

Enugu State University of Science & Technology Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities



Journal of Social Sciences

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published by

Faculty of Social Sciences

Enugu State University of Science & Technology

www.esutjss.com

Perceived impacts of the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) in poverty reduction and implications for Social Work practice

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Abstract

The indicators of poverty in Nigeria showed that poverty is in increase and rural areas were the most affected. Rural people find it difficult to have three square meals daily as well as other basic requirements of life such as shelter and clothing. Despite several efforts at reducing poverty in Nigeria, a 2018 World Poverty Clock (WPC) report indicated that 90.8 million Nigerians representing 46.4% of its estimated 195.6 million people are living in extreme poverty, making Nigeria a country with the highest number of life-threatening poor people in the world. The study was conducted in Ebonyi State, South East Nigeria and both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection were employed to analyze the data from 483 respondents. The results of the study showed that while majority of the respondents constituting 99.3 % indicated that the programme has positive impacts on their lives, 53.8% majority perceived NAPEP as being ineffective in poverty reduction. The study therefore recommended amongst others that the real beneficiaries of the programme should be involved in the planning and implementing stages so that their views will be considered.

Keywords: Beneficiary, National Poverty Eradication Programme, Perception, Poverty, Reduction

Introduction

Poverty is one of the very worst problems facing the world today (Roser& Ortiz-Ospina, 2019). According to World Bank (2018), an estimated 8.6 percent of the world's population was living in extreme poverty. Though most countries worldwide have seen a decrease in the share of population in extreme poverty since 1990, around two-fifths have experienced an increase in the number of people living in extreme poverty (Walton, 2019). Despite the fact that significant efforts have been made in lifting people out of poverty especially in more developed nations of the world, poverty level in some low-and-middle income countries especially in Sub-Saharan Africa has continued to rise.

The United Nations Development Programme {UNDP} (2001) stated that countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America are currently with the highest level of poverty and consequently with the lowest level of socio-economic development. Extreme poverty is increasingly becoming concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa (Development Initiatives, 2019). According to Walton (2019), the number of extremely poor people who lived in the region between 1990 and 2015 was 15% and 56% respectively; with largest

increases occurring in Democratic Republic of Congo, Madagascar and Nigeria. Poverty depicts lack of command over basic consumption needs, having inadequate level of consumption, and inability of a person to attain a minimum standard of living and high status in a society (World Bank Report, 1990; Aderonmu, 2010; & Aluko, 1975).

Poverty in Nigeria is massive, pervasive and chronic, engulfing a large proportion of the society (Sule, Adamu, & Yahaya, 2019; Uma & Eboh, 2013), and characterized by declining per capita income, increasing hunger, rising unemployment and environmental degradation (National Bureau of Statistics {NBS}, 2014). Its indicators includes hunger and malnutrition, limited or lack of access to quality education and basic services, increased morbidity and mortality, which occur as a result of illness, inadequate housing, homelessness, unsafe environment, and social discrimination (Ebenehi, Saddiq, Oyinbo, Muhammad, & Ichi, 2012). As a result of the continuous deterioration of living conditions of Nigerians, several poverty reduction programmes were introduced by successive governments to positively impact the poor (Obadan, 2002). According to Oyeranti and Olayiwola (2005), since mid-1980s, reducing poverty has become a major policy concern for government and donor agencies in Nigeria.

The earliest poverty reduction efforts in Nigeria are National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) and Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB) established between 1972 and 1975 by General Yakubu Gowon (Edeh, Udoikah & Ugbala, 2017). Viewing poverty from agricultural point, these programmes were aimed at improving agricultural production as a means of lifting Nigerians out of poverty. Specifically, NACB was charged with the responsibility of providing loans to farmers to boost agricultural produce.

Following the failure of NAFPP and NACB, the administration of General Olusegun Obasanjo in 1979 enunciated the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) as a poverty alleviation measure. The programme had specific focus of increasing food production on the premise that availability of cheap food will mean higher nutrition level and invariably lead to national growth and development. According to Agedah (1993), OFN was aimed at making the country self-sufficiency in basic food needs and impact on Nigerians a new sense of purpose and the need for self-reliance. Yet, in spite of the above objectives, OFN like its predecessors did not achieve its set objectives.

