EXERCISING DEMOCRACY IN POLICY MAKING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL POVERTY REDUCTION PROGRAMME (NAPEP) IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
The issue of poverty reduction policy agenda setting and implementation in Nigeria has been a tumultuous one. This paper investigates the relation between democracy and poverty reduction in Nigeria through the prisms of National Poverty Reduction Programme (NAPEP), the nation’s poverty reduction coordinating body. The paper utilised 245 questionnaires to solicit responses of respondents and analysed the data using SPSS as a research instrument. From NAPEP’s policy agenda setting up to its implementation stage, the paper reveals that democracy and its key principles have not been institutionalised and practiced by the body. It further shows that most NAPEP’s policies and programmes are deliberate policy choices based on poor consultations, poor targeting and implementation, duplication of government’s efforts, policy inconsistencies and under representation of women. Moreover, since NAPEP lacks appropriate information and representation it is the case, perhaps, that those hoisting the banner of poverty reduction policies in Nigeria care less about the lack of exercising democracy and its broader implications and consequences on sustainable poverty reduction. As the paper delineates the gap between the principles and practice of democracy in poverty reduction efforts, it is advanced that unless democracy and its principles are institutionalised and practiced in poverty reduction efforts of NAPEP like previous programmes, it will continue to remain a mirage in the eyes of the poor as there is currently a lack of involvement of the poor in such policy frameworks. The paper thus recommends amongst others that for Nigeria to achieve sustainable poverty reduction, it requires the positive collaboration and partnership of all concern which must be seen as a public challenge to effectively tackle poverty.

Key words: Democracy, Poverty, Policy Making, Policy Implementation, and NAPEP
Introduction

For centuries, the idea of direct or representative democracy as a form of government has been a major preoccupation of political thought (Jega, 2007). Ake (2000) however observes that the original idea of democracy has been lost to various epochs that society has passed through from middle ages, renaissance, time of French revolution and preponderance of political arrangement established by European bourgeoisies. Despite these current challenges and transgression that democratic journey went through over the years Ake (2002), Huntington (1991) and Omotola (2007) notes that, liberal democracy in post third wave appears triumphant and unassailable and its universalization only a matter of time as it has assumed the status of a universal virtue which is now desirable to all societies. The expectation according to Abbas (2013b), Dauda (2016) and Mohammed and Alimba (2010) was that democracy will address the issues of joblessness, non-poor growth, structural dysfunction and corruption through good governance, transparency and accountability.

Despite the “third web of democracy” (Huntington, 1991) that permeated the African, Asian and Latin American continent particularly after many years under military rule in so many cases, there are still many obstacles. The challenges remain so as the politics and democratic governance is marked by general political instability, thus making nation building an arduous task (Ake, 2000; Abbas, 2013b; Jega, 2007; Omotola, 2007). Although the uniqueness of these challenges across the continents differs in appearance, scope and degree of such vulnerability especially in Africa made Diamond (1999), Omotola (2007) and Mohammed and Alimba (2010) to observe that, not all countries undertaking the transition to democracy are likely to consolidate their democracies and some, even many of them may stagnate or backlash while some will slide back to military dictatorships. Interestingly, in what appears to be a paradox in Nigeria, although there has been economic growth since the return of democracy poverty have persisted unabated over the years (Abbas, 2013a, Dauda, 2016). Nigeria’s situation therefore presents a contrast between economic growth and poverty as these paradoxes are still evident in deprivations in education, health and economic opportunities leading to poor living standard.

To achieve sustainable socio-economic and political development in any society one of such significant issue to be addressed is poverty (Abbas, 2013a; 2016; Dauda, 2016). This is in view of the fact that poverty remains a serious phenomenon that cut across social, cultural, economic and political activities due to its multifaceted nature (Abbas, 2013a; Abbas, 2016; Dauda, 2016). Interestingly, with the wave of democracies across the African continent, national and international pressures were mounted on the democratic regimes to deliver on democratic dividends to their already impoverished citizens (Abbas, 2013b; Jega, 2007; Omotola, 2007). Hence, one issue that needs to be addressed in Nigeria is poverty that has been increasing both in breadth and depth (Abbas, 2013a; 2016; Abdulraheem, 2010; Dauda, 2016). In fact, when Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999, it received a disturbing report from World Bank that indicated more than 70% of Nigerians were living below poverty line (WB, 2008). This prompted the Obasanjo’s regime to set up three presidential committees that worked and recommended for the formation of National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) by 2001.

