

Leadership Recruitment and Poverty Reduction at the Grassroots Level in Nigeria

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Abstract. After two decades of a return to democratic governance, Nigeria is still battling with the challenge of electing political leaders with clear vision of how to tackle poverty at the grassroots level. Poverty level in some states of the Federation had continued to rise over the years, with Nigeria being regarded as the poverty capital of the world as at 2019. The study examined leadership recruitment and poverty reduction at the grassroots level in Nigeria with particular reference to Lagos and Rivers states. The study adopted on mixed methods design. The study population was the residents of the two selected states. The sample size of the study was 914. The respondents were selected using purposive sampling technique. Data were collected using validated questionnaire with reliability coefficient of 0.783, interview schedule and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) guide. The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were content analysed. The study found that the modes of leadership recruitment have not been credible, transparent and fair. It also indicated that poor conducts during the electoral process has reinforced poverty at the grassroots level. Hence, poor leadership recruitment has affected anti-poverty programmes instituted to combat high level of poverty at the grassroots level in selected states. The study recommended that there is an urgent need to ensure the credibility, transparency and fairness of modes of leadership recruitment, especially party primary elections in Nigeria. In addition, the electoral umpire should be strengthened for an improved management of the electoral process.

Keywords: Electoral process, grassroots development, leadership recruitment, poverty reduction,

1. Introduction

It is no longer news that more than half of the Nigeria's population lives on less than \$2 per day and majority of these set of people lives at the rural areas, where poverty is more severe (absolute). After two decades of a return to democratic governance, the grassroots populace has continued to live on the fringe of starvation, destitution and where there is lack access to good schools, health care, electricity, safe water and other social services and infrastructure are limited. As World Bank (2019:14) has observed, poverty in 2016 was significantly higher in rural areas of the country with an estimated 64 percent of all poor people living in rural areas, while 52 percent of the rural population lives below the poverty line. Contrastingly, the poverty rate in urban areas remained stable at 16 percent between 2011 and 2016.

Despite the various initiatives and programmes instituted to develop and move rural dwellers from abject poverty and squalor to prosperity, as well as rural development approaches and strategies adopted by the successive governments since 1999 to address the rising trends of poverty which has been the bane of socio-economic development at the grassroots level, yet poverty remains unabated due to its dire social service delivery outcomes, lack of basic infrastructure, politics, weak governance, poor quality of education, and lack of political will and insincerity on the part of political leaders to tackle poverty (Alechenu, Chiedozie, Nwogu & Isenyo, 2020; World Bank, 2019).

However, accusing fingers are pointed at leadership recruitment process. Scholars have argued that there have been crisis of acceptable pattern of leadership recruitment process that produces leaders with capability to make life comfortable for the poor

masses at all levels of government and particularly at the grassroots level (Ekundayo, 2017; Odisu, 2017). As Ajayi (2004) has noted, leadership is a core ingredient in organising, mobilising and inspiring societal resources, for the attainment of poverty reduction goals. According to Utomi (cited in Odisu, 2017:1), “very few people have been taking decisions over the resources of Nigeria because there had never been good elections”.

Since bad elections can never enthrone credible candidates, only those with questionable character would emerge to pursue anti-people agenda (Nnadi, 2018). Consequently, successive administrations have failed to ensure that funds meant for the poor reach the masses (Alechenu, *et al.*, 2020). Hence, reducing or alleviating the dangerous trend of poverty at the grassroots level in most of the states of the Federation has remained challenging. Against the backdrop of the foregoing, this study examined leadership recruitment and poverty reduction in Lagos and Rivers states in Nigeria using mixed method design.

2. Conceptualising Leadership Recruitment

Leadership recruitment is a combination of two nuanced words with varied meanings and perspectives, depending on ideological and cultural contexts of the definer. Ogbeyi (2012:4) portrays concept of “leadership” as “a body of people who lead and direct the activities of a group towards a shared goal. It also denotes the ability to lead, direct and organise a group.” Burns (1997, pp. 7-8) defines leadership, “leaders acting – as well as caring, inspiring and persuading others to act – for certain shared goals that represent the values – the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations – of themselves and the people they represent.” From the Burns’ definition, the attributes of leaders are discernible, which shows that a leader must be caring, inspire, persuade, must act at appropriate time and represent not on his own interest but the general or national interest.