Between 1979 and 1983, Alhaji Shehu Shagari introduced another poverty alleviation programme called the Green Revolution Programme (GRP) aimed at reducing importation of basic food and improving crop and fiber production locally through mechanized farming. As expected, the programme could not achieve its objectives, as foods were even more imported. According to Edeh, Udoikah and Ugbala (2017), the programme only succeeded in making military officers, politicians, and bureaucrats wealthier as they had access to GRP facilities and acquired vast lands for themselves.

In 1983 through 1985, General Muhammadu Buhari introduced War Against Indiscipline (WAI). Though, this programme was merely fighting corruption, some analysts argued that fights against corruption and indiscipline were equal to poverty

alleviation programme in the sense that the two were partly the reasons many Nigerians are poor (Programmes, 2008).

In the same vein, General Ibrahim Babangida between 1985 and 1993 introduced a welter of poverty reduction programmes. They include Peoples Bank of Nigeria (PBN), which sought to provide loans to prospective entrepreneurs on soft terms without stringent requirements of collaterals; Directorate for Foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructures (DFRRI) which sought to open up the rural areas via construction of feeder roads and provision of basic amenities; and Nigerian Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA) which tried to head-off poverty by targeting the agricultural sector. It intended to reduce the prevalence of subsistence agriculture in the country and in its place infused large-scale commercial farming by assisting farmers with inputs, and developing land for them to the point of planting at subsidized rate. Others are National Directorate of Employment (NDE) that aimed at designing and implementing programmes to combat mass unemployment and articulate policies aimed at developing work programmes with labour intensive potentials; and Better Life Programme (BLP) introduced by his wife (Miriam). BLP introduced gender element into poverty reduction programmes on the assumption that women needed special treatment in the light of their immense contributions to the national development.

The administration of General Sani Abacha introduced the Community Bank (CB), Family Support Programme (FSP) and Petroleum Special Trust Fund (PTF). These programmes were aimed at reducing poverty from the polity (Anyebe, 2015). Other poverty reduction programmes are Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP), National Economic Empowerment Development Strategies (NEEDs), Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), Seven-Point Agenda, Subsidy Removal and Reinvestment Programme (SURE-P), and the current N-Power Programme etc. However, despite the several efforts at reducing poverty in Nigeria through various poverty reduction strategies, a 2018 World Poverty Clock (WPC) report indicated that 90.8 million Nigerians representing 46.4% of its estimated 195.6 million people are living in extreme poverty thereby making Nigeria a country with the highest number of extreme poor people in the world (WPC, 2018).

In view of the increasing wave of poverty and the abysmal performance or failure of most of these poverty reduction programmes, the Nigerian government under President Olusegun Obasanjo in 2001 introduced the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) to tackle the scourge of poverty. It is also aimed at monitoring all poverty eradication activities of the federal government; and to maintain a comprehensive and detailed databank on all activities aimed at eradicating poverty in Nigeria. In addition, NAPEP was aimed at carrying out impact assessment of all efforts meant to eradicate poverty in Nigeria, suggesting necessary reviews and policies required to enhance effectiveness, and directly intervene in critical projects. NAPEP is complemented by the National Poverty Eradication Committee (NAPEC), which is to coordinate the poverty reduction related activities of all relevant ministries, parastatals and agencies (NAPEP, 2006). It has the mandate to ensure that the wide range of activities are centrally planned,

coordinated and complement one another so that the objectives of policy continuity and sustainability will be achieved (FRN, 2001).

NAPEP is headed by a national coordinator who is the chairman of the National Coordination Committee (NCC) and reports directly to the president who is the chairman of the National Poverty Eradication Committee (NAPEC). There are states coordinators who also head the State Coordination Committee (SCC), which coordinates all poverty eradication programmes of all federal agencies in the relevant states and report to their state governors who are the chairmen of the various States Poverty Eradication Council (SPEC). In addition, a Local Government Monitoring Committee (LGMC) was established in each local government area to facilitate effective implementation of NAPEP intervention initiatives (NAPEP, 2001). NAPEP is funded by Poverty Eradication Fund (PEF), contributions by states and local governments and private sectors and special deductions from consolidated funds of the federal government (NAPEP, 2001).