It should be noted however that such poverty reduction policies and initiatives by NAPEP in a democratic government would have to be acted upon by the government before such could be labeled as public policy. In fact, “it has been advanced that the product of any public policy process is the direction and measures to solve problems experienced by the public.” (Santoso, Suwirito, Setyoko & Zauhar, 2016:190). More specifically, in a democratic set up the democratic process could be actions taken in the planning, distribution, regulation and redistribution of state resources in the society (Dlakwa, 2008). To achieve success, this kind of policies should not only be clear and realistic but must also allow popular participation of the common people within a given resource base in their respective communities (Abbas, 2016). One challenge however in Nigeria is the incessant changes in democratic regimes leading to instability in the nation’s body polity and by extension, all other resultant policies. While various poverty reduction policies and programmes have been formulated and executed over the years Abbas (2013a) and Dauda (2016) have shown that the quality of life of the ordinary citizens in Nigeria had remained low despite huge public resource allocations to these programmes.

As one country with a high number of poor in the globe, the issue of poverty in Nigeria is of paramount concern, because it poses a serious challenge for policy on poverty reduction both in Africa and the world over because of its strategic position in the black continent. At sub national level, Yobe state is among the 10 states with the highest incidence of poverty in the 36 federal states of Nigeria (Abbas, 2016; NBS, 2010). In fact, the data released by National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) shows Yobe state with poverty incidence put at 79.6% which is far above the national average: 69% (NBS, 2010) considered worrisome to
the government, non-governmental organisation and other policy makers. This contradiction is more worrisome as although NAPEP came in to being in 2001 and promised to reduce poverty level in the country to an acceptable level, it is obvious from poverty statistics that poverty reduction efforts by NAPEP among several others have failed to achieve its expected goals in Yobe state and even Nigeria as a whole (Abbas, 2016).

While the relation between democracy and poverty reduction is considered significant, no democratic society is free from problems in its policy agenda setting or implementation therefore prompting current and future interventions in an attempt to understand the problem. In relation, while designing and implementing NAPEP’s activities over the years, some certain fundamental reasons were responsible for its failures at the various levels of democratic governance structures (Abbas, 2013a; 2016; Elumilade, Asaolu & Adereti, 2006; Oshewolo, 2010; Ugoh & Ukpere, 2009). It should be noted however that while previous studies have addressed general issues, none have examined the exercise of democracy and its principles in poverty reduction efforts particularly on NAPEP. This paper therefore aims to analyse the exercise of democracy and its elements (popular sovereignty, freedom of choice and equality of citizens) in poverty reduction through two stages of policy agenda setting and implementation of NAPEP in Nigeria with Yobe state as a case in point.

**Literature Review**

**Democracy and Poverty Reduction**

Democracy is a government which sovereign power is vested in the people collectively and is administered to them by people or leaders elected or appointed to represent them and their communities (Abbas, 2013b). In modern times, democracy is a bundle of principles. Generally, beyond the minimalist standard of the election most scholars agree on its basic principles (Ake, 2000; Diamond, 1999; Jega, 2007; Omotola, 2007). The first principle being popular sovereignty which holds that ultimate power belongs to the citizens and not the government. This principle emphasises that citizens are the ultimate owners of power where individuals shape their destiny. Based on this, citizens are thus moral agents who deliberately delegate political powers to an agency usually the state (government) for the best form of peaceful coexistence to reign. In essence, the government therefore serves as the provider and protector of the basic needs and interest of the citizens such as poverty reduction for the good of all.

The second principle centers on freedom which recognises individuals rights and liberties that must not be compromised by the state and therefore serving as an instrument of evaluating the degree of development. These sets of freedom accorded to citizens in democratic societies may include freedoms of speech, religion, conscience, equality, movement, association, political beliefs, etc. The third principle is legal, economic and political equality which implies that all citizens are equal before the law irrespective of social, economic or political status. This means that the law does not discriminate on the basis of sexual, racial, tribal or religious orientations. In fact, having accepted this principle by most democracies across the world as enshrined in their respective constitution this principle also emphasise the popular participation of citizens in the governance affairs of their countries. As in the case of poverty reduction efforts through policy process, this principle advance that citizen’s participation in decision making should be open to stakeholders to create rooms for citizens to be involved in the political and democratic process (Abbas, 2013b; 2016). The combination of the three democratic principles is to allow for the manifestation of the will of the people to decide and act on critical issues such as poverty that affect them through a level playing field.

Just like democracy or its principles poverty does not have a universal definition due to its multi-dimensional nature. However, several attempts had been made by different writers to define the concept which accounted for each trying to relate the term to his/her perception or specialization. According to Oladeji and Abiola (2000), physical or personal deprivation may include lack of access to education, healthcare, food which culminated in to lack of self-esteem. Denial or inadequate access to factors of production; finance, assets, property and income may therefore contribute to economic deprivation leading to poverty. Hence, social and cultural dimensions which share some form of discrimination due to either values or beliefs of the people serves as an impediment for people to take the advantages that life has offered them. Politically, people are deprived of information and choice, therefore lacking voice or power which forces them to occupy lower positions thereby subjecting them to political and economic humiliations thus leading to poverty.

