

WIDENING ACCESS TO SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICES PROVISION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Social welfare services are policies and programmes provided by the state, non-governmental actors, private sector and community or individual initiatives to promote programmes and activities that enhance the welfare and wellbeing of the citizenry in the society. The provision of social welfare services has been weak and inadequate to cater for the growing population of Nigerians and lift the vulnerable and poor out of increasing multidimensional poverty. To achieve this, Nigeria has a draft on National Social Protection Policy which was revised for endorsement in 2021. This paper looked into how to widen access to social welfare services in Nigeria through Policy Enactment, Promotion of Inclusive Social Protection Systems, financing Building Social Network and Connecting Families, solving insecurity problems, accountability and Monitoring and Evaluation (M & E). Therefore, there is a dire need that government should partner with relevant development partners, non-governmental actors, private sector and community or individual initiatives to promote inclusive social protection systems, finance and increase accountability through policy enactment and monitoring and evaluation in a social network devoid of insecurity to widen access to the provision of social welfare services to the citizens.

Keywords: Social Welfare, Social Policy, Social Protection, Policies and Programmes

Introduction

Social welfare services are policies and programmes provided to the people by the state, nongovernmental actors, private sector and community or individual initiatives. These policies and programmes are formally prescribed by the Social Protection Policy of the Federal Government of Nigeria and other extant policy documents to promote programmes and activities that enhance the welfare and wellbeing of the citizenry in the society. The policies and programmes are designed to enhance people's capacity for self-help to enable them manage economic and social risks, as well as reduce poverty and vulnerabilities to shocks.

The relevant agencies of government, non-governmental actors and private sector's participations are involved in the provision of basic social amenities for the people in the areas of housing, transport, electricity supply, healthcare services, education, Water and Sanitation(

WATSAN), waste disposal, security, access to food, employment opportunities, pension benefits and recreational facilities to manage people's exposure to social problems of homelessness, sickness, maternal and child care, unemployment, gerontological challenges and environmental issues of flood and communal conflicts.

The amenities serve public interests and community development. Government agencies are involved in provision of facilities for commerce such as community markets, and social interactions like civic centres, youth recreational centres, and literacy centres in the communities. Nongovernmental actors, private sector and community or individual initiatives exist to complement the efforts of the government to give wider access to social welfare services in the community. In spite of the concerted efforts of the government and private sector, the provision of social welfare services has been inadequate to serve the 774 local governments in Nigeria (Ogbonna, 2017; Erondu & Oladejo, 2015; Kanu & Umoh, 2013). The government have been faced with growing population amidst weak socio-economic growth and instability that has increased poverty, inequity and instability (Holmes, Akinrimisi, Morgan, and Buck, 2012). From the population census of 2006 which stated that Nigeria has a population of 140 million (Yin, 2022), the country is presently estimated to be 214 million with population density of 226 per km² which is 586 people per mi² as of February 27, 2022 according to the Worldometer elaboration of the United Nations recent data analysis. The country's population is equivalent to 2.64% of the total world population it is estimated to increase to 263 million in 2030 with an average annual change of 2.51%, 329 million in 2040 with an average change of 2.31% and 401 million in 2050 with an average annual change of 2.07% (Worldometer, 2019).

National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) stated that 83 million Nigerians which is 40% of the population live in extreme poverty in 2020 and it is estimated that this will increase to 90 million which is 45% of the population in 2022 as has increased from 35 million Nigerians living in extreme poverty back in 2013 (Onyeonoru 2018: Onyeiwu, 2021). 75 million out of the 83 million living in extreme poverty in 2020 live in the rural areas (Sasu, 2022). There is currently a housing deficit of 20 million housing units with annual increase of 900,000 units (Nwabughio, 2021). The Nigeria's transport system and infrastructure are in deficit (Effiom and Ubi, 2016). Power generation was privatised in 2013 with installed capacity of 13,000MW, but power generation hovers slightly above 5,000MW. It means 43.5% of Nigerians do not have access to electricity, making Nigeria

the largest country with energy deficit in the world (Evbogbai, 2021). Nigeria's health outcome indicators such as maternal mortality, infants and children mortality remain high (WHO, 2018).