To achieve its objectives, which is to train youths in vocational trades, support internship, create employment at the automobile industry, and provide social welfare services and exploitation of natural resources; NAPEP was divided into four schemes (Aliyu, 2001). They include Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES) that aims at providing opportunities through programmes in skills acquisition, employment and wealth generation; Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS), which aims at ensuring the provision and development of critical infrastructural needs including transport, energy, and communication particularly in rural areas; Social Welfare Services Scheme (SOWESS), which ensure the provision of adequate basic social welfare services including quality primary and special education, farmers empowerment, maintenance of recreational centres, public awareness facilities, provision of mass transit, and primary health; and Natural Resources Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS) that aims at ensuring higher participatory and sustainable development of agricultural, mineral and water resources, while caring for the environment. In order to contain the increasing wave of poverty in the country, NAPEP subsequently created several other schemes and programmes such as Youth Empowerment Scheme, Farmers Empowerment Programme, and Conditional Cash Transfer Programme, Capacity Acquisition Programme, Mandatory Attachment Programme, Village Economic Development Solutions, and Multi-Partner Micro-Finance Programme (NAPEP, 2007). However, like previous poverty reduction programmes, NAPEP has not yielded the expected results. This is evident in poor infrastructure, essential amenities and high level of unemployment and hunger in the country. According to Chukwu (2012) and Onwe and Nwakamma (2015), with the current poverty profile in the land, it appears that expectations of poverty reduction and general improvement in the standard of living of the people have not been realized as physical infrastructure and social services are not adequately provided.

In view of the above, social workers are needed to play some roles in ensuring that the welfare of the poor are addressed through championing of policies aimed at reducing poverty; and encourage them to utilize available poverty reduction strategies like NAPEP. According to Zastrow (2004), one of the roles of social work is to always advocate policies and programmes that address the provision of social services especially to the poor.

Social workers had to fight dependency, destitution, squalor, ignorance, illiteracy, starvation, over-population, underproduction, alienation, diseases, etc all of which are fall-outs of poverty (Ekpe&Mamah, 1997). This being the case, social workers should be an integral part of the policy-making bodies concerning the welfare of the people. They should be involved in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of poverty reduction-related policies; hence, they are armed with the knowledge, methods, and techniques that will aid the society in handling all forms of social maladies, including poverty.

Statement of the problem

Despite the plethora of poverty reduction programmes, which past and present governments had initiated and implemented through different institutions, the UNDP (2019) reported that Nigeria's Human Development Index (HDI) was only 0.534 and that about 51.4% of the population, which translates to 98.175 million Nigerians live in multidimensional poverty. This means that in spite of these poverty reduction programmes, the poverty situation in Nigeria, which they aim to eradicate is in the increase with more people falling into the region of poverty on daily basis rather than escaping.

According to Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (OXFAM) report (2019), 57 million Nigerians lack access to safe water, and adequate sanitation, and over 10 million children are out of school. The report further stated that the federal and state governments of Nigeria are exacerbating inequality and poverty by underfunding public services such as healthcare, education, water and sanitation, women empowerment and agriculture. Similarly, about 300, 000 Nigerians die from malaria each year, six times this number die of diarrhea; 2300 under five children and 145 women of child bearing age die daily of preventable diseases as a result of lack of adequate healthcare orchestrated by poverty (New African Magazine, NAM, 2019).

Poverty situation in Nigeria in general and Ebonyi state in particular is worrisome especially in the rural areas where majority of the population lives. This is evident in the virtual collapse of basic infrastructures and social amenities such as roads, health, educational institutions, water supply and other social services. According to Mbam (2007), approximately half of the rural population in Ebonyi state obtains drinking water from shallow wells and contaminated water from rivers. It is against this backdrop that this study aimed at finding out the perceived impacts of NAPEP as a poverty reduction strategy in Eboyi state, Nigeria and implications for social work practice. Specifically, the study looked at the following questions:

1. What NAPEP projects did the respondents benefited from in Ebonyi state?
2. What impact does NAPEP have in the lives of beneficiaries in Ebonyi state?
3. Has NAPEP being effective in reducing poverty in Ebonyi state?
4. What are the measures that can help reduce poverty in Ebonyi state?

