities of political and administrative leaders in formulating and executing poverty reduction programs.
2. To examine the effectiveness of leadership in managing and sustaining poverty alleviation efforts across various government levels.
3. To identify the structural, institutional, and systemic challenges that undermine poverty reduction leadership effectiveness.

### **Scope and Limitations of the Study**

This study focused on evaluating the role of leadership in Nigeria's poverty reduction efforts, with a particular emphasis on leadership performance at the federal, state, and local government levels. This study examines a range of poverty alleviation initiatives and evaluates the quality of leadership in terms of vision, policy continuity, accountability, and transparency. This study will cover both qualitative and quantitative aspects using descriptive statistical tools.

However, this study has limitations. A notable constraint is the limited availability of reliable and up-to-date data on the implementation and impact of certain government programs. Political sensitivities and possible biases in stakeholder responses may also affect the comprehensiveness of primary data collection. Time and financial constraints may also limit the study's geographical scope.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is of significant value to a wide array of stakeholders, including government policymakers, development agencies, civil society organizations, scholars, and the public. The study offers evidence-based insights that can inform the design and implementation of more effective, transparent, and accountable development interventions by identifying the link between leadership roles and the effectiveness of poverty reduction strategies.

Furthermore, the research contributes to academic discourse by providing empirical analysis rooted in TLT. This study offers a theoretical and practical framework for understanding how leadership dynamics influence developmental outcomes, particularly in resource-rich but governance-deficient contexts such as Nigeria. Ultimately, the findings of this study support the emergence of a new leadership paradigm focused on people-centered governance, ethical accountability, and sustainable development.

### **Research Methodology**

This study employs a descriptive survey research design. The descriptive approach enables the researcher to understand the views, perceptions, and experiences of individuals regarding leadership and poverty reduction efforts across different regions in Nigeria. Primary and secondary sources of data were used for this study, and the collected data were presented using tables and simple percentages.

## **RELEVANT LITERATURES REVIEW**

### **The concept of leadership**

Leadership can be defined as the ability to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute to the effectiveness and success of organizations or systems to which they belong. According to Northouse (2019), leadership is a process in which an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. In governance, leadership entails the capacity to guide, coordinate, and effectively deploy public resources to foster development and enhance citizens' welfare. In the context of public administration, leadership refers to the capacity of individuals in positions of authority to influence, direct, and guide others toward achieving specific objectives. Leadership effectiveness is often determined by its ability to mobilize resources, foster accountability, and implement strategic visions for national development.

Therefore, a leader is expected to demonstrate qualities that embrace but are not limited to good character, vision, tact, prudence, and the ability to lead by example because people ascribe leadership to those who they feel can most enable them to achieve important goals or objectives.

### **The Concept of Political Leadership**

Political leadership refers to the ruling class that bears the responsibility of managing a political entity's affairs and resources by setting and influencing policy priorities affecting the territory through different decision-making structures and institutions (Ogbeidi, 2012). Broadly defined, however, political leadership goes beyond the ruling elites that directly manage a territory's affairs; it embraces the totality of the political class that can manipulate the machineries of government even from behind the scenes.

### **The concept of poverty**

Poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon involving the inability to access basic needs, such as food, shelter, education, and health care. The World Bank (2022) defines extreme poverty as living on less than \$2.15 per day. In the Nigerian context, poverty manifests not only as income deprivation but also as a lack of access to quality services, infrastructure, and opportunities.

### **Different Leadership Roles and Styles and How They Affect Poverty in Nigeria**

Since independence, Nigeria has witnessed varying leadership approaches. While some leaders have implemented reforms aimed at economic empowerment (e.g., agricultural loans and social investment programs), inconsistent leadership commitment and lack of continuity undermine sustainability. Leadership

roles at the local and state levels, which are closest to the grassroots, are pivotal but often underutilized in Nigeria's federal structure.