The country has the highest number of out-of-school children in the world. According to Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), 10.5 million to 13.2 million children are out of school as of October 2018. Refuse disposal and management of waste disposal are serious environmental problems in spite of efforts by government and private sector organisations (Nwigwe, 2008; Aliu, 2017). 26.5% of the population have access to improved drinking water sources and sanitation facilities. 23.5% defecate in the open. The use of contaminated drinking water and poor sanitary conditions has increased vulnerability to water-borne diseases and diarrhoea resulting in high morbidity and mortality of children below five years old annually (UNICEF, 2022). Despite the rich natural and human resources, Nigeria's food insecurity is a recurrent double-digit problem (Otaha, 2013). The food insecurity is compounded with waves of overlapping security crises such as herders and farmers' clashes, banditry, kidnapping, insurgencies, oil militancy, ritual killings and violent crimes with youth unemployment at 32.5% (Tanko, 2021).

Nigeria has a draft National Social Protection Policy which was revised in 2021 with inputs from social development department of the Ministry of Finance, Budget and National Planning, Nigerian Institute for Social and Economic Research (NISER) and other key stakeholders at Federal and subnational levels in the public and private sectors. It is a document incorporating social agenda paradigms with an integrated multi-sectoral and multidisciplinary approach to improving social welfare services and programmes.

There is also the Institutionalising Social Protection for Accelerated SDG implementation in Nigeria which is jointly implemented by the UN agencies such as UNICEF, ILO, UNDP, WFP and WHO to accelerate the implementation of the objectives of the national social protection policy and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria. The national partners are: Ministry of Finance; Budget and National Planning; Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs; Disaster Management and Social Development; National Social Safety Nets Coordinating Office; National Cash Transfer Office; National Health Insurance Scheme; Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on SDGs; Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment to mention but a few. The programme targets women, children, girls, youth, persons with disabilities, older persons, minorities and migrants with a total budget of US\$2,000,000 only.

Nigeria has commenced the domestication of the 17 SDGs and the state governments are working at localising actions and outcomes (WHO, 2018). Nigeria wants to partner with all her stakeholders in the social welfare value chain and actualise the United Nations SDGs by 2050 (Sumaina, 2021). The government instituted the National Social Investments Programmes (NSIP) in 2016 to tackle poverty and hunger in the country. The government aspires to lift 100 million Nigerians out of poverty by 2030 and various social welfare services such as the cash transfer programme have been designated to achieve these SDG goals (Onyeiwu, 2021). This paper examines the concept of social welfare, social welfare services in Nigeria and examines the issues and perspectives of widening access and the provision of social welfare services in the country.

The concept of social welfare is a practice that is common to human societies. The history is traceable to ancient civilisations of the Greek, Egyptian, Indian, Chinese and European. The oral traditions of precolonial African societies showed that social welfare is a common denominator among the people through different trade, crafts, occupations and congenial community associations. These societies catered for the poor and less privileged among them. With modernisation, social welfare services evolved through the charity organisation society in the early 1900s, and the welfare of the individual became interwoven with the welfare of the community and the state.

Social welfare can be defined as an organised system of social services, programmes and institutions to assist individuals and groups to attain satisfying standards of life and health (Badru, 2022). It can mean the actions, activities, policies and programmes of government designed to improve the standard of living of the generality of the people and the disadvantaged people in the society. The United Nations (1967), has stated that social welfare refers to a body of activities designed to enable individuals, families, groups and communities to cope with the social problems of changing conditions.

