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**THE INFLUENCE OF MEDIA COVERAGE OF GOVERNMENT
PROGRAMMES ON POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Nigeria is one of the leading oil producing nations of Africa, yet she is rated as one of the 25 poorest countries of the world (Obadan, 2010:1). Little wonder why different government in power have floated several poverty alleviation programmes with the primary aim of reducing poverty in the country. That notwithstanding, the Federal Office of Statistics reported that as at 1996 poverty incidence in the country was 66 percent. In all this, the media is supposed to help the people come to terms with the programmes on poverty alleviation, if any significant progress is to be made. This study, therefore, examined the effect of the influence of media coverage of poverty alleviation programmes on the people. It was built on a theoretical footing called perception theory. The survey method was used to elicit response from respondents. The study, however, revealed that the media do have strong influence on the people in terms of coverage of programmes on poverty alleviation but that such influence occurs gradually. The researchers recommended that government should match their programmes with good political will and that the media should cover poverty alleviation programmes with all sense of fairness and encouragement with development at the back of its mind.

Key words: media coverage, poverty, poverty alleviation, perception

Introduction

Several studies and report from World Bank, and the Federal Office of Statistics have always shown that Nigeria still has over 50% of population living in poverty. This is a total deviation from the fact that Nigeria is among the largest oil producing nations in the world.

According to Obadan (2010:1), Nigeria is "enormously endowed with human, agricultural, petroleum, gas and large untapped solid mineral resources. Particularly worrisome is that the country earned over US 300 billion from her resources- petroleum- during the last .three decades of the twentieth century. But rather than record remarkable progress in national socio-economic development, Nigeria retrogressed to become one of the 25 poorest countries at the threshold of twenty-first century whereas she was among the richest 50 in the early 1970."

This day (2010: para 2) avers that "rating agencies have continued to show that the indices of poverty -in Nigeria are even worsening, with over seventy percent of the population said to be living below poverty lines-living on less than a dollar a day. With many still having difficulty affording three square meals a day, or unable to attend to health challenges, or even a decent accommodation, the Human Development Index (HDI) of Nigeria is bound to be low. Rather than improving, the poverty level of Nigerians is rather increasing. One thing that this shows is that all claims to poverty alleviation in the country are sheer sloganeering."

Record has it that "at independence in 1960 and for the best part of 1960s, poverty eradication efforts in Nigeria centred on education, which was seen as the key to economic technological and intellectual development of the nation. "Show the light and

the people will find the way", was, at the time, an oft-quoted mantra by Nigeria's first president, the late Nnamdi Azikiwe. Thus education programmes were implemented alongside agricultural extension services, which encouraged increased food production" (www.dawodu.com).

However, "the oil boom in the 1970s skewered this 'outlook as rising global oil prices boosted exports from W 4 billion in 1975 to H.26 billion in -T980, while GNP per capita rose from \$.360 to more than \$ 1000. By the time oil prices fell, so did the nation's .export, receipts. This also translated into negative growth and a fall in GNP per capita to \$370 in the 1980's. In 1960, according to the Federal Office of Statistics, about 15 percent of the population was poor but by 1980 this had grown to 28%. The FOS estimated that by 1985 the extent of poverty was about 46% although it dropped to 43% by 1992. However, by 1996, poverty incidence in the country was 66% or 76.6 million Nigerians out of a population of 110 million. The UN Human Poverty Index in 1999 which credited Nigeria with 41.6% captured the phenomenon more succinctly as the figure placed the nation as amongst the 25 poorest nations of the world" (www.dawodu.com).

Considering the poverty crisis that has bedeviled the country, successive governments have enunciated various programmes aimed at alleviating poverty in the country. Prominent among these programmes include; "the 1972 National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) and the Nigerian Agricultural and Co-operative Bank, entirely devoted to funding agriculture. The 1976 Obasanjo's Operation Feed the Nation, which expended much money and effort in getting ill-prepared university

undergraduates to go to the rural areas to teach the peasant farmers how to farm. The 1979 Shagari's Green Revolution Programme which had the objectives of curtailing food importation while boosting crop and fibre production" (Maduagwu, 2011: 2). And several other poverty alleviation programmes- piloted by different government in power.

