

POVERTY ERADICATION PROGRAMMES IN EKITI STATE - Notes on Implementation Strategies

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The Present administration in Ekiti state under Engr Segun Oni came to power against the backdrop of indifference and or neglect of the past two elected regimes to implement a sustainable poverty alleviation strategy. To be fair the immediate past democratic regime under Fayose implemented a crude strategy of throwing few wads of naira notes to some ecstatic youths at bus stops, doling out some bales of "Ankara" uniforms (asoebi) to market women and teachers on some commemorative days, or providing some kerosene stoves to some women who wondered what to cook on them. While that regime enjoyed some short-lived popularity in the streets, poverty endured.

This appalling scenario informed the strategic focus of this administration in implementing a multifaceted poverty eradication programme, aimed at reflating the economy of the State through the injection of subsidies towards the poor and the vulnerable segment of the society, while boosting the productive sectors with cheap credit to increase productivity.

The philosophical basis for these injections as envisioned by the pragmatic Governor Oni was that: Economic indices or averages will make no meaning when a larger segment of the society operate on zero or meager income level. Therefore some subsidies have to be injected to these lower rungs of the economic ladder to increase their capacity to generate income and withstand the vagaries of bad economic weather.

Thus the Government introduced some pro-poor or welfarist programmes running through the Three Point agenda or Tripodal development strategy of Education + Enterprise + Infrastructure = Development.

Some of the programmes are stated hereunder:

Education Sector:

In the education sector, Governor Segun Oni introduced various subsidies in the form of School feeding programme, scholarship programme from graduate to post graduate, free education and free text books, payment of WAEC and NECO Examination fees, free JAMB and coaching for qualified students. It is the belief of Government that if parents are relieved of the burden of feeding and education of their wards, then their capacity to withstand the vagaries of the economic downturn will be enhanced.

Under the School feeding programme, 199,225 pupils in Primary to JSS classes are fed with eggs and chocolate twice a week. This programme serves a multifarious purpose. It relieves parents of the stress of feeding these children with nutritious foods, boosts the physical and intellectual growth of the pupils and halts the alarming drop out rate in schools. At the same time, the programme creates demand for agricultural based products – egg and chocolate aiding the agricultural and entrepreneurial development in the State.

The immediate positive indication of success of this scheme was the over 200% jump in enrolment in public schools with a negative impact on private schools, while, scores of employment were generated through supplies of eggs, chocolate, plastic cups and plates!

On the flip side, the unanticipated rush into the public schools created stress on public expenditure, while the opposition party which could not bear the import of the increased popularity of government mounted negative propaganda to discredit the program. Government has remained undaunted!

Health Sector

As they say, Health is wealth, Government believes in taking some burden of health financing off the poor people as a poverty eradication strategy. Thus, the Oni administration, implemented a special quarterly medical intervention named “Surgical Festival” which involved free medical examination, free treatment of several ailments including surgery of complex nature. A total 147,799 citizens mainly the poor and children, benefited under this scheme between 2007-2009.

In one instance, a complex urological surgery costing a million Naira was performed for a poor man free, while in another instance a 4 kg fibroid was taken off a poor woman who had been under the weight of this health burden for over 6 years! Over 11,000 poor people had been given free eye glasses, in addition to one month free eye care from the ultra modern ophthalmological centre in Ado Ekiti.

Economic Sector

The State Government set up the Ekiti State Micro Credit Agency, to assist the mass of vulnerable people operating in the informal sector to shore up their productive and wealth creation capacity through improved access to cheap credit.

Over N2billion went to beneficiaries totaling 24,621 which cut across Market women (Iyalaja's) ethnic based trading associations (Ebira, Igbo, Urhobo and Hausa traders) widows, Artisans, Motorcycles operators (Okada riders), Faith based cooperatives, Wives of Kings etc. (see attached table)The SME's were assisted through the Micro finance Institutions (1,141 got N56m)

In the area of agriculture the State Government introduced the Millennium farmers programme which involves creating employment for young graduates in the farm settlement concept. 50 youths were involved in the Orin Farm Settlement Scheme, and 250 for the Fishing Farming group.