The role of leadership in Nigeria is pivotal in decision-making, influencing public perception, directing fiscal priorities, and engaging in collaborative governance with stakeholders. The prevailing leadership style in any regime largely determines the effectiveness of PRS. The effectiveness of leadership in Nigeria is shaped by individual integrity, political commitment, and the strength of institutional support. Poor leadership results in corruption, policy summersaults, and marginalization of vulnerable populations.

In Nigeria, the styles of leadership adopted by those in authority significantly affect poverty levels across the state's various regions. The leadership role includes setting visions, policy formulation and implementation, resource allocation, conflict resolution, institution building, and ensuring social justice. Leadership styles in Nigeria can be broadly classified into transformational, transactional, autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire. Each style affects poverty alleviation efforts differently:

1. **Transformational Leadership:** This style encourages innovation, long-term vision, and inclusivity, which can empower citizens economically and socially (Akinola, 2021). For instance, leaders who promote inclusive policies and grassroots development initiatives are more likely to sustainably reduce poverty.
2. **Transactional Leadership:** It focuses on reward exchange and punishment systems. While it may ensure short-term performance, it often lacks the visionary strategy needed for deep structural poverty reduction.
3. **Autocratic Leadership:** This type of leadership often suppresses citizen participation and accountability, contributing to corruption and inefficient resource use and worsening poverty (Eze & Ibe, 2023).
4. **Democratic Leadership:** It encourages participatory governance and accountability, leading to better public service delivery and empowerment of the poor (Yusuf & Bello, 2022).
5. **Situational Leadership:** This style adapts to different situations and team members' needs. This style is flexible, adaptive, and responsive. It is effective in various contexts but requires high emotional intelligence.
6. **Laissez-faire Leadership:** It provides team members with significant independence, enabling them to make decisions and take responsibility for their tasks. This style can be effective with highly motivated and skilled team members.
7. **Participative Leadership:** it involves team members in decision-making and problem-solving, fostering teamwork, and encouraging creativity.
8. **Coaching Leadership:** They focus on developing team members' skills and provide support and guidance. They build talent and promote growth, but it requires patience and investment.
9. **Bureaucratic Leadership:** A leader who follows established rules and procedures. They followed fixed rules and procedures, which are often criticized for being overly complex or inefficient.
10. **Meritocracy Leadership:** This is a leadership system in which positions and powers are awarded based on individual ability, talent, and merit rather than wealth or social class.

### Overview of Nigeria's Poverty Reduction Policies and Programs

Poverty reduction refers to strategies, policies, and programs aimed at decreasing a population's level of poverty. These interventions may include social welfare programs, job creation, infrastructure development, and economic reforms. Garba (2006) opines that there have been attempts to alleviate poverty in Nigeria. Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's government introduced the Poverty Alleviation Program (PAP) in 1999 as an interim antipoverty measure (Nwobi, 2003). The program created jobs for the unemployed despite increasing youth restiveness. Following the ineffectiveness of the PAP and the central question it elicits as to why the government should be interested in only alleviating poverty instead of eradicating it, the government came up with the national PEP (NAPEP) in 2001 (Omotola, 2008).

NAPEP was established in 2001 and involved all stakeholders in poverty eradication in Nigeria, namely the federal, state, and local governments, civil society organizations, research institutions, the organized private sector, women's groups, and concerned individuals (Okoye and Onyukwu, 2007). However, the program failed due to a lack of focus on the poor, program inconsistency, poor implementation or severe budgetary and governance problems, corruption, project substitution, misrepresentation of project finances, diversion of resources and conversion of public funds to private uses (Okoyee & Onyukwu, 2007).