Abolurin (2012) suggests that a leader must pave way for people in order to achieve incredible success. He must be democratic and not autocratic in his style of carrying the followers along. Generally speaking, leadership has three main characteristics: leadership as an attribute of position; characteristic of a person and category of behaviour (Nwachukwu, 2007). To lead effectively, a leader must be identified with certain fundamental qualities, which include honesty, integrity, vision, communication and self-confidence (Asaju, Arome & Mukaila, 2014). However,

recruitment takes place at all levels of offices. From the organisational perspective, Cole and Kelly (2011) maintain that recruitment process provides the organisation with a pool of potential qualified candidates that can fill the available job vacancies. In politics, election at both the party and national levels is the most recognised and legitimate mode of leadership recruitment. This is otherwise known as political recruitment.

Gale (2008) defines leadership recruitment as the institutional processes by which political jobs beyond the citizenship level are filled. He further stressed that political careers are patterns of incumbency in these political offices and roles. The scholar noted that political socialisation is relevant to the study of political recruitment, only insofar as it affects one’s chances of being recruited or of desiring to enter into specific roles in political life. Political recruitment, according to Villarreal (2010), includes the selection process aims at filling vacancies in any political structure, which allows upward mobility in the political careers or a change of role from a non-political to a politician.

From the foregoing, leadership recruitment is the process of electing, selecting or appointing political candidates into the political leadership positions, whether at the national, state or local levels. Candidates are selected or nominated for two things: manning party offices across all the branches and chapters of political parties, and also to contest general elections. Unlike for party leadership positions, in the latter, candidates are selected by different political parties to compete in national or local elections (Udeuhele, 2015).

3. Concept of Poverty Reduction

Socio-political discourses across board have continued to be occupied by the need to fight poverty to pave way for national development. Various perceptions abounding on the concept emphasises the causes, dimensions and consequences of poverty on the people, organisation(s), nation, country and the world at large. According to Okunmadewa (2001), poverty is more easily recognised than defined hence, a universally acceptable definition of the term has remained elusive. Generally, poverty is the state of one who lacks a usual or socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions. It exists when people lack the means to satisfy their basic needs (*Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.*). Chen (2019) provides that poverty-stricken people are those without proper housing, clean water, healthy food, and medical attention. Poverty is a state or condition

which characterises a person or group of people as lacking financial resources and essentials of life to enhance a better standard of living. It involves a situation where such person or community has a record of low income level and inability to have provision of basic human needs, such as food, shelter and clothing.

The above definitions among several others view poverty in socio-economic terms. Although, the level at which one is poor might be difficult to measure, poverty is a difficult issue to overcome because it is often passed from one generation to another. In economic term, poverty is measured when particular person(s) earns less than \$1.90 a day. Poverty can be chronic or transitory, relative or absolute. Relative poverty views poverty as the inability of an individual to attain a socially acceptable minimum standard of living; while absolute poverty is of the view that there is a minimum income that is necessary for the survival and physical efficiency of every individual in life (Rosenje & Moliki, 2016; World Bank, 2001).

However, the World Bank's definition goes beyond the amount of money a person or family earns to cover a more comprehensive and all-encompassing definition. According to the Bank, poverty is hunger, lack of shelter, being sick and not being able to see a doctor, not having access to school and not knowing how to read, losing a child to illness brought about by unclean water, as well as powerlessness, and lack of representation and freedom. This definition encompasses living conditions, an inability to meet basic needs because food, clean drinking water, proper sanitation, education, health care and other social services are inaccessible (Compassion, *n.d.*, World Bank, 2001).

Ebong (1991) cited in Antai and Anam (2014) opines that poor rural areas are characterised by lack of basic infrastructures, poor access roads, a dirge of educational facilities, lack of pipe borne water, inequality, low per capita income, and high unemployment, among others. In addition, they are also characterised by poor health care delivery, lack of basic nutrition, inadequate housing, social discrimination and inadequate/ineffective channels through which concerns can be voiced (Esema, 2007). Over the years, successive governments worldwide have formulated, designed and implemented myriad of programmes, policies and reforms aimed at alleviating poverty and to transform the vast rural areas into the mainstream of national development.