For the Entrepreneurship Development Programme midwifed by the Ekiti Enterprise Development Agency (EEDA) ,this involved a 3 month intensive training of 250 young graduates in entrepreneurship development, with a provision that all of them will be assisted to get credit of N5 million to develop an enterprise of their choice. The programme is being jointly coordinated by African Leadership Forum (ALF) and First Point Consulting ltd, with financing agreement from some banks.

The Administration met on ground a scourge of "Post retirement Poverty" (PRP)which afflicted a group of educated elites – retirees, who have been denied their pensions and gratuities some dating back to 1994, when the State was not even created. The outstanding liability was in the region of N2 billion. The Government cleared this backlog by 2008 December, thus empowering some of the beneficiaries to embark on productive ventures while some unfortunately invested the funds into non productive pursuits.

For those still in employment, the Government gave up to N3 billion for Housing and Car loans to the Public Servants in its bid to encourage the beneficiaries to own decent houses and cars. Of course, artisans, factories and all those engaged in business of housing construction and car dealers were enhanced economically

GIVING MORE WITH LITTLE RESOURCES!

As

can be seen above, the total exposure by Ekiti State Government to Poverty eradication programmes directly or indirectly is more than N5 billion, which has been solely financed by the State Government without any support from Federal or Donor agencies. This is in spite of its lean financial resources as one of the State with the least allocation from the Federation account.

Thus, apart from the general dividends of democracy through roads, water, building and other infrastructure, which benefits the entire society, Ekiti State Government conceived of a programme, where individuals in the society can benefit directly from Government. Engr. Segun Oni reduced this to an index of democratic dividend named Direct Individual Benefit Index (DIB), which is a calculation of the number of individuals that has benefitted from a particular government programme. For instance on loans for public servants, 11,690 out of 62,557 public servants have directly benefitted with N3,270 billion disbursed by State Government.

By 2008, 24,621 individuals benefitted from N993,191,900 disbursed directly as Micro credit loans. Also, a total of 2,851 students got Scholarship of N411.3m between 2008-2009, while the State Government paid N86.6m for WAEC exam fees of 20,979 students. For JAMB fees N33m was paid for 1,790 students seeking admission.

The Challenges

The sustainability of these poverty alleviation programmes may be in jeopardy with the dwindling resources of the State Government owing to the economic depression. A State Government that carries a monthly Public Service Salary burden of N1.9 billion, and receives N1.7 billion from Federation Account Allocation, with low Internal revenue cannot sustain all the subsidies on a long term basis, some of which are not even appreciated as part of gains of democracy. It is common knowledge that physical development is more appreciated and celebrated in our society than intangible investment in people!

Much more worrisome is the low repayment of the micro credit scheme, which so far is about 10%, hence other potential beneficiaries on the waiting list may never get the cheap credit.

No doubt, the inadequate communication of these policies to the people, may have robbed government of its desired accolades, but individuals who took the benefits definitely could at best have been charitable enough to tell others rather than the present posture of anomie.

Our society unfortunately is still enmeshed in the mentality of demanding cash gifts for social reasons instead of using financial assistance for productive ventures. Many of our people would rather receive pittance of cash gift than to be given interest free credit for business venture

We need to assess or trace, for instance where the over 24,000 beneficiaries of Micro credit scheme invested over N2 billion taken from government, and how much income were generated there from.

It needs to be investigated how many more employment were generated through this microcredit programme

ROLE OF NAPEP and Donor Agencies

It is at this point, I need to call on the NAPEP Headquarters and donor agencies to assist the State Government in taking up some of the burden of financing the poverty eradication programmes, some of which are indeed unique to the State, for sustainability of the programme.

NAPEP, can indeed identify one of the programmes and integrate it with its own strategy for funding.

In addition, NAPEP may assist the State Government in evaluating the entire Poverty alleviation strategy, its impact and gaps, so as to advise the State Government on areas for improvement.

I commend the NAPEP for implementing the Pilot programme of COPE (IN CARE OF THE PEOPLE) in 10 local Governments of the State. The State Government actively supported this programme, and I believe that as soon as we recoup more of the micro credit loans, from the defaulters, the State Government will be encouraged to plough it back into the COPE programme for the other 6 Local Governments yet to benefit.

Thank you for your attention.

Segun
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