From whichever perspective poverty is viewed, it remains a threat to humanity that must be dealt with (Abbas, 2013a; 2016; Dauda, 2016). This becomes important as poor people are mostly left vulnerable to various inhumane treatment and exploitation by both agents of the state and private authorities from which they seek assistance. Unfortunately, since poor people lack independence, power and voice which to rely on
for survival, they become cheap for all kinds of exploitation (Abbas, 2013a; Abdulraheem, 2010). Hence, from the literature, there is an implied agreement that individual, community, state, country and international bodies need to address every dimensions and cause of poverty in any given society through an wide range of policies to achieve sustainable poverty reduction. However, this may remain elusive if there is no proper understanding of the socio-economic and political forces that shape poverty reduction policy making and its implementation in a particular place and time.

Policy Making and Implementation in Poverty Reduction

Generally, policy refers to “the principles, guidelines or orientations adopted by a government body in guiding the affairs of people in a given polity” (Dlakwa, 2008:2). In the same vein, the policy is “a relatively stable, purposive course of action followed by an actor or set of actors in dealing with a problem or matter of concern” (Anderson, 1997). In a democratic context, policy therefore remains an attempt by the democratic regime to address issues of key concern through agenda setting and its implementation towards achieving the desired goals in a given society. It is in this regard that Abbas (2013) once observed that, since poverty permeates political, social and economic activities of a society, the phenomenon remain a concern that must be addressed by all stakeholders. To achieve this, it then means the identification and developmentof an effective policy framework within available resources for the benefit of all citizens, especially the poor (Abbas, 2016). Generally, it is this quest in Nigeria that saw the hybridization of democracy and poverty reduction efforts to the extent that no military or democratic regime has come and gone without initiating and implementing one sort of poverty reduction policy or the other in the country (Abbas, 2013a).

While making effort to eradicate the incidence of poverty in the country to an acceptable level through effective utilisation of its resources, the Federal Government of Nigeria then arranges NAPEP into four sectoral schemes for effective service delivery. These schemes include Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES); Natural Resources Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS); Social Welfare Service Scheme (SOWESS), and Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS). To make these schemes work at the national and sub national levels (federal, state and local government) the following committees were inaugurated to serve as NAPEP’s operational framework; National Coordination Committee (NCC); State Poverty Eradication Council (SPEC); State Coordination Committees (SCC); and Local Government Monitoring Committees (LGMC). In a democratic set up like in Nigeria, such poverty reduction policy like other societal developmental issues should be referenced on “what government does in order to meet the yearning and aspirations of the citizenry” (Dlakwa, 2008:2) by following democratic principles.

While the quest to achieve the objectives of such programmes the making of public policy of any nature is usually a challenging task especially at an unstable environment (Dlakwa, 2008; Sapru, 2008; Smith, 2001). This is even more challenging where in a society like Nigeria where citizens are often looking up to government for solutions to their problem. Based on this, the making of policy is a consequential blueprint of wide range of interconnected activities towards achieving a specific goal. Hence, the policy process takes place through formulation, implementation and feedback (Dlakwa, 2008; Santoso et al, 2016; Sapru, 2008; Smith, 2001). However, it is worth noting that, implementation and getting feedback mechanisms cannot be achieved by policy makers without proper understanding and analysis of the policy problem in the first place. In fact, it has been previously emphasised by Abbas (2016) and Santoso et al (2016) that this idea remains so as policy agenda setting that intends to solve the problem remains the most important stage towards understanding the effectiveness of any public policy, including poverty reduction policies.

Hence, it is in this regard that policy problem according to Smith (2001) is considered a situation or circumstance which produces the desired human change as result of dissatisfaction or denial, identified by one self or by another person in order to bring resolution to the identified problem. In order to achieve its success, after identifying the problem, the citizens and their democratic government are expected to work harmoniously to initiate the policy by considering the preferred opinion of the general public which the government is targeting. This means that once the policy problem is properly identified by the policy makers, it is expected to pass through the following ideal stages of formulation, implementation and the evaluation or feedback stage as advanced by Smith (2001):

a) formulation of goal which involves various groups with different interests
b) Identification and definition of the problem and its situations
c) Setting agenda with the support of groups and individuals to determine choices and decisions
d) Various policy alternatives should be evaluated
Beyond policy agenda, if the above stages have been successfully exhausted, the implementation stage considered critical to any policy becomes the next line of action. Barret and Fudge cited in Sapru (2008:150) see implementation process as “a sequence of events triggered off by a policy decision involving the translation of policy in to operational task to be carried out by a variety of factors and agencies and substantial coordinating activity to ensure the resources are available and that things happen as intended”. In fact, to indicate its relevance Sapru (2008:149) has this to say about policy implementation “However good the political system, however noble the goals, however sound the organisational system, no policy can succeed if the implementation does not bear a relationship to the intention of the policy adopters.” Hence, implementation stage requires the realisation of objectives and goals of democratic government through its designed programme. To put it simply by Santosoto et al (2016), the problems that may arise through the implementation stage cannot therefore be separated from the initial policy formulation or agenda setting stage.