The mass media have always been the major channel through which these programmes are made popular to the people in the country. That notwithstanding, the poverty situation in the country still remains at the despicable state. In line with the several coverage given to the various programmes on poverty alleviation, this paper focuses on the influence of media coverage of poverty alleviation programmes on the people and how such influence affects their perceptions, attitudes and behaviours towards the country's state of poverty, the government and their poverty alleviation programmes.

Statement of Problem

Nigeria is .rated as one of the countries with high rate of poverty amongst her citizens. Yet, it is on record that several government programmes aimed at alleviating poverty have been on the development plans of most government of the day.

When these programmes are roiled out, to actualize them, government has always employed the services of the media to help conscience, interpret, educate and mobilize the people for the programme(s).

However, when the range of programmes targeted at alleviating poverty are compared to the socio-economic development of the country, it seems that more still need to be done to actualize and sustain the socio-economic development' of the country.

The questions that arise from this scenario are: Is it that the media do not give appropriate coverage of the programmes to the understanding of the people or that government do not act in accordance with the plans contained in the programmes or that the media do not mobilize the people and the government alike to be co-activist in the actualization of the programmes or that the media do not see reasons to address the government on the need for the continuity of a particular programme for result purposes.

These are question-oriented problems which are mind-boggling, which of course, this study intends to address.

Purpose of the Study

The aims of this study therefore are:-

- 1) To examine the perception of programmes on poverty alleviation.
- 2) To find out the influence of media coverage of poverty alleviation programmes on the people.
- 3) To examine how this influence affects the perception, attitude and behaviour of the people towards poverty alleviation.

Research Questions

The questions which raise concern in this study include;

- 1) What is the perception of the people towards government programmes on poverty alleviation?

- 2) What is the influence of media coverage of poverty alleviation programmes on the people?
- 3) How does this influence affect the perception, attitude and behaviour of the people towards poverty alleviation?

Theoretical Framework

This study is built on a behavioural theory known as perception theory. This theory, according to Barikui (2009: 138) citing Akpan (1993: 30-31) opines that "perception is a process; that is, the means by which we learn about the world. In the process of perceiving, individuals select stimuli (information) from the external world and at the same time, mix and blend those (stimuli) with internal stimuli, which are within them (individuals)".

Explaining this theory Akpan (1993: 31) opined that "in attempting to make sense out of the world, individuals have two sources of information available to them: the elements they bring with them (their past, attitude and personality) and those elements presently existing in the external world (other people, their words, messages, surroundings, media and so on). Finally, Akpan submits that "as individuals, we create the vision that influences our behaviour". Supporting Akpan's submission, Folarin (2005: 88) avers that "perception depends on a complex of variables such as psychological disposition, past experiences, cultural expectation and social relationships".

From the submissions above, it is obvious that perception is a picture of events, situations and activities (gotten either from the media or otherwise) formed by

individuals, which are acted upon by the individual's past experiences, academic background, social relationships and psychological disposition. However, this picture, Akpan, said influences- the attitudes and behaviour of the individuals involved, which in turn affect their relationship with the world around them.

This theory is relevant to this work in that it talks about how individuals form an opinion about a given phenomenon like government disposition and attitude towards its programme on poverty alleviation and the way the media do report the programmes. The theory equally looks at how this opinion of the people finally affects their attitude and behaviour towards these programmes which ordinarily are meant for their own good. This opinion, which they form, subsequently affects the way the people view the activities of the media or activities of government in the country.

Programmes on Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria

Since independence in 1960, considering the resolve by government to better the living standard of the people, "numerous policies and programmes have been designed at one time or another, if not to meet the special needs of the poor at least to reach them" (Obadan, 2010:6).