International Labour Organisation (*n.d.*) defines poverty reduction to include the continued improvements of the infrastructure assets and

economic growth in a country that are fundamental to and rural development. In the view of Achimugu, Abubakar, Agboni and Orokpo (2012:79), poverty reduction strategy is "the bulk of policies and strategies pursued by government, in active partnership with civil society, the organised private sector and other stakeholders towards the systematic tackling of poverty." Poverty reduction is a set of measures both economic and humanitarian that are intended to permanently lift people out of poverty. Egbefo (2015) submits that any attempt at tackling the menace of poverty must focus largely on the local communities because grassroots development is a major vehicle for poverty eradication in Nigeria.

4. Modes of Leadership Recruitment Process in Nigeria

Nigeria is a multiparty state with election being conducted every four years into the Presidential, National Assembly, Governorship and House of Assembly's public offices. Leadership recruitment in Nigeria, as in other democratic societies, is achieved through election. Political leaders are recruited through the primaries and general elections. Broadly conceived, election refers to the process of elite selection by the mass of the population in any given political system. Elections afford the freedom to choose candidates to manage their affairs and give candidates the opportunity to canvass for the votes of the electorate in a free and fair contest (Egwemi, 2013).

According to INEC Nigeria (2015), political parties conduct primaries to enable them democratically elect candidates who will represent the political parties at various elective posts during election. Here, political party is considered a central actor in the recruitment process. Party enforces the recruitment of political leaders through competition with other nominated candidates. The process is mainly determined by party's internal rules and procedures. In some political parties, the selection of candidate is centralised, while participatory in others. Candidates selected through primary elections will be able to participate in general elections with other contending candidates from different political parties (Bille, 2001). However, political parties recommend the selected candidates through primaries or consensus to the electoral management body, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The electoral umpire therefore screens the candidates recommended by the party, approve their candidacy, and print their names on the ballot paper (ACE Encyclopedia, *n.d.*) for the purpose of general elections.

A thorough examination of the primary elections conducted since 1999 in Nigeria's political parties, reveal that virtually all these elections failed to pass the credibility test. These elections were conducted in a secret manner that not only restrict members of the party to participate, but also did not extensively followed legal frameworks guiding primaries and candidate selection (Adekeye & Ambali, 2017; Ayomola, 2015; Udeuhele, 2015). This is the reason why emphasis is often placed on effective and efficient party internal democracy during the selection process.

However, elections conducted since 1964 till 2015, have been questioned for lacking credibility (Dauda, Efundowo & Oyekanmi, 2018). The history of elections in Nigeria has been characterised by massive frauds, intimidation and even assassination of political opponents (Okoye, 2011; Nwanegbo, 2015). It has also been revealed that Nigeria's previous elections were characterised by attacks on INEC facilities, abuse of electoral and security officials, assassination of political opponents, intimidation of voters, snatching of election materials, abduction and attacks on opposition candidates/party members, supporters and the electorate, as well as pre and post-election violence (Jega, 2012). It is also glaring from the recent and past elections in Nigeria, that whenever election is approaching, political parties wallow in diverse intra and inter-party crises, leading to defection and counter-defection of party members (Moliki, 2018; Oni & Abioye, 2014).

5. Poverty as the Bane of Development at the Grassroots Level in Nigeria

The incidence of poverty has assumed a frightening dimension in Nigeria. In spite of its abundant human and natural resources, and government's annual budgetary allocations towards programmes aimed at reducing poverty in the country, the poverty rate has always been on an ascending trend (Rosenje & Moliki, 2016). Egbefo (2015) observes that the Nigeria poverty situation, be it at the state and local government levels, however, presents itself as a paradox in the sense that the country is richly endowed in both human and material resources yet its people remains among the poorest people in the world.

According to Sam (2014), there have been attempts by successive regimes in Nigeria towards poverty reduction and grassroots development. Prominent among these programmes have been identified to, include, National Accelerated Food Production

Programme (NAFPP) and the Nigeria Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB) in 1972, Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) in 1976, Green Revolution (GR) in 1979, Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI) in 1986, Better Life Programme (BLP) and National Directorate of Employment (NDE) in 1987, Family Support Programme (FSP) and the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) in 1993.

Others include National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) to replace the previously failed Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) in 2001, Integrated Community Development Project (ICDP), and Local Economic Empowerments and Development Strategy (LEEDS) in 2004, National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) in 2004, National Fadama Development Projects in 2005, Subsidy Reinvestment & Empowerment Programme (Sure-P) in 2012, Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YouWin) in 2012, and GEEP FarmerMoni, Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) and N-Power scheme since 2016. All these are meant to achieve poverty reduction through wealth creation, employment generation and value re-orientation at the rural areas. Unfortunately, most of these programmes have not been able to radically change the poor standard of living of rural dwellers (Paul, Agba & Chukwurah Jr, 2014; Rosenje & Moliki, 2016).