In view of the above, critical to achieving any policy goal like poverty reduction will therefore depend on the success of its implementation stage (Abbas, 2016; Dlakwa, 2008; Santoso et al, 2016; Sapru, 2008; Smith, 2001). This is also applicable in poverty reduction in Nigeria as Sapru (2008) argues that policy remains a mere statement, if the action in reality does not take place. Consequently, the success or failure of any democratic government’s poverty reduction policy in Nigeria relies on its implementation stage which according to Sapru (2008) is critical in managing cost, time and solving the policy problem of poverty itself. Although the implementation stage in policy process remains the most challenging, difficult and critical, it should involved diverse interaction and activities among the people and government and non-government bodies (Dlakwa, 2008; Sapru, 2008; Smith, 2001). This shows that in public policy making and implementation process, some forms of power are exercised by individuals, groups; executives, legislators, bureaucrats, leaders of organised interests, party chieftains, elders statesmen, traditional rulers among several others.

Furthermore, each set of forces mentioned above exercise certain influences and power which, taken together, makeup the policy making process and its subsequent implementations of the decisions made under the influence of powerful individuals and groups (Santoso et al, 2016; Sapru, 2008). In fact, this advances the need to appreciate the roles of what David Easton referred to as “authorities in a political system; elders, paramount chiefs, executives, legislators, judges, administrators, councilors, monarchs and the likes” (Anderson, 1997). This scholar however cautioned that policy should not only concentrate on what is intended by stakeholders but also on what actually is being done in solving the identified problem. Subsequent to policy implementation, the basic premise of any poverty reduction policy is its result (Abbas, 2016) which can be achieved, if its goals are properly initiated and implemented thereby leading to better outcomes (Dlakwa, 2008; Sapru, 2008).

While the above remain the ideal quest, on the contrary, it has been observed that, poverty reduction policy failures mostly recorded in developing nations cannot be divorced from failures of those in governments (Abbas, 2016; Oladeji & Abiola 2000; Oshewolo, 2010; Ugoh & Ukpera, 2009). Moreover, in most cases, such policies are only considered to mostly serve the interest of few top politicians (especially elites) to the detriment of the majority poor in most developing nations. In Nigeria, Oshewolo (2010) and Abbas (2013a, 2016) maintains that despite many attempts by various democratic governments in the country to address the problem of poverty through policies, their impact remains minimal considering the perpetual state of poverty in the country.

**Poverty Trends in Nigeria**

The issue of poverty and its reduction efforts have been of serious concern to both governments and non-governmental organisation in Nigeria and Africa (Abbas, 2013a; 2016; Daua, 2016). In most cases, the greater proportion of poor person lives in developing nations particularly Africa (Abbas, 2016; Daua, 2016). More specifically, in West Africa, virtually all countries (including Nigeria) are hence classified as Low Income Countries (LICs) characterised by low Human Development Index (HDI) reports by national and international development bodies such as the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), World Bank (WB), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), etc. It is disturbing to note that half or more of the population in the African countries according to the above mentioned reports are living below the poverty threshold. It should be noted that although this part of the globe is commonly affected by poverty, different groups of poor people in Africa are affected differently because they are faced with different constraints, needs and roles in their respective societies.
In Nigeria, the HDI parameters including long and healthy life, acquisition of knowledge, good standard of living, political, economic and social rights, freedoms, etc advanced by UNDP have classified the country among the poorest nations in the globe with more than 70% of its people identified as poor. To show its poor rating in 2010 alone, UNDP HDI report had downgraded Nigeria to 127th out of 139 LDCs in the world. Similarly, to show its continuous decline in 2013, Nigeria’s HDI was 0.471 ranked as 153 out of 187 countries and nations (UNDP, 2013). In an assertion to strengthen the high spate of the poverty level in Nigeria, Abdulraheem (2010:2) rightly observed; 

Poverty has earned recognition in the extent of its ravaging society and the affairs of humanity at the international, national and local levels… the need exists now for urgent actions towards its eradication and control…indeed, poverty in Nigeria is a snare. It is dehumanization… It must be eradicated.