The target of NAPEP was to completely eradicate poverty in Nigeria by 2010. The stages to the attainment of this ambitious target have been identified as: the restoration of hope in the mass of poor people in Nigeria, which involves providing basic necessities to hitherto neglected people, particularly in rural areas, and the restoration of economic independence, confidence, and wealth creation (Elumilade, 2006). Although NAPEPE appeared to be well crafted, the prevalence of poverty in Nigeria sadly placed NAPEP's activities in the realm of prospective analysis (Omotola, 2008). This scenario led to the establishment of the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), which was launched at the beginning of the second term of the Olusegun Obasanjo administration in 2003 (Omotola, 2008).

Furthermore, President Olusegun Obasanjo's regime achieved another milestone via the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN). SMEDAN was established by the SMEDAN Act of 2003 to promote the development of the Nigerian economy's micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) sector. The agency's role was to address poverty, rooted out of a lack of access to income-earning opportunities and a lack of capacity to take advantage of the opportunities in the country (Umar, 2010).

Interestingly, the successor to Obasanjo, Alhaji Umar Musa Yar'Adua, also designed a strategic action plan to reduce poverty in Nigeria, popularly known as "The 7-points Agenda," for alleviating poverty and driving Nigeria to become a modern economy and industrialized nation by 2020. The agenda revolved around the development of power and energy, food security, wealth creation, transport sector, land reforms, security, and education. After the demise of Alhaji Umar Musa Yar'Adua, by virtue of the Nigerian constitution, the vice president assumes the post of president. Thus, the sad passage of Alhai Umar Musa Yar'Adua paved the way for Goodluck Jonathan to become the president of Nigeria from 2010 to 2015. Goodluck Jonathan's administration came up with "The Transformation Agenda" and as well he also introduces SURE-P (Subsidy Re-Investment and Empowerment Program) which was aimed to establish the Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS) to reduce unemployment among graduates and stimulate economic growth and opportunities toward the attainment of Vision 2020. The scheme engaged unemployed graduates in firms and institutions for one year to acquire skills and experience and enhance their employability. This equipped graduates to meet the demands of employers in the current labor market according to their area of specialization (Nnamdi, 2013).

Under President Buhari's administration, the N-Power Programame initiative was carved out to address the problem of poverty in Nigeria. The N-Power Program of the Federal Government is a job creation and empowerment initiative of the Social Investment Program, designed to drastically reduce youth empowerment in Nigeria (Obadan, 2017).

### **Challenges confronting leaders toward poverty reduction in Nigeria**

Despite numerous anti-poverty programs, Nigeria continues to struggle with high poverty rates. Ajakaiye and Olomola (2019) identified key issues undermining these programs, including leadership deficits, poor coordination and lack of political will. Agbiboa (2021) noted that corruption, nepotism, and poor public sector accountability have become entrenched in the political system. Furthermore, policy continuity is limited due to frequent changes in leadership and governance strategies, leading to the abandonment of existing poverty



alleviation initiatives. Leadership at all levels of government is often reactive rather than strategic, focusing on short-term political gains rather than long-term developmental goals.

However, Nigerian leaders face several daunting challenges in their quest to reduce poverty:

1. **Political Interference, Political Instability, and Partisanship:** Political interference hinders long-term planning and implementation. Political godfathers and party pressures often compel leaders to prioritize political survival over development.
2. **Corruption:** The rampant embezzlement of public funds intended for social services undermines efforts to alleviate poverty. According to Transparency International (2023), Nigeria ranked 145th out of 180 countries in corruption perception, reflecting the severity of the issue.
3. **Ethno-Religious Divisions:** Leadership positions are often allocated based on ethnic or religious affiliations rather than merit, marginalizing competent individuals and creating regional development imbalances.
4. **Insecurity:** Nigerian leadership constantly contends with challenges such as insurgency, banditry, and communal clashes. These security issues divert resources away from development and discourage both foreign and domestic investment (NBS, 2023).
5. **Weak Institutions:** Institutions meant to check the excesses of leaders are often compromised, leading to impunity and poor governance. The lack of effective checks and balances diminishes the leadership's potential to systematically address poverty.
6. **Inadequate Funding and Mismanagement:** Budgetary constraints and financial mismanagement prevent the effective execution of PAPs.
7. **Poor infrastructure:** Poor transportation systems, unstable electricity supply, and weak technological infrastructure hinder economic activities that are essential for reducing poverty.
8. **High Population Growth:** Rapid population increase without corresponding economic growth strains public services and increases poverty levels.
9. **Public Distrust:** Many citizens no longer trust government initiatives due to years of failed promises, leading to apathy or resistance to reforms.
10. **Public-Private Partnerships:** Leadership should facilitate partnerships with private sector actors and international organizations to scale social intervention programs.