The much published poverty alleviation programmes on the pages of newspapers and television screen are those ones made known by the federal government. "The earliest poverty alleviation programmes were the 1972 General Yakubu Gowon's National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) and the Nigerian Agricultural and Co-operative Bank entirely devoted to funding agriculture. Then came

the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) in 1976 by the then military strong-man, Gen. "Olusegun Obasanjo, which expended much money and effort in getting university undergraduates to go to the rural areas to teach the peasants farmers how to farm. In 1979, Shehu Shagari floated the Green Revolution Programme which had the twin objective of curtailing food importation while boosting crop and fibre production. By 1983 when Shagari's regime was toppled by Buhari, a new programme was born. But this time around it was the Go Back to Land programme with different variations in different states. In 1986 General 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. Babangida equally established the Peoples Bank of Nigeria and the Community Bank of Nigeria. Neither did these financial institutions live up to their expectations, nor 'did they .actualize their aims and purposes. Babangida's wife, Maryam, also went into 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 better life for rich women. Finally, when government changed hands, Abacha-came up with the-.Family Support Programme and the Family economic Advancement Programme in 1993" (Maduagwu, 2000:2-3).

In 1999, President Olusegun Obasanjo, launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme, the Poverty Alleviation Programme and the constitution of the Ahmed Idris-Panel and Ango Abdullahi Committee in 2000. The immediate concern of the Panel/Committee was the stream-lining and rationalization of existing poverty

alleviation institutions, and the coordinated implementation and monitoring of relevant schemes and programmes. These culminated in the introduction, early in 2001, of the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) and the establishment of the National Poverty Eradication Council (NAPEC) (Obadan, 2010:13).

This new scheme was designed to integrate four sectoral schemes. The first was the Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES) which was concerned with providing unemployed youth opportunities in skill acquisition, employment and wealth generation. Second, the Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS) which was concerned with the provision and development of infrastructure needs in the areas of transport, energy, water and communication especially in rural areas. The scheme was broken into four parts: the Rural Transport Programme, the Rural Energy Programme, the Rural Water Programme and the Rural Communication Programme. Third, the Social Welfare Services Scheme (SOWESS) which aimed at ensuring the provision of basic social services including quality primary and special education, strengthening the economic power of farmers, providing primary healthcare and so on. Lastly, the Natural Resources Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDGS) which aimed at bringing out a participatory and sustainable development of agricultural, mineral and water resources through the following sub-divisions: Agricultural Resources Programme, Water Resources Programme, Solid Minerals Resources Programme and Environment Protection Programme (Nigeriafirst.org, 2006:1-2).

The government of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua in 2007 piloted the 7-point agenda which is another programme aimed at alleviating the poverty stricken nature of

the country. The agenda focused on seven major areas of the country's sectors/Although it was reduced to 4 -point agenda by Dr Goodluck Jonathan, in 2010, after the death of Mr. President, Musa Yar'Adua'.

Problems with Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Nigeria

For several decades now-different governments have come and gone with each proposing articulated programmes on what government wants to achieve or accomplish in reducing or eradicating poverty. However, much of these programmes may not have really translated into physical benefit for the country's economy. Obadan (2010:2) opines that:

Until the inauguration of a Poverty Alleviation Programme Development Committee (PDPDC) by the Nigerian government in 1994, all efforts at poverty alleviation were essentially ad-hoc. It was generally the case that ^poverty alleviation programmes and strategies are not crystallized and consolidated within the nation's overall development objective. This view is borne out of a perusal of the various National Development Plan over 1962-85 period, and National Rolling Plans from 1990.