However, poverty has remained pervasive in almost all the local communities in Nigeria. Over the years, grassroots development has been neglected. Rural areas are regarded as abodes of diseases, superstition, poverty, lethargy, low income and low productivity. This problem, which is policy action towards rural transformation, is responsible for the poor state of affairs among rural dwellers in Nigeria. Government is virtually concerned with urban development and urban renewal programmes to the neglect of the rural areas (Eteng, 2006). Despite the purported concerted efforts of the government at combating poverty in Nigeria, poverty alleviation programmes have consistently failed to achieve the desired objectives (Adesopo, 2008; Ovwasa, 2000; Rosenje & Moliki, 2016). Instead, it has instituted the replication of mass poverty in the country.

6. Theoretical Framework

Elitism is adopted as the theoretical explanation to situate the connection between leadership recruitment and poverty reduction in the selected states in Nigeria. The major exponents of the elitism theory include Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca and Robert

Mitchels. Elitism theory emphasises that the society and powers are largely determined by a small group of people with overriding monopoly of power and exceptional abilities to influence the governed. These elites abound in all societies and are always powerful with wherewithal to secure power, perpetuate it and rule (Friedrich, 2014; Okonofua, 2013). In the argument of Robert Mitchels, one of the exponents of elitism, political leaders form cohesive groups because they recognise that this improves their chances of remaining in power, while rank and file of their members tend to be apathetic to the needs of the masses (governed) (Mazi Mbah, 2007). Thus, oligarchy is a concentration of entrenched illegitimate authority and/or influence in the hand of a minority, such that *de facto* what the minority wants is generally what comes to pass even when it goes against the wishes of the majority (Suleiman, 2011).

However, Diah (2017:33) critique that the elites are a core group of people who occupy key positions of power and influence, and set the direction for the whole country, but lack political will. Hence, the Nigerian political elites or better still, governing elites, from the time of political independence till the current democratic dispensation, are sentimental, uncontrollably dependant, greedy and materialistic, thereby contributing immensely to the underdevelopment of Nigeria's nation states. In the recent time, there are increasing attentions on the need to elect good leaders with capacity to engender good governance and service delivery, enhance economic growth, promote development and ensure poverty reduction (Mkapa, 2008).

However, the question of absence of committed leadership capable to initiating socio-economic development programmes aimed at eradicating poverty at the grassroots level has remained unanswered in Nigeria, perhaps, due to the nature of Nigeria's electoral process which have been characterised by massive irregularities, such as excessive militarisation, electoral rigging, ballot stuffing, monetised politics and vote-buying. No wonder did Ijewereme and Dunmade (2014) argues that the process of enthroning leaders in Nigeria is bedeviled with crisis and it does not provide room for morally upright, competent, visionary leaders to emerge.

In the opinion of Alfa, Otaida and Audu (2014:103), various poverty alleviation programmes have been

formulated and implemented in Nigeria but with minimal success. This is because some of these programmes "are not realistic" while the masses and the poor for whom the programmes are designed to cater for are not adequately consulted, but were foisted on them. According to Rosenje and Moliki (2016), some of these poverty reduction programmes were not properly monitored. Also, the poor who are the beneficiaries of the programmes were not properly targeted. As a result, the elites who are in charge of implementing these programmes, only benefits their cliques, relatives, party members and cronies, and moreover, the programmes have only benefited those who designed and implemented them. As such, most of these poverty alleviation programmes have remained fundamentally weak, defective and failed, with consequences on widespread extreme poverty at the grassroots level.

7. Research Methods

The study employed mixed methods design which combined the use of both qualitative and quantitative data. The study population included the residents of twelve local government areas in Lagos and Rivers states. The sample size of the study was 914 calculated using Cohen's (1988) sampling formula at 99% confidence level. The respondents were drawn through multi-stage sampling technique. In the first stage, the existing three Senatorial districts in both Lagos and Rivers states were purposively identified. This is followed by the selection of six local government areas (LGAs) from the three districts using purposive sampling technique. Then, five political wards from each LGA were randomly selected using stratified sampling technique. Above all, simple random sampling technique was adopted to select the target respondents. The instruments of data collection included validated questionnaire, interview guide and focus group discussion (FGDs) guide. The response rate was 98%. Thirty interviews and twelve FGDs were conducted with participants drawn from the residents of the grassroots, legal and medical professions, academia, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), political actors, retirees, farmers, artisans, traders, change agents, community heads/leaders, and other members of local government areas in Lagos and Rivers states. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics of simple percentages, mean and standard deviation while qualitative data were content analysed.