Using global development indicators, the UNDP (2010) further shows the life expectancy at birth in 2010 for average Nigerians as 48.4 years, less than that of Cameroun (51.7), Uganda (54.1), Ghana (57.1), and Republic of Benin (62.3). The statistics of malnourished children further shows disturbing figures for Nigeria if compared with Brasil another developing nation over a thesame period of 2000 to 2007, put at the rate of 27.2% and 3.7% for Nigeria and Brasil respectively. Another indicator provided by the WB 2008 report shows that the mortality rate of children below 5 years is 191 per 1000 births in 2006 alone. It is also disturbing and worrisome, if the Nigerian data is compared with other African countries, like South Africa (69 per 1,000 births), Togo (108 per 1,000 births), Ghana (120 per 1,000 births) and Cameroun (149 per 1,000 births).

Another dimension to understanding poverty situation in Nigeria is through its political geography. For instance, poverty is higher in the rural areas than in the urban centers of the country (Abbas, 2013a; Aigbekhan, 2000; Dauda, 2016). By taking the comparative analysis of the two areas, it shows that life is more difficult in rural areas than in the urban settlements as evidenced in the absence of potable water, access to education, sanitation services, and healthcare facilities, etc. The above explanation shows that, the Nigerian rural poor live under very difficult circumstances if related to their counter parts in the urban centers. Some may argue that, the level of rural poverty is due to their dependence on low productivity agriculture, lack of access to opportunities and poor social and economic infrastructure. However, the situation of both rural and urban poor of Nigeria is worse than the situation in for instance Zimbabwe, South Africa, Cameroun and Zambia (World Bank, 2008).

Also, if related to previous data, poverty incidence across the depth and breadth of Nigeria is on the rise. The most recent data which shows 69% of the population translating to 112,518,507 Nigerians are poor (NBS, 2010) is unacceptable that must be checked. The most unfortunate situation is that, while the nation’s measurement of relative poverty by NBS 2004 is put at 54.4%, the number later jumped to 69% of the population amounting to 112,518,507 Nigerians in the year 2010 (NBS, 2010). At the subnational level, the first sixteen states with the highest poverty incidence are in the North with the exception of Ebonyi state. It is also observed that, Jigawa state in 2004 was leading the most poverty stricken states in Nigeria (95%), on thesame period, Anambra state was leading in the packs of states with least poverty record put at 22% (NBS, 2010). From highest to lowest, Figure 1 shows states with the highest incidence of poverty in Nigeria.

Figure 1 States with Highest Incidence of Poverty in Nigeria
This evidence shows that there is poverty in Nigeria despite its huge potentials for growth and development. Although Nigeria is among the major oil suppliers in the global market supported by economic growth, it shelters the highest number of black poor persons living in the planet (Abbas, 2013a, 2016; Abdulraheem, 2010; Aigbekhan, 2000; Dauda, 2016; Oshewolo, 2010; Ugoh & Ukpere, 2009). Clearly evident in inflation, unemployment, hunger, the collapse of state institutions, and decay in infrastructures, these conditions are credited to unfavourable political, social and economic environment in the country. As the poverty situation continues to be pervasive and intractable across all strata of the nation despite previous efforts to address it, it becomes a public problem that must be addressed through democratic policy matters (Abbas, 2016, Abdulraheem, 2010). In this regard, the unanswered question remains whether or not ademocracy and its key principles were exercised during policy making and implementation of NAPEP, the nation’s coordinating body for all poverty reduction programmes in the country over the years.

Research Methodology
This study was conducted in Yobe state as one of the poorest states in Nigeria (NBS, 2010) to determine the exercise of democracy in policy making and implementation in NAPEP in Nigeria. The state according to 2006 national population census has a population of 2,321,591 people spread across its 17 Local Government Areas (LGAs). The state is mostly rural in nature, small scale agriculture and farming constitute about 80% of its working population. With about 80% of its population rated as poor, Yobe state according to NBS (2010) is rated among the 10th poorest state in Nigeria. To achieve the objectives of this paper, a quantitative research design was adopted which mainly relied on the responses of respondents from distributed and returned questionnaires in the study area.

For the purpose of data collection, the stratified quota sampling technique was adopted which drawn a sample of NAPEP’s officials, beneficiaries of NAPEP programmes and the public from the 3 senatorial districts in the state. Through the selection of 3 LGAs from each of 3 zones closed ended questionnaires were distributed in Bade, Yusufari, Machina, Damaturu, Geidam, Yunusari, Nangere, Potiskum and Fune. Through a field survey method, 245 questionnaires were initially distributed to respondents and 202 were filled and returned. In order to supplement the questionnaire data, secondary sources: publications from NBS, records from NAPEP and related literature were analysed to support the findings.