Theoretical perspective

The study adopted empowerment theory propounded by Solomon in 1976 as its theoretical framework. The choice of this theory is because of its relevance and bearings with poverty reduction. Empowerment is the process by which individuals and groups gain power, have access to resources, and have control over their own lives. In doing so, they gain the ability to achieve their highest personal and collective aspirations and goals (Robins et al, 1988). The central assumption of this theory is that personal, interpersonal and environmental resources are needed to update the skills, knowledge and motivation of people to achieve valid social roles and activities aimed at improving their living conditions. Therefore, the inability to use these resources and support to achieve collective goals results in powerlessness and sense of hopelessness (Solomon, 1976). This theory states that people have the right to power, ability, and authority to achieve self-determination. The emphasis here is that empowerment resides with the person that needs the help, and not the helper. This being the case, it is believed that the poor should be empowered to take advantage of policies and programmes meant for them to benefit and improve their lives by encouraging and educating them to access and utilize the services of NAPEP. In other words, the poor should be encouraged to participate in the formulation and implementation of various programmes of NAPEP that are aimed at reducing their poverty level and turning around their lives. According to Aliyu (2002), experiences from the past poverty reduction programmes showed the inability to involve the people in their planning and implementation which probably led to their failure. Yet, one of the main features of NAPEP is the adoption of bottom-up approach to programmes' planning, implementation and monitoring. Therefore, by empowering the people especially the poor through CAP, MAP, CCT etc, the beneficiaries will be lifted out of poverty thereby reducing poverty level in Ebonyi state in particular and Nigeria in general.

Methods

The study adopted cross-sectional survey design method and was carried out in Ebonyi state, Nigeria. According to the National Population Commission (NPC, 2006), Ebonyi state has a population of 2, 173, 501 people. The sample size of this study was 483, comprising of 459 respondents for the questionnaire, 8 respondents for in-depth interviews, and 16 respondents for focus group discussions. The study area was divided into 3 zones of Ebonyi North, Central and South. Two (2) local governments were selected from each of these zones (6 local governments in all), and a total of 80 questionnaires were allocated to each of the selected local government areas. The local government areas are Ishielu, Ezza-North, Abakaliki, Ohaukwu, Afikpo-North and Ohaozara. The reason for this spread was to ensure that all parts of Ebonyi state were represented.

The purposive sampling technique was used in the selection of the 6 local government areas. The rationale behind the choice of sampling method was the researchers' awareness of NAPEP's projects in those areas; and that only the beneficiaries of these projects will be selected for the study. With the help of NAPEP officials, who furnished the

researchers with the names and contacts of the beneficiaries, the researchers again adopted snowballing sampling method in the selection of individual respondents. For qualitative data (in-depth interviews and focus group discussions), 6 in-depth interview sessions were carried out on opinion/community leaders (one from each local government), and 2 interviews for NAPEP officials. Similarly, 2 focus group discussions were conducted for males and females, and each session was made up of 8 participants. The questionnaires were administered to the respondents at their respective homes and their weekly meeting places; while the IDIs and FGDs took place at arranged and agreed places between the researchers and the respondents.

The quantitative data were analyzed with the use of statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequency distribution tables were used in characterizing the respondents, while the qualitative data were analyzed in themes, verbatim or direct sentences, and illustrative quotes to support data generated through qualitative means.