8. Findings and Discussions

Table 1: Responses on Questionnaire Items on Leadership Recruitment and Poverty Reduction at the Grassroots Level in Lagos and Rivers states

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	S.D.
1.	Rural development is a major vehicle for poverty reduction in selected states.	444 (49.3%)	336 (37.3%)	336 (37.3%)	16 (1.8%)	3.34	0.75
2.	Poverty reduction programmes in selected states failed to succeed due to bad leadership.	402 (44.7%)	384 (42.7%)	92 (10.2%)	22 (2.4%)	3.30	0.75
3.	A poor leadership selection process would exacerbate poverty rate rather than curbing it.	408 (45.3%)	354 (39.3%)	120 (13.3%)	18 (2.0%)	3.28	0.77
4.	Majority of the people at the grassroots level remains poor due to corrupt leadership.	416 (46.2%)	348 (38.7%)	112 (12.4%)	24 (2.7%)	3.28	0.78
5.	Leadership recruitment determines effort of political leaders at reducing poverty.	384 (42.7%)	386 (42.9%)	108 (12.0%)	22 (2.4%)	3.26	0.76
6.	Rural development integrated approaches to poverty reduction failed due to poor leadership recruitment process.	367 (40.8%)	419 (46.6%)	90 (10.0%)	24 (2.7%)	3.25	0.74
7.	An imposed leader would find it difficult to alleviate the sufferings of the masses at the grassroots level.	392 (43.6%)	364 (40.4%)	110 (12.2%)	34 (3.8%)	3.24	0.81
8.	Poor leadership recruitment process affect anti-poverty programmes instituted to combat poverty at the grassroots level.	374 (41.6%)	388 (43.1%)	104 (11.6%)	34 (3.8%)	3.22	0.80
Average mean						3.27	0.77

Decision: It has been adjusted that means score of = 3.0 and above is significant.

Source: Field Survey, 2019/2020

Table 1 shows the opinion of the respondents on the effects of leadership recruitment on poverty reduction at the grassroots level in Lagos and Rivers states. The table above shows that 49.3% of the respondents strongly agree that rural development is a major vehicle for poverty eradication in Nigeria, 37.3% agree, 37.3% disagree, while 1.8% strongly disagree. The mean and standard deviation are 3.34 and 0.75, respectively. This implies that on the average the respondents see rural development as a major vehicle for poverty eradication in Nigeria. The table also shows that 44.7% of the respondents strongly agree that poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria failed to succeed due to bad leadership, 42.7% agree, 10.2% disagree, while 2.4% strongly disagree. The mean and standard deviation are 3.30 and 0.75 respectively. This implies that on the average the respondents see failure in poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria as a result of bad leadership. The table also shows that 45.3% of the respondents strongly agree that a poor leadership selection process would exacerbate poverty level rather than curbing it, 39.3% agree, 13.3% disagree, while 2.0% strongly disagree. The mean and standard deviation are 3.28 and 0.77 respectively. This implies that on the average the respondents are of the view that poor leadership selection process would exacerbate poverty level rather than curbing it.

Table 1 also shows that 46.2% of the respondents strongly agree that majority of people at the grassroots level still remains poor due to corrupt leadership, 38.7% agree, 12.4% disagree, while 2.7% strongly disagree. The mean and standard deviation are 3.28 and 0.78 respectively. This implies that on the average the respondents are of the opinion that poverty at the grassroots level is as a result of corrupt leadership. The table also shows that 42.7% of the respondents strongly agree that leadership recruitment determines effort of political leaders at alleviating poverty, 42.9% agree, 12.0% disagree, while 2.4% strongly disagree. The mean and standard deviation are 3.26 and 0.76 respectively. This implies that on the average the respondents are of the view that leadership recruitment determines effort of political leaders at alleviating poverty.