Social welfare in Nigeria has its roots in the colonial era but social welfare services started under the Social Development Directorate with the promulgation of Decree 12 of 1974. Subsequently, the Federal Ministry of Culture and Social Welfare was created in 1989 resulting in the birth of the Social Welfare department which was responsible for the coordination of all intergovernmental and interstate social welfare activities and management of caseworks. The department hired and trained professional social workers to work in different aspects of the society in crime prevention and provision of social for vulnerable groups.

According to the National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) for Nigeria (2021 revised draft) published by the Federal Ministry of Finance, Budget and National Planning, social welfare services can be described as integrated policy and programme interventions at the bottom-up to mobilize and use national resources effectively in order to improve the lives of the people. The appropriateness of this description is premised on the assumption that social welfare services are based on developmental approach which integrate the socio-economic development with the wellbeing of the people, and the concept of social protection.

Government needs to deliver social welfare services at personal, interpersonal and community level. The human development index should show the measure of average achievement of the country in key dimensions of human development regarding the ability and capacity of the people to access decent standard of living, access to decent education, and live a healthy long life. Doing this involves the empowerment and development of the human potentials and capabilities for learning and adult education, self-development and self-reliance. The interesting dimension of the development approach is that the vulnerable groups are catered to in the value chain. The system is integrative and combines social development with economic development strategies for effective implementation of social welfare services.

Social Protection and Social Welfare Services

The development approach to social welfare correlates social welfare services to social protection. Social protection is a necessary component of economic growth and human development because it contributes to poverty alleviation and elimination of inequalities and social exclusion among vulnerable groups. The concept is a range of public measures that provides support to the citizenry and help individuals, families, households, and communities to actively participate in all sphere of life and manage their risks better (Taylor, 2010).

The African Union (2007) cited in NSPP (2021) defined social protection as a package of policies and programmes with the aim of reducing poverty and vulnerability of large segments of the population. This it does through a mix of policies/programmes that promote efficient labour markets, reduce people's exposure to risks, and contribute to enhancing their capacity to protect and cover themselves against lack of or loss of adequate income, and basic social services. The European Report on Development in NSPP (2021) stated that social protection is a kind of insurance policy

against poverty and a tool for delivery social justice, as well as a means of promoting inclusive development an expression of solidarity and cohesion between the haves and have-nots, between governments and citizens, and even between nations while The Nigerian Social Protection Policy (2021) defines social protection as a mix of policies and programmes designed for individuals and households throughout the life cycle to prevent and reduce poverty and socio-economic shocks by promoting and enhancing livelihoods and a life of dignity. The implication is that social protection is a tool of government to institutionalise social welfare services and implement its basic measures such as cash transfers, pensions for the elderly, grants to children and households, cash for food and public works programmes as well as its comprehensive social measures such as access to nutrition, healthcare, housing, transport, electric power supply, water and sanitation, and education.

The objectives of NSPP are as follows:

- People vulnerable to poverty should be empowered
- people vulnerable to economic shocks should be empowered
- human capital should be built to ensure a dignified life for all
- Guidelines for managing social protection projects and programmes
- Achieving social cohesion, equity, and growth inclusiveness by providing citizens with basic social services and infrastructure\
- improving food security and nutrition, and ensuring decent employment and sustainable livelihoods.
- Protecting individuals and households from shocks that can lead to extreme poverty.
- coordination and synergy among social protection intervention agencies

In Onyeonuru (2018), three major types of social protection are identified as follows; social insurance aims to help old people cope with income losses associated with retirement, illness, or disabilities. Among the types of insurance-based schemes are the Contributory Pension Scheme (CPS) and the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS); grants for children, school feeding programmes, public works programs such as pay-for-work and food-for-work, cash transfers, emergency relief. A non-contributory programme is one that targets the poorest and most vulnerable members of society most, such as pensions for the elderly. Work hours and wages are governed by the National Minimum Wage Act, workplace safety is governed by the Employee Compensation Act, 2010,

antidiscrimination laws include the HIV and AIDS (Antidiscrimination Act), public works programmes and skill training, as well as microfinance.