Results/findings

Demographic characteristics of respondents

Table 1: Percentage distribution of respondents by socio-demographic variables

Socio-demographic variables	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	260	56.6
Female	199	43.4
Age		
18-27	64	13.9
28-37	73	15.9
38-47	75	16.3
48>	247	53.9
Marital Status		
Married	308	67.1
Single	59	12.9
Divorced	31	6.8
Separated	7	1.5
Widowed	54	11.7
Religion		
Christian	365	79.5
Islam	5	1.1
Traditionalist	58	12.6
Free-Thinker	31	6.8
Education		
No Formal Education	120	26.2
Primary	146	31.8
Secondary	142	30.9
OND/NCE	15	3.3
HND/BSc.	34	7.4
Postgraduate	2	.4
Occupation		
Trading	97	21.1
Tricycle Rider	6	1.3
Okada	10	2.2
Teaching	63	13.7
Civil Servant	28	6.1
Farming	223	48.6
Artisan	6	1.3
Hair Dressing/Fashion Designing	25	5.7
Income		
N3000-8000	205	44.7
N9000-13000	119	25.9
N14000-18000	87	19.0
N19000>	48	10.4

Source: Fieldwork 2018

The demographic characteristics of respondents were analyzed and presented in Table 1 above. The analysis on the table showed that there were more male (56.6%) than female (43.4%) beneficiaries. It also showed that married respondents constituted the highest number with (67.1%). This means that majority of the study respondents were still married at the time of the study. The findings equally revealed that majority of the respondents constituting (79.5%) were Christians; (31.8%) respondents attended primary schools and obtained First School Leaving Certificate; while significant majority of the respondents representing 48.6% were farmers. The study also found that (44.7%) of the total respondents were earning less than N9, 000 monthly; while majority of the respondents constituting (53.8%) fall within the age bracket of 48 years and above. This simply inferred that age affects farming as a profession in the study area. Farming here is seen as old peoples' business.

Table 2: Percentage distribution of respondents' views on research questions

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
What type of NAPEP project have you benefited from?		
Employment	12	2.6
Training	11	2.4
Skill acquisition	1	0.2
Loan/grant for business/farming etc	405	88.4
Tricycle	30	6.4
What impact has NAPEP made in your life since you became a beneficiary?		
Positive impact	456	99.3
Negative impact	3	0.7
Has NAPEP being effectiveness in reducing poverty in Ebonyi state?		
Yes	211	46.0
No	248	54.0
What measures do you think can help to reduce poverty in Ebonyi state?		
Provision of employment opportunities	308	67.1
Skills acquisition	4	0.9
Awareness creation on NAPEP projects	7	1.5
Ensure completion of mapped projects	39	8.5
Ensure that the real poor benefit from projects	41	8.9
Extension of period to repay loans/grants	60	13.1

Source: Fieldwork 2018

Respondents' views and responses on some research questions were presented in Table 2 above. The result showed that all the respondents (100%) have benefited from NAPEP through its various projects. It further revealed that the respondents benefited through employment (2.6%), capacity building training (2.4%), skills acquisition (0.2%), loans/grants for farming and business purposes (88.4%), and tricycle (*Keke*-NAPEP) (6.4%). Regarding the impacts the benefits have made in their lives, the analysis indicated

that the highest proportion of the respondents (99.3%) agreed that the benefited projects have improved their lives positively, while (0.7%) responded on the contrary.

The analysis also showed that (46.0%) of the respondents saw NAPEP as being effective in poverty reduction, while (54.0) majority saw it as ineffective and should either be reshaped for efficiency or discontinued. In the same vein, only (42.0%) of the respondents commended the efforts of NAPEP in poverty reduction, while (58.0%) majority did not commend its efforts. The findings equally revealed that the respondents recommended provision of employment opportunities (67.1%), skills acquisition (0.9%), awareness creation on NAPEP various projects (1.5%), ensure completion of mapped projects (8.5%), ensure the real poor benefits from the projects (8.9%), and give enough time to beneficiaries to repay loans (13.1%) as ways to make NAPEP projects benefit the poor and reduce poverty.

Discussions

This study ascertained the perceptions of the beneficiaries of NAPEP in Nigeria with particular reference to Ebonyi state. From the study analysis, it was found that all the respondents (100%) had benefited from NAPEP projects. Specifically (88.2%) majority benefited through loans and grants for farming purposes and other business ventures. This showed that NAPEP projects are mainly on loans and are aimed at boosting agricultural production in the rural areas. Data from FGD buttressed this finding as all the participants affirmed to have benefited from the programme. Specifically, a participant identified as Mr. J reflected his view in this quote, "I was given a loan of N200, 000, which I used in rice and cassava plantation, and was given 24 months to pay back". Another respondent identified as Mrs. A said "we were 15 in number as a group and was given N2, 000, 000 loan, which we shared among ourselves for businesses and farming purposes". Still on NAPEP benefits, a respondent identified as Mr. D stated, "I was given a tricycle (*Keke-NAPEP*) on hire-purchase basis at the rate of N650, 000, and was asked to pay back within 24 months". This is in line with the work of Anya (2017), which stated that NAPEP has benefited many people through employment creation, *Keke-NAPEP*, Otta farm training programme, tailoring and fashion and designing equipment, and loan/grants to farmers.