Table 1 also shows that 40.8% of the respondents strongly agree that rural development integrated approach to poverty alleviation failed due to poor leadership recruitment process, 46.6% agree, 10.0% disagree, while 2.7% strongly disagree. The mean and standard deviation are 3.25 and 0.74 respectively. This implies that on the average the respondents are of the opinion that failed rural development integrated approach to poverty alleviation was as a result of poor leadership recruitment process. The table also shows that 43.6% of the respondents strongly agree that an imposed leader would find it

difficult to alleviate the sufferings of the masses at the grassroots level, 40.4% agree, 12.2% disagree, while 3.8% strongly disagree. The mean and standard deviation are 3.24 and 0.81 respectively. This implies that on the average the respondents are of the belief that imposed leader will find it difficult to alleviate the sufferings of the masses at the grassroots level. Furthermore, the table also reveals that 41.6% of the respondents strongly agree that poor leadership recruitment process affect anti-poverty programmes instituted to combat poverty at the local level, 43.1% agree, 11.6% disagree, while 3.8% strongly disagree. The mean and standard deviation are 3.22 and 0.80 respectively. This implies that on the average the respondents are of the conviction that poor leadership recruitment process affects anti-poverty programmes instituted to combat poverty at the local level.

The implication of the foregoing results is that leadership recruitment process to a great extent determines success or otherwise of poverty reduction/alleviation programmes at the grassroots level in the Lagos and Rivers states. When the leadership recruitment process is poor, resulting in the emergence of leaders who lack the vision to effectively combat poverty, it reflects in the failure of the poverty reduction programmes in such local governments.

The interviewees expressed their opinions on how leadership recruitment has affected poverty reduction at the grassroots level in Lagos and Rivers states. A resident of a community in Ikorodu area noted that the successful implementation of poverty eradication programmes depends on the leadership himself. Most of the poverty alleviation programmes embarked upon by the government has not been able to eradicate poverty at the rural areas due to wrong priority. The priority of the government has been those who belong to their political parties and not the poor *per se* (Mukaiila in an interview conducted at Ikorodu on 10/12/2019).

Most of the interviewees in the two states stated that it is undisputable that a leader that is imposed cannot do outside the wishes and decisions of the godfathers. At the grassroots level, it is common among the politicians to give people little money in the name of poverty alleviation or empowerment that will bring them out of misery. Some of them stated that in their local governments, people had not enjoyed sustainable poverty reduction programmes. They pointed out that most of the political leaders at the grassroots level make false promises during their electioneering campaigns. When elected into office they do not fulfill their campaign promises regarding

alleviation of poverty at the grassroots. Many of the interviewees posited that poor leadership recruitment had affected programmes instituted to combat poverty at the grassroots level. Some of the poverty reduction programmes could not stand the test of time due to the challenges of leadership, corruption and other institutional failures.

As pointed out by an educator and also a business man, electoral corruption is responsible for the poor service delivery at the grassroots (Uzokpe, in interview conducted at Ikwerre on 27/11/2019). During elections, everybody is compromised. From the electoral management body (EMB) officials, to the security agents, and election observers, the story is same. Due to corrupt officials who decide to compromise the process as a result of bribery by politicians, the mantle of leadership is given to a wrong person. Hence, leaders with no mercy found their ways into public offices. Thus, the poor are at the receiving end. Poor leadership at the helms of affair widens the gap between the rich and the poor.

Majority of the interviewees from the two selected states noted that the government paid a lip service to the implementation of poverty alleviation programmes at the local government areas. Some of the implemented ones however have not been targeted to meet with the needs of the beneficiaries. The beneficiaries of most of the poverty reduction or alleviation programmes are not poor. While those that are poor are manipulated. This situation remains so because of poor leadership recruitment process in Nigeria.

The discussants in the FGDs conducted in Lagos and Rivers identified some of the effects of leadership recruitment on poverty reduction to include poor actualisation of the programmes, lack of continuity of the programme, target of wrong beneficiaries of the programme, and misplacement of priority, among others.

However, as indicated in the FGDs, the fight against poverty had been a serious issue that is yet to be resolved in Nigeria. From the responses of the discussants, apparently rural populace is starving and poor thus in need of government's intervention to ease their sufferings. The avalanches of poverty alleviation programmes designed by the government aimed at improving socio-economic conditions of the people have been found not to be successful. One of the problems responsible for this is leadership challenge. Poverty has remained pervasive at the grassroots level in the selected states.

