

# POVERTY ERADICATION

*At the Retreat on National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP)  
Abuja, 23 June, 2001*

It gives me pleasure to welcome you all to this important retreat for State Governors and the Chairpersons of the State Coordination Committees of the National Poverty Eradication Programme [NAPEP].

The primary objectives of this Retreat are to brief the participants on the contents and implementation strategies of the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) and to improve the communication between Executive Governors and the Chairmen of the Coordination Committees of NAPEP. Ultimately it is hoped that by the end of this Retreat collaboration between the Federal Government and the State Governments will be strengthened to such a degree that this country will be well positioned to combat poverty through the various programmes and projects.

But, above all, this Retreat will once more underscore the importance which our Administration attaches to poverty reduction in this country to the extent that even before inauguration this issue was