The findings also showed that a very high proportion of the respondents, representing (99.3%) perceived NAPEP as having positive impacts on their lives. According to them, the loans and grants given to them helped them to start up small-scale businesses and planting cash crops in larger scales for consumption and commercial purposes. To collaborate the above, a respondent identified as Mr. A, who participated in FGD said, "NAPEP has helped me in so many ways and improved my life and those of my family members for better. The loan I got helps me in training my children in school and feed them well. I can now cultivate more hectares of land, hire labour, and produce enough food for my family and for sales. All these are possible through of the assistance of NAPEP". However, this finding is in contrast with the work of Onwe and Nwakamma (2015), which found that NAPEP has not really impacted on the development of human

capital, and has not improved access to basic education and infrastructure facilities. They further stated that inadequate sensitization, poor coordination, narrow coverage, excessive politicization, and insincerity and corruption are some of the reasons the programme is not impacting on the poor. The finding is also in contrast with the study of Edeh, Udoikah and Ugbala (2017), which found that despite the huge financial allocation to the programme by government, the poor are yet to see the actual impact of the programme.

The findings equally indicated that despite the fact that the programme has impacted them positively as seen above, majority of the respondents (54.0%) perceived the programme as ineffective in poverty reduction. They said NAPEP is ineffective because loan given to them was too small to invest in any meaningful business and that many people living in poverty who applied for loan and grants did not get it. They also said the programme organizers did not educate and sensitize them on new breeds and methods of farming. They equally stated that difficulties in getting assistance from the programme, and repayment periods is worrisome. To them, the payback period is too short and should be extended. This is in line with the work of Anyebe (2015) which stated that 'though NAPEP is indeed a conscious effort by the Nigerian government to eradicate all forms of poverty, the performance of the programme is a mixed bag of limited success and continuing challenges resulting from certain problems.' According to Adofu and Adofu (2017), poor communication network between the NAPEP agency and the people, inadequate personnel and corruption that exist in the agency poses strong factors limiting the rate of diffusion and consequently, the effectiveness of the programme.

The analysis of the study indicated that the respondents made some suggestions that they believed would help NAPEP work better, become more effective and reduce poverty level in the study area. The suggestions include adequate employment opportunities (67.1%), skills acquisition (0.9%), enough awareness creation on NAPEP (1.5%), completion of every mapped project (8.5%), ensuring that the real poor benefits from the programme (8.9%), and extension of loan repayment period (13.1%). Adding credence to the above views, an IDI respondent identified as Mr. E said, "I think loan and other projects of NAPEP should be increased and expanded to reach those who are yet to benefit." So many poor people are yet to benefit and government should really do something about it. Also, "the period given to beneficiaries to pay back the loan should be extended from 24 months to at least 60 months to enable us invest the money properly". Another respondent, Mrs. F said, "government should provide employment opportunities for the jobless, create more skills acquisition centres, ensure that sufficient funds are released, and make sure these funds get to the real people in need". This is in line with the study of Edeh, Udoikah and Ugbala (2017) which recommended that poverty reduction should ensure investment by rural communities in agriculture, education, healthcare, electricity, functional feeder roads, distribution of goods and services, investment in human capital and skills acquisition and training for available job opportunities. This is because lack of proper selection of beneficiaries, lack of commitment and dedication on the part of the beneficiaries, lack of monitoring and

evaluation, inability or failure of the concerned authorities to properly set up some of the beneficiaries after training hinders the smooth operation of the programme and makes it ineffective (Abubakar & Hussaini, 2014).