### **Ways Leaders can Reduce Poverty in the Nigerian System**

To reduce poverty in Nigeria, leadership must adopt the following approaches:

1. **Formulating Inclusive Policies:** Leaders must design and implement inclusive socioeconomic policies that prioritize vulnerable groups, such as women, youth, and people with disabilities.
2. **Transparent Governance:** Leaders must embrace transparency and accountability by ensuring budget tracking, project monitoring, and public involvement in governance (Adeleke et al., 2021).
3. **Human Capital Development:** Leadership must prioritize education and health, which are key drivers of productivity and poverty alleviation. An educated and healthy populace contributes more effectively to the economy.
4. **Empowerment Programs:** Leaders can invest in entrepreneurship programs, skill acquisition, and microfinance schemes that target the unemployed and underemployed, especially in rural areas.
5. **Collaboration with NGOs and the private sector:** Effective leadership involves strategic partnerships with civil society and private investors to scale poverty intervention programs and enhance service delivery.
6. **Judicious Resource Management:** Leaders must reduce wastage and redirect resources toward capital expenditure, infrastructure development, and agricultural revitalization to spur job creation.

7. **Policy Continuity:** Successive administrations must ensure policy continuity and avoid abandoning viable poverty alleviation programs initiated by predecessors.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on TLT, and the concept of TLT was first introduced by James MacGregor Burns in his 1978 seminal work *"Leadership"*. Transformative leaders are visionary and can serve as a tool to address the failures of previous poverty reduction efforts. It emphasizes visionary planning, stakeholder engagement, ethical conduct, inspirational, intellectually stimulating, and attention to the needs and aspirations of followers and long-term policy sustainability, all of which are critical for poverty reduction success.

Transformative leadership can be defined as a process by which leaders and followers engage with one another in such a way that they raise each other to higher levels of motivation, morality, and performance. It is not merely about managing or directing but also about inspiring and transforming. Burns believed that transformational leaders are driven by strong values and ethical principles, and they aim not only to achieve goals but also to elevate followers' purpose and commitment. He introduced the concept while Bernard M. Bass expanded and operationalized it in the 1980s. He proposed that transformational leadership could be measured and taught. Leaders such as Nelson Mandela, Barack Obama, and Martin Luther King Jr. are often cited as examples of transformative leaders because of their ability to inspire societal change through vision, moral conviction, and personal example.

### **Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation of Data**

#### **Demographic characteristics of the respondents**

Understanding the demographic attributes of respondents is crucial to contextualizing their perceptions and experiences. This study surveyed 200 public servants, local community members, and civil society actors in three purposively selected states representing Nigeria's geopolitical diversity.

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Categories</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Gender	Male	120	60%
	Female	80	40%
Age Group	18–30	45	22.5%
	31–50	95	47.5%
	51+	60	30%
Education	Secondary	30	15%
	Tertiary	130	65%
	Postgraduate	40	20%
Occupation	Civil Servants	70	35%
	Private Sector	50	25%
	Unemployed	40	20%
	Self-Employed	40	20%

The data reveal a balanced spread of respondents across different socioeconomic categories, offering a broad base for assessing the influence of leadership on poverty reduction.

#### **Awareness and access to poverty reduction programs**

Respondents were asked about their awareness and experiences with government-led poverty alleviation programs such as N-Power, CCT, and the NSIP. The results show that 83% of the respondents were aware of these programs, but only 38% reported direct benefits.