Several reasons have contributed to the failure of the programmes on poverty alleviation. However, the two main reasons are the politics of personal rule and the top-down-big-man from Lagos (and now Abuja) approach to poverty alleviation. The Nigerian politics, according to Maduagwu (2000:1) "is monopolistic as against pluralistic

or multiparty politics. It is usually a civilian one-party state or a military dictatorship. It is politics of Big-Men who are a considerable distance from the ordinary people: politics of no accountability, transparency and responsibility. In this type of monopolistic politics there is little or no time for the governed. When the- governed 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-man 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".

Another area of concern is that "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 cannot 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. 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" (Maduagwu, 2000:1).

Furthermore, "there is a belief 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 General Gowon's National Accelerated Food Production Programme; the General Obasanjo's' Operation Feed the

Nation, the Shehu Shagari's Green Revolution, and the General 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 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" (Maduagwu, 2000:2-3)

Methodology

This study made use of survey method. This is: because survey provides for the sampling of peoples, opinion over a given issue of great importance. The population was therefore narrowed to resident in Imo state.

Using stratified sampling, the state was divided into three senatorial districts namely; Orlu, Owerri and Okigwe .Senatorial districts. From each of these senatorial districts, the researchers used purposive sampling to select each local government which include; Okigwe local government, Orlu local government and Owerri North local government. The choice of this local government was anchored on the fact that they are the commercial and metropolitan towns of the three senatorial districts in the state.

Senior members of staff from these local-governments constituted the sample for the study and they include, Orlu LGA- 24, Owerri LGA- 26, and Okigwe LGA-21. These figures were provided by the personal department of the various local governments.-The total sample therefore, is 71 persons. The questionnaire was employed as an instrument of data collection. It was drafted in simple language and divided into-demographic and .psychographic sections. The instrument was administered on a face-to- face bases even

though; it was initially difficult identifying staff members in the senior cadre. A response window of two weeks was given to the respondents. At the end, out of 71 questionnaires distributed, only 62 were returned and used. This gave a response rate of 87.3% creating a loss of 12.7%.

In order to ascertain the validity of the study, the researchers face validated the questionnaire by sending it to three senior lecturers in the department of Mass Communication, whose corrections on the instrument were effected. As for the reliability of the study, 100 copies of the questionnaire were printed and administered on the members of staff from Owerri North Local Government Area. Their responses were in line with the general aim of the instrument. Data were analysed in simple percentages and presented in tabular format.

Data Analysis and Presentation

The tables below provide analysis to the response collected from the questionnaires distributed

Table 1: Age of Respondents

Categories	Frequency	Percentage
21-30	17	27.4%
31-40	22	35.5%
41-50	15	24.2%
15-above	8	12.9%
Total	62	100%

From the analysis above, 17 (27.4%) and 22 (35.5%) respondents fall within the ages of 21-30 and 31-40 respectively, while 15 (24.2%) and 8 (12.9%) fall with the ages of 41-50 and 51/above respectively.

Table 2: Sex of Respondents

Items	Frequency	Percentage
Male	34	54.8%
Female	28	45.2%
Total	62	100%

Table 2 above shows that 34 (54.8%) respondents are male while 28 (45.2%) respondents are female.

Table 3: Showing respondents awareness of programmes on poverty alleviation

Items	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	62	100%
No	-	0 %
Can't say	-	0%
Total	62	100%

From table 3, it is obvious that all the respondents are aware that government over the years, have floated programmes aimed at alleviating poverty in the land. This is evident from the fact that 62 (100%) respondents agree that they are aware of government programmes on poverty alleviation.

Table 4: Showing the perception of respondents on programmes targeted at alleviating poverty

Items	Frequency	Percentage
They are good government programmes	23	37.1%
They are avenues for embezzlement	27	43.5%
Can't say	12	19.4%
Total	62	100%

The analysis in table 4 above shows that 23 (37.1 %) respondents perceive the programmes on poverty alleviation to be good government programmes aimed at actually alleviating the plight of the people. However, 27 (43.5 %) respondents perceive the programmes on poverty alleviation to be avenues for government offices to embezzle the system; While 12 (19.4%) respondents are indifferent as to their perception of the programmes poverty alleviation.