The findings of the study equally have implications for social work practice in Nigeria. Social workers can take up educational role by enlightening the poor on the need to take advantage of available poverty reduction programmes. They should also be motivated and encouraged into taking positive actions that will better their lives. Social workers know the right methods, techniques and steps to take in linking the poor to systems that will help them function better with or without assistance. For this reason, there is the need for social workers to be engaged in various agencies meant to reduce poverty as well as have them in diverse areas where policies concerning the welfare of the people and the society, especially those living in poverty are made.

Limitations of the study

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, which was to ascertain the impacts of the National Poverty Eradication Programme in poverty reduction in Ebonyi state, the researchers employed both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. However, there were some limitations of the study. The first and biggest constraint was the unresponsive behaviour of some of the respondents. NAPEP tried by handing the researchers the list and addresses of the beneficiaries across the state but that did not in any way made it easy for the researchers since they did not know most of those places and their indigenous languages. In addition, most of the respondents were unwilling to disclose any information to the researchers who they saw as strangers. It took the researchers lots of persuasion and confirmation from NAPEP officials before submitting themselves to be interviewed. Second, the researchers had hard times trying to guide the respondents fill the questionnaires, as many of them had no formal education and therefore could not fill the questionnaires unaided. Third, the use of tape recorder raised a very big dust from the respondents, community leaders and the NAPEP officials during qualitative data collection. It however took the researchers several visits to these groups and persuasion before they allowed the use of tape recorder. Finally, the researchers found it difficult sourcing fund to carry out the study since it was self-sponsored.

Conclusion/Recommendations

In spite of the expressed concern and efforts of the National Poverty Eradication Programme towards eradication of poverty in Nigeria, the incidence of poverty has continued to rise. Like the other poverty reduction programmes, which the past and present government in Nigeria have initiated and implemented, the National Poverty Eradication Programme is still struggling to achieve its objectives. Though those who have benefited from the programme said it has positive impacts on their lives, same cannot be said about the poor who did not benefit from NAPEP after several attempts. In other words, despite the efforts of the National Poverty Eradication Programme in reducing poverty in Ebonyi state, the fact remains that the poverty level in the state is still

high. This is no doubt the reason the respondents saw the programme as ineffective in poverty reduction. Based on the foregoing, the study made the following recommendations:

The government should provide adequate employment opportunities and skills acquisition training for the teeming unemployed youth. This is because findings from the study revealed that lack of employment is a major cause of poverty. They should organize on regular basis a n awareness campaign on its activities; ensure genuine beneficiaries, completion of all a pproved projects, project evaluation and follow-up to ensure continuity and sustainability. This will be done through monitoring, routine visits and supervisions of projects. The study equally recommended that NAPEP should always examine the feasibility of projects contained in the proposal of prospective beneficiaries before approval to avoid projects abandonment.

Social amenities that make up an enabling social environment should be provided for the rural dwellers to help sustain the efforts of NAPEP in poverty reduction and reduce rural-urban migration. In addition, loan should be given to farmers on time, while agricultural implements such as fertilizer, insecticides, seeds etc should be subsidized for the farmers. The study further recommended that the real beneficiaries should be involved in the planning stage of the projects so that their views will be considered while designing the projects. This will give them sense of belonging and spur them into judicious use of the benefits/assistance given. It is also the recommendation of this study that in order to ensure NAPEP gets to the real poor, assistance should pass through the community heads and key leaders since they know those at the bottom of the heaps that need the programme more than the programme managers.

The study also suggested the need for the recruitment of trained social workers in various poverty reduction agencies and organizations; and should be elected into public positions so as to make favourable policies that will better the lots of the people. It was observed during this study that there are no social workers attached to NAPEP headquarters, Abakaliki. Therefore, the very first instrument for poverty reduction policy is to have the right personnel as policy makers; and social workers are best suited for these positions.

Social workers should champion pre and pro-poor policies that will be favourable to the poor and help reduce poverty in Nigeria. They should also encourage and empower the poor to take advantage of policies made to benefit and improve their lives. This can be done by encouraging them to participate in the formulation and implementation of policies, programmes and projects aimed at reducing poverty and making their lives better.

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