Most discussants believed that bad leadership could be blamed for the failure of some of the poverty alleviation programmes by both the government and NGOs. One of the members of an NGO, talked about how government policy has affected the programme embarked upon to assist the people at the rural areas. They were summoned and asked to stop simply because of politics. One thing they noted was that the owner of the NGO is not in the same political party the leader belongs to. This is one of the myriad of challenges facing such programmes. Aside that, most of the programmes are too politicised to the extent that the failure outshine the success whereas they claims they have done this and that, but in actual fact, they achieved little.

In contrary, it was revealed from the responses of two discussants that leadership recruitment does not portend threat to poverty alleviation programmes as this depends on the nature and character of the leader himself. If the leader is good, knowledgeable and have fear of God, he should be able to carry out programmes that will have positive influence on the people. For instance, in Lagos State, people who gain from the programmes of government are not the APC alone since 1999. Both the APC and PDP members enjoy the programmes without discrimination or marginalisation.

Besides, some discussants believed that the poverty reduction programmes were politicized to the effect that areas that were identified as strongholds of the opposition parties in the states were deprived the necessary poverty reduction intervention programmes. In the implementation of poverty reduction programmes, communities/wards that voted against the party in power in the last election are sidelined. They stated that poor leadership recruitment is dangerous to achievement of any good programmes especially the one that is aimed at eradicating poverty at the grassroots level.

The findings of this study are in agreement with earlier studies that leadership failure is among the reasons for the failure of poverty reduction programmes in Nigeria (Rosenje and Moliki 2016; Egbefo 2015; Paul, *et al.*, 2014; Tela 2014; Adesopo 2008; Mkaapa 2008; Ovwasa 2000; Wara, Ilaboya & Hymore n.d.). For instance, Balogun (2004) posited that unequivocal leadership is imperatively needed in replacing poverty alleviation preoccupation with the wealth creation hence effective leadership is required in all the tiers of government to transform our resources into more wealth.

Earlier studies also found that most past poverty reduction programmes were not able to curb the rate of poverty in Nigeria, because of the poverty reduction strategies employed by past administrations (Nwogwugwu & Odedina 2018; Rosenje & Moliki 2016). In this same vein, Ovwasa (2000), Adesopo (2008), and Rosenje & Moliki (2016), have also concurred that poverty alleviation programmes have consistently failed to achieve desired objectives. Similarly, Ahmed (2007) cited in Egbefo (2015) noted that poverty rate in the rural areas has become a common phenomenon that it is almost becoming an accepted factor of life because of poor leadership. Paul, *et al.*, (2014), subscribed that none of the poverty alleviation programmes have been able to radically change the poor standard of living in rural communities.

Tela (2014) posited that bad leadership is responsible for the poverty incidence in Nigeria which has assumed a different dimension. He identified that the actualisation of poverty alleviation programmes depends on sound leadership void of corruption and depth of policies and strategies designed to tackle poverty (effective policy measures). Egbefo (2015) observed that the Nigeria poverty situation, be it at the state and local government levels, however, presents itself as a paradox in the sense that the country is richly endowed in both human and material resources yet its people remains among the poorest people in the world. Odisu (2017) argued that poor leadership recruitment has created social stratification in Nigeria.

9. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concluded that poor leadership recruitment process has negatively affected efforts at reducing poverty rate at the grassroots level in the two selected states, as the low quality of leadership that emerged in most of the local governments resulted in haphazard implementation of poverty reduction programmes, which exacerbated poverty instead of ameliorating it in most of the local governments. Based on the above findings, this study therefore recommends the following:

- There is an urgent need to ensure the credibility, transparency and fairness of modes of leadership recruitment, such as primary and general elections in Nigeria.
- The patterns of leadership recruitment in Nigeria should be repositioned for effective delivery. Perhaps, a major recommendation in this regard is that the electoral law provisions should be amended to pave way for independent candidacy during election.

- It is also recommended that political parties should allow a free, fair and credible process of electing leaders. Party primaries should be conducted in a transparent, free, fair and credible manner.
- It has been established that leadership recruitment has endangered the implementation of poverty reduction programmes at the grassroots level in selected states. Therefore, it is incumbent on the current administrations in both states to take urgent steps towards implementing sustainable poverty eradication programmes that will be effectively monitored thereby improving the standard of living of grassroots populace.
- Finally, the electoral umpire should be strengthened for an improved management of the electoral process.

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