The social welfare services are established based on the national social protection policy's social policy framework. The policy itself was premised on the principles of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999 as amended) which guarantees fundamental human rights of citizens to reasonably good life and access to basic social amenities for effective functioning in the community. Other policies that shaped the social policy design are the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), African Charter on Human and Peoples' Right (1981), Nigerian Vision 2020 and its adherence to all relevant UN and ILO conventions.

Social Welfare Services and COVID-19

Social protection is weak in Nigeria, hence the Nigerian population were exposed to large welfare losses during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in 2020 (Lain & Vishwanath, 2021). Prior to COVID-19 pandemic, Care of the Poor (COPE) and Subsidy Reinvestment and Empower Programme (SURE-P) initiated by the World Bank in 2007 faced difficulties because they were not contextualised to the country's operating environment. The government phased out these two initiatives when it inaugurated the Household Uplifting Programme in 2016.

The citizens' vulnerability was complicated by the low enrolment of Nigerians to the country's social protection programme, National Social Safety Net Program (NASSP). 1.6% of Nigerians lived in households enrolled in the programme and the coverage of other programmes such as NPower, Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT), Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP) and Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSP) under the National Social Investment Programme (N-SIP) was lower. The coverage of social protection programmes remained low throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. According to World Bank and Nigeria COVID-19 National Longitudinal Phone Survey (NLPS) estimates, 4% of households received cash support from local government, state government and federal government between March 2020 and March 2021.

The low level of enrolment in NASSP, low responsiveness from relevant government agencies and the absence of social assistance in Nigeria have deepened increased multidimensional poverty in the country caused by the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy. The pandemic

affected human capital, livelihoods, relationships and welfare of the people because of lockdown, restrictions in movement and social gatherings as well as limited commercial activities. Although restrictions were lifted on economic activities, inflation and rise in food prices worsened the conditions of the vulnerable and poor people.