Key Barriers Identified include the following:

1. Political favoritism and nepotism in the selection of beneficiaries
2. Poor communication and awareness at the grassroots level
3. Limited outreach in rural and marginalized communities.

These findings reflect previous scholarly assertions that poverty programs in Nigeria often lack inclusivity and transparency (Ajakaiye & Olomola, 2019; World Bank, 2023).

### **Assessment of Leadership Roles in Reducing Poverty**

Respondents were required to rate leadership performance across four dimensions: policy formulation, program implementation, transparency/accountability, and community engagement.

<b>Leadership Variable</b>	<b>Positive Response (%)</b>	<b>Negative Response (%)</b>
Policy Formulation	60%	40%
Program Implementation	45%	55%
Transparency	33%	67%
Community Engagement	38%	62%

The results indicate a clear deficiency in leadership capacity, particularly in ensuring program transparency and engaging community stakeholders during the implementation stages.

### **Qualitative Interview Findings**

Thematic analysis of key informant interviews with government officials, development consultants, and community leaders revealed the following consistent concerns:

1. **Political interference:** Program implementation is often politicized, with appointments and benefits distributed as political patronage.
2. **Lack of Continuity:** Successive governments discard or rebrand previous administrations' initiatives, creating instability.
3. **Corruption:** The misappropriation of funds was cited as a major reason for project failures.

A respondent observed that Nigeria does not lack good policies but lacks the will and discipline to implement them sustainably.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

#### **Summary**

This paper examines leadership roles and poverty reduction in the Nigerian state system: issues and challenges. Leadership plays a crucial role in determining the success or failure of poverty reduction programs, and most programs suffer from implementation inefficiencies, lack of continuity, poor transparency, and weak engagement with target beneficiaries. A significant relationship exists between leadership effectiveness and poverty outcomes.

#### **Conclusion**

Despite the plethora of poverty reduction programs introduced over the years, Nigeria remains a country with the highest poverty incidence globally. This paradox reflects a fundamental governance challenge. The study concludes that poverty in Nigeria is not merely a consequence of economic misfortune but is also intricately linked to leadership failures.

#### **Recommendations**



- i. **Institutionalize Policy Continuity: Federal** and state governments should enact legislation that protects poverty alleviation programs from political transitions.
- ii. **Enhance Transparency and Accountability:** To minimize corruption, government agencies must adopt digital tracking systems for poverty funds and beneficiary verification.
- iii. **Strengthening Grassroots Participation:** To enhance relevance and ownership, local communities should be engaged in the design, execution, and monitoring of poverty programs.
- iv. **Develop leadership capacity:** Periodic training in TLPs should be mandatory for policymakers and program managers.
- v. **Adopt Integrated Governance Structures:** To avoid duplication and conflict, coordination among different levels of government and stakeholders should be enhanced through inter-agency frameworks.
- vi. **Promote evidence-based policymaking:** Leaders should rely on accurate data and empirical research to guide the formulation and evaluation of poverty reduction strategies, ensuring that interventions are targeted and effective.
- vii. **Foster Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs):** The government should collaborate with private sector actors, non-government organizations (NGOs), and international development agencies to mobilize resources, expertise, and innovation in poverty alleviation initiatives.
- viii. **Ensure Economic Empowerment Through Skills Development:** Leadership at all levels should prioritize vocational training, entrepreneurship support, and youth empowerment schemes to create sustainable livelihoods and reduce dependency.
- ix. **Implement monitoring and evaluation (M&E) mechanisms:** Establish robust systems to periodically assess the outcomes and impact of poverty reduction programs, enabling corrective actions and policy learning.
- x. **Promote inclusive leadership and gender equity:** Special attention should be given to marginalized groups, especially women and persons with disabilities, by ensuring their representation in decision-making processes and tailoring poverty interventions to their unique needs.

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