For the purpose of data analysis, the responses obtained through questionnaire were calculated using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software (version 22) and Excel to produce graphs, frequencies and percentages towards providing meaningful and relevant interpretation of the data. The Likert scale of measurements for social science ranging from the Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (SD) and Disagree (D) were utilised in the questionnaire to indicate negative and positive response on the exercise of democracy on the process of NAPEP’S policy making and implementation. As can be seen in result and discussion section, descriptive and explanatory data analysis techniques were employed to achieve the objectives of this paper.
Results
For the responses of the 245 questionnaires distributed to respondents across the 9 LGAs, 202 questionnaires were filled and returned. With almost 82% of returned questionnaires out of the total distributed, the current number is considered reliable and valid for data analysis. As can be seen in Figure 2, the age bracket of the respondents ranges from 18 to above 46 years. It also shows that majority of the respondents (40%) and (21%) fall between the age brackets of 36-45 and 26-35 years respectively (Figure 2). For the purpose of this paper, this age bracket is within the common range of productive labour force and therefore likely to have offered relevant information.

The sex distributions of 153 respondents (76%) were male while 49 respondents (24%) were female participants (Figure 2). As could be observed, the low percentage of female participants (24%) indicates the lower participation of women in the study and the programme thus reflecting even so in the daily lives of people in the state. While women almost equal the population of men in the state and the country with an a higher number of poor persons among them (NBS, 2010) such cannot be said of the NAPEP’s policy target and implementation. Although more women live below the poverty line than their male counterpart, this poor representation of women in NAPEP shows the lack of gender equality in empowerment and representation that democracy upholds.

Figure 2 Demographics of Respondents

Source: Field Survey, 2014

Figure 3 Poor Consultations with Stakeholders by NAPEP
In educational levels, 39% obtained Secondary School Certificate (SSCE), 22% attended tertiary education, 23% attended primary school, 10% hold Arabic qualification while 6% have no formal education. This shows that majority of the respondents have obtained some educational qualifications which could influence their perception of exercising democracy in policy making and implementation in NAPEP. Similarly, the respondent’s occupations show diversity which reflects their diverse opinions on NAPEP. It also captured different social groups such as farmers and fisher men (31%), public and civil servants (44%) and 25% selected from various business and trade professions.

One important aspect of exercising democracy in poverty reduction efforts is the principle of popular participation in both policy agenda setting (formulation) and implementation. To relate to this principle, Figure 3 above shows that 83 of the respondents (41%) strongly agreed and 75 respondents (37%) simply agreed that NAPEP would have performed better if common citizens were consulted in policy agenda setting. However, 24 respondents (12%) disagreed and 10% completely dissented. Based on this result, the non-consultation or participation of the ordinary people (the large chunk of poverty group) in policy formulation or agenda setting in NAPEP is a serious setback. The implication is that since there is a positive relationship between the level of people’s participation and the success or otherwise of poverty reduction efforts in a given society the low level of participation of the ordinary people (poor) folks has thwarted the success of NAPEP.
Figure 4 Poor Targeting of the Poor by NAPEP

Source: Field Survey, 2014

Figure 4 indicates that 36% of the respondents strongly agreed that the poor are poorly targeted in agenda setting and implementation of the poverty reduction activities of NAPEP. 64 or 32% of the respondents also simply agreed with the above assertion. However, out of the 202 respondents, 34 respondents representing 17% disagreed with the assertion that poor were poorly targeted. 31 respondents which represent 15% also strongly disagreed with the above assertion. Looking at the above statistics which shows that 137 out of 202 respondents that strongly agreed and simply agreed on the poor targeting of the poor, the consensus is that the poor who are supposed to be the major target of NAPEP were not targeted in policy agenda setting and even implementation by NAPEP.

The Figure 5 below shows that 73 respondents (36%) disagreed that the poor are strictly targeted at the implementation of the activities of NAPEP. Similarly, 64 (32%) strongly disagreed that the poor are being targeted at for implementing NAPEP’s programmes. However, 34 respondents (17%) simply agreed while 31 respondents (15%) chose strongly agreed with the above assertion. Since 137 out of 202 respondents disagreed, the consensus is that the poor were not targeted in NAPEP’s implementation of its programmes. This may cause lack of confidence in government by the poor.

Figure 5 Poor Implementation of NAPEP’s programmes

Source: Field Survey, 2014
The Figure 6 above assesses the assertion that NAPEP activities are being performed by other bodies and therefore duplicating government’s efforts in poverty reduction. Figure 6 above shows 60 respondents (30%) strongly agreed that the activities of NAPEP are in conflict with some other bodies. Similarly, 71 respondents (35%) simply agreed with this assertion. Of the 202 respondents, 45 respondents (22%) disagreed while 26 (13%) strongly disagreed that the efforts of NAPEP are duplicated by other government’s bodies. This indicates that sufficient plan and implementation mechanism has not been put in place to avoid duplication of efforts by various agencies of poverty reduction in the country in order to avoid overlapping functions which the programme initially intended to achieve.