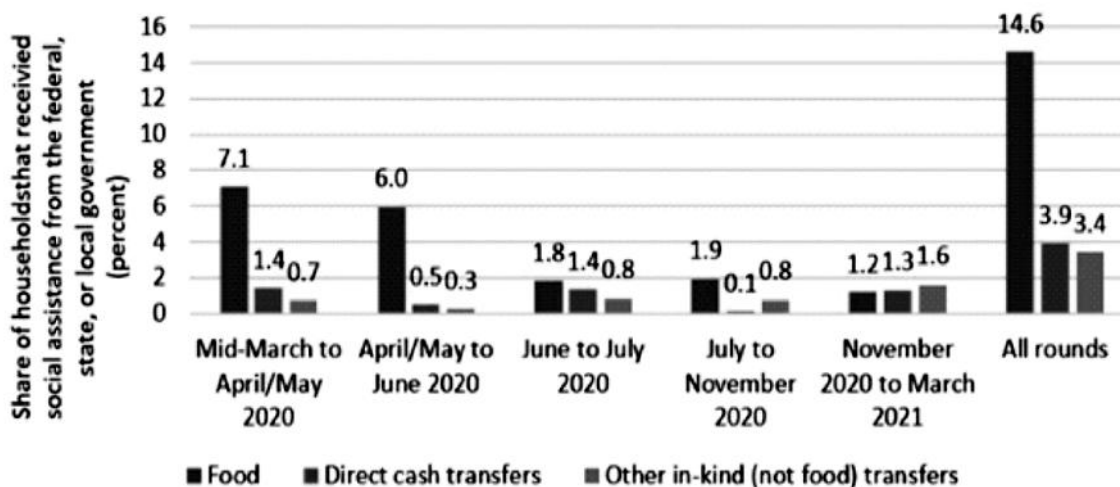


Figure 1 : Social Protection coverage throughout COVID-19 pandemic

Source: Lain and Vishwanath, 2021/World Bank estimates

The non-existent social assistance from the government compelled Nigerian households, families, groups and individuals to resort to the adoption of negative coping strategies to respond to the post-COVID-19 shocks. This approach exacerbated poverty and feelings of helplessness among the people. It also limited the concerted efforts of government and other collaborator nongovernmental actors, private sector and communities or individual initiatives. Lian & Vishwanath (2021) argued that negative coping strategies of the people will threaten social welfare services in Nigeria with consequences for the future. They posited that unless innovative techniques are adopted to reach the vulnerable and poor in the post-COVID-19, scaling up social protection will be impossible, human development will be jeopardised, more people who have been rendered poor particularly in the urban centre in southern Nigerian will be further impoverished and the provision of social welfare services will completely collapse (Blumenstock, Lian, Smythe, & Vishwanath, 2021).

To widen access of millions of Nigerian to the social welfare services, these are some issues and perspectives that will enable the government close the gaps in the existing policy framework, structure and practice of the provision of social welfare services in the country:

Policies and programmes for social protection can assist in establishing and maintaining equal and comprehensive access to social services (Babajanian, 2013). From this perspective, the National Assembly should expedite its legislative processes and pass draft National Social Protection Policy document to leverage on the existing National Protection Policy document (2017-2020) (Federal Ministry of Finance, Budget, and National Planning, 2021). This will give legal backing to the framework for the implementation of the various government's social welfare services' initiatives to ameliorate the effects of COVID-19 on the people. It is expedient to extend the validity period of the policy with a provision for addendum when updates are required rather than the present scenario of short-term life-span that invalidated its approval to subject it to a whole new process of review and approval.

There are about 24.3 million poor and vulnerable Nigerians in 5.7 million households registered in the National Social Register (office of the Vice President, 2021). This initiative should be consolidated with NASSP and include the new poor people who live in the urban centres in the southern Nigeria who have been impoverished and had to depend on and use negative but counterproductive coping strategies to live through the economic hardship in the post-COVID-19. Also, there must be concerted efforts and policy framework to bring in and cater for the needs of the different segment of the population. People living with disabilities, senior citizens, women and children, the urban poor, under-employed who earn below minimum wage, and working-class people, particularly in the informal sector. Nobody should be left behind. The role of women should be increased in the value chain to ensure gender equality and diversity.

Fiscal resource constraints have incapacitated the spread and influence of social welfare services, but the government should be determined to make adequate and timeous provisions for budgetary allocation and disbursement for funds for the implementation of the various social protection programmes.

The government should court the private sector, groups and individuals to build a coalition of social networks and leverage on their corporate social responsibility and philanthropic potentials. The coalition against COVID-19 (CACOVID) demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic

the extent of collaboration with government in crisis. Families and communities should be engaged to drive the implementation of social welfare programmes for effective penetration and impact. This will minimise interference and corrupt practices in the value chain.

The government should surmount the challenges of insecurity through political will and partnership with relevant development partners and governments to create an enabling environment which enhances enforcement of human rights, justice, peace and social order to foster free movement of humans, goods and services, and commerce.

The problem of accountability should be addressed through centralised system of funds disbursement in a transparent manner. There should be checks and balances to guard against corrupt practices. The development partners and designated agencies of government should work together to ensure that the funds being disbursed get to the final beneficiaries which are the vulnerable and poor people. The money deposit in banks, and risk management companies should be engaged to work together and manage the funds disbursements through the existing local government structures.

Social welfare services must be monitored and evaluated on a frequent and ongoing basis. The collection, analysis, and use of information to track the policy initiatives and implementation efforts to government should be done by experts in the field of M&E and development partners who have a proven track record

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper concluded that the provision of social welfare services has been weak and inadequate to cater for the growing population of Nigerians and lift the vulnerable and poor out of increasing multidimensional poverty. It was recommended that government should partner with relevant development partners, non-governmental actors, private sector and community or individual initiatives to promote inclusive social protection systems, finance and increase accountability through policy enactment and monitoring and evaluation in a social network devoid of insecurity to widen access to the provision of social welfare services to the citizens.

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