Table 5: Showing the influence of media coverage of poverty alleviation programmes on the people

Items	Frequency	Percentage
Very strong	16	25.8 %
Strong	27	43.5%
Weak	13	21.0%
Can't say	6	9.7 %
Total	62	100%

The table above-shows that 16 (25.8 %) and 27 (43.5 %) respondents opine that the influence "of media coverage of poverty alleviation programmes on the people is very strong and strong respectively. While 13 (21.0 %) respondents opine that the influence is weak. Six (9.7 %) respondents are indifferent about the media's influence on the people.

Sterns	Frequency	Percentage
Sharp influence	6	8.1 %
Gradual Influence	49	79.0%
Can't say	8	12.9%
Total	62	100%

From table 6, it is obvious, that 5 (8.1%) and 49 (79.0%) respondents are of the opinion that the influence of the media on the people are sharp and gradual respectively. While 8 (12.9%) respondents are indifferent as to how the influence of media coverage on programmes of poverty alleviation occurs on the people.

Discussion of Finings

From table 1 and 2, the researchers found out that there are more respondents within the ages of 21 to 40 out of which 34 (54.8%) respondents are male while 28 (45.2%) respondents are female. This means that there are more men in the response chat than woman.

Table 3, went further-to reveal that all the respondents are aware that government over the years have floated programmes aimed at alleviating poverty in the land. This is

evident from the fact that 62 (100%) respondents agree that they are aware of government programmes on poverty alleviation.

However, in table 4, 23 (37.1%) respondents perceive the programmes on poverty .alleviation -to be good government programmes aimed at actually alleviating, the plight of the people, while, 27 (43. 5 %) respondents perceive the programmes on poverty alleviation to be avenues for government officials to embezzle the system. The remaining 12 •-.9.4%) respondents are indifferent as to their perception of the programmes **on** poverty alleviation. This means that those who see poverty alleviation programme as avenue for embezzlement are more than those who believe in the fruit of such programmes. This might be the reasons why majority of the people do not believe the government of the day when they come up with their programmes. Hence, the high rate of apathy on the part of the people.

In table 5, the respondents see the influence of the media on the people to be strong even though majority does not see it as very strong. On the other hand, 13 (21.0%) of the respondents opined that the influence is weak. Six (9.7%) respondents are indifferent about the media's influence on the people. The analysis in table 6 show that the influence of the media on the people as regards the coverage of government programmes on poverty alleviation takes place gradually and over a period of time.

Conclusion

The mass media, no doubt, is a potent instrument in the spread of innovations and mobilization of the people for a particular course, of national benefit. It, therefore, means

that the media; can be a potent tool in the mobilization and education, of the people; on the need to participate in the actualization of programmes on poverty alleviation. This, the media can achieve by limiting the negative reports tied to a particular programme and reducing reports of antecedents on similar programmes that have failed. In this way, the influence of the media would be re-established thereby helping in the fruitful actualization of the aims of programmes targeted at alleviating poverty in the country.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers are compelled to recommend as follows:

Government should ensure that there is integrity, transparency and good political will in the implementation of programmes floated for the sole purpose of alleviating poverty.

Government should ensure that to some extent, there are some levels of consistency with poverty alleviation programmes that are aimed at resituating the economy and the standard of living of the people. Rather than floating different programmes with different regimes

Government should also make sure that those who seize the opportunity of using government programmes a their private pockets do not go unpunished

The media should make out time to cover and interpret government programmes on poverty alleviation in such a way that the people would not only be informed but well indoctrinated on the benefits they stand to get on such programmes.

The people should equally find way of letting-go of bad antecedents on poverty alleviation programmes and embrace new programmes on poverty alleviation with open minds and confidence for a better tomorrow.

This study is also recommended as a resource material for those who would like to venture into this and other related areas.

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