Figure 7 shows 79 (39%) of respondents strongly agreed that poverty reduction policies have not been consistent over the years as a result of political instability, intolerance and inconsistency in government policies. Similarly, 75(37%) simply agreed with this statement. However, 31(15%) and 17 (9%) of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively with the above assertion. By considering the number of respondents that strongly and simply agreed on the assertion, poverty reduction policies of
NAPEP like its predecessors have not been consistent over the years and could have been responsible for its inefficiency and non-performance in the country.

Discussion of Findings

A review of policy documents by NAPEP and some previous studies have claimed that NAPEP has involved various stakeholders in its policy formulation and implementation stages over the years. However, findings of this study reveal that contrary with 88% of the respondents surveyed that confirmed that they have not been at any time consulted to make their input in the plan or implementation of the activities of NAPEP in their respective areas and communities (Figure 3). This further show that, despite such claims of inclusiveness of stakeholders and partners by NAPEP in its policy formulation and implementation stages, such key democratic principle of popular participation by ordinary citizens and stakeholders reveals the contrary in reality (Figure 3). This means that NAPEP fails short on exercising democracy in its policy process. In fact, since the most policy agenda setting in a democratic set up determines policy implementation (Dlakwa, 2008; Santosos et al, 2016) such issues surrounding poverty reduction across the board should have been clearly studied, understood, critically debated before being embedded in any policy process.

Abbas (2016) and Santosos et al (2016) had earlier emphasised that the understanding of the involvement of stakeholders in policy agenda setting remains the most important stage towards understanding the effectiveness or otherwise of any public policy, including poverty reduction policies. In fact, it has been further argued by these scholars that various problems that may arise through implementation stage cannot be separated from the initial formulation stage (Santoso et al, 2016) hence inseparable. The expectation according to Abbas (2013b), Dauda (2016) and Mohammed and Alimba (2010) were that since democracy will address the issues of joblessness, non-poor growth, structural dysfunction and corruption through good governance, transparency and accountability, NAPEP’s policy agenda and implementation should have institutionalise and practice such democratic principles. In essence, NAPEP simply ignored the roles that such common citizens would have played in the policy process. This means that although the poor persons understand poverty more than any other group, the elites who have no real knowledge of poverty or its real situation determine what, where, how and when poverty issues need to be addressed.

The above situation depicts that NAPEP’s undemocratic principles arise from the fact those appointed to decide on the programme are essentially the non-poor thus making difficult to understand and comprehend the real context the poor people find themselves. In fact, it is for this reason that it is often asked: how far is the government linked with the will of the people? (Santoso et al, 2016:201). To answer this, in the policy process, the most effective way is the proper targeting of the poor in policy agenda setting and implementation. On the contrary, Figures 4 and 5 showed that the poor targeting of the poor by NAPEP is one of the stumbling blocks to its success. With the majority of the respondents in agreement that there is the poor targeting of poor in policy agenda setting and implementation by NAPEP (Figures 4 and 5), this explains why most of its programmes do not get to the ordinary people at the grassroots level where most of the poor people reside. This means that only the powerful elites enjoy the generosity of government in a programme that is supposed to serve to ordinary people (Abbas, 2016). In addition, even if the poor were the real target of the NAPEP, some agents of the ruling elites have continued to hijack such programmes. In the terms of Santosos et al (2016) although the political economy of the logic target has continued to be developed, the logic of targeting the real populace has been less effective.

The above scenario made Elumilade et al (2006:67) to observe that “the master and servant relationships associated with the programmes to alleviate poverty are serious problem” evident in the arrogant display of dominant power most government officials excessively exhibit thereby exposing the larger proportion of the society continue to experience abject poverty and penury. The problem of poverty reduction in Nigeria becomes even more complicated by the fact that in Nigerian politics, personal interest rather than national interest affect the way poverty reduction policy is usually made and implemented. It is also certain that the implementation of NAPEP’s policy like others rely on the determiners of alternatives between which the policy makers must choose, on those who must help carry it out; on all whose harmony is needed and to put it in to effect and thereby giving or with holding that conviction, can either kill or nurse its probability of success (Sapru, 2008). In Nigeria, this becomes unfortunate for the poor people who are the victims of the circumstances, because responsible individuals to outline the poverty reduction policy mostly exert their personal above the public interest thus undermining the policy process. Consequently, the domineering roles and influence of the ruling elites have always been a supreme determinant factor in what poverty reduction policy, and where to be implemented with the final outcome usually not effective. Although such public policies continue to be critical in tackling the nation’s political, economic and even social concerns, such failure have continued to undermine its success.
The failure to address the scourge of poverty through the involvement of stakeholders in their respective communities which may provide an multi-dimensional approach in tackling the menace as captured above could therefore be attributed to the adoption of general approach rather than specific ones. It has been previously established that in making poverty reduction policies, the consideration on specific areas and the particular situation is important and necessary as most poverty reduction strategies could not be generally applied the same way everywhere (Abbas, 2013a; Santos et al., 2016). Importantly, since there has been confusion due to the lack of generalisation of one size fits all policy hence lacking any consensus anywhere on how to reduce poverty it is therefore safe to say that such activities and programmes of NAPEP would have been more successful and result oriented if there were only proper coordination and consultations among various stakeholders during policy initiation, implementation as well as its monitoring.

Another major challenge in this regard is the duplication of efforts by the government in poverty reduction (Figure 6). In fact, when NAPEP was established in 2001, its main objective was to coordinate the activities of poverty reduction bodies across Nigeria towards achieving the MDG goal 1 (reducing poverty by 50% by 2015) (Abbas, 2016). Although understandably, the rise in expectations of the poor people has compelled democratic governments to adopt pro-poor policies through NAPEP its functions and operations is actually lacking coordination in practice. More so, by using centralised data (national cross sectional data) to guide or provide policy solution to poverty, policy agenda setting also becomes centralised (Santoso et al, 2016). Under NAPEP in Nigeria, this can be seen where its poverty situation in the early return to democratic rule prompted the then Obasanjo’s regime to set up three presidential committees that worked and recommended for the formation of NAPEP by 2001. Since there exist some cultural problems to most poverty situation across places (Santoso et al, 2016), the centralisation of NAPEP’s policies in Nigeria was therefore bound to fail due to its inability to really decentralise its policies and programmes.

Beyond this, Nigeria is a country with a track record of incessant poverty reduction policy failures (Abbas, 2013a; 2016; Dauda, 2016). Historically, although several democratic regimes in the past have made efforts at reducing poverty in the country with each designing and implementing its policy and programme to tackle the ugly phenomenon of poverty (Abbas, 2013a), such political instability due to change of regimes has led to lingering instability in the nation’s governance system with consequences on poverty reduction policies. As agreed by 76% of the respondents, poverty reduction policies have not been consistent over the years due to political instability, and inconsistency in government policies (Figure 7). This explains why despite several attempts by successive regimes to address poverty through public policies as mentioned above, its impact and benefits on the ordinary people had been minimal considering the current spate of poverty in the country.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper provided the relation between democracy and poverty reduction in Nigeria through the prisms of National Poverty Reduction Programme (NAPEP), the nation’s poverty reduction coordinating body. Although some studies have been done on poverty and its reduction effort, its major gap is that they tend to concentrate more on general situations of poverty and its impact rather than addressing specific issues or areas. The poverty situation in Nigeria today, which continues to be pervasive and intractable across all strata of the society accounts for much of the increase in political, social and economic inequality across individuals, is not a problem of the poor alone but a public policy concern that must be addressed in public domain. In fact, no regime has come and gone without initiating and implementing one form of poverty reduction programme or the other and yet, the high level of poverty in the country has attained an endemic nature. This is in spite of the fact that, huge human and material resources have been committed to these programmes. Since the exercise of power by NAPEP reveal the same top down approach to policy formulation and implementation, it shows that NAPEP’s policies and programmes are not therefore based best policy choice based on proper consultations, effective targeting, proper implementation, proper coordination of government’s efforts, policy consistencies and gender equality. The truth of the matter is that the political elites are politicizing poverty reduction in a contest among them with the aim to make such public policies conducive to the achievements of their personal and selfish interest. More worrisomely, despite not being in the poverty bracket, the roles and influence of the ruling elites have always been a supreme determinant factor in what the state and its machinery choose either what to do or what not to do in the allocation of the state resources.

The paper thus recommends that For Nigeria to achieve sustainable poverty reduction, it requires the positive collaboration and partnership of all concern which must be seen as a public challenge to effectively tackle poverty. In this sense, the government and its responsible agencies must act and work in the public interest not on their whims and caprices. To effectively achieve the objective of reducing poverty
to a considerably low level, policies and strategies directed towards poverty reduction need to address the real problem of the poor in a holistic manner. This means that poverty cannot effectively be addressed in isolation of other governmental policies and the entire Nigerian environment of uncertainties. A successful poverty reduction policy formulation and implementation should therefore focus on general socio economic growth and political development through popular and robust participation of the people as advanced by democratic tenants which will in turn generate wealth and enhance skills of the people thereby reducing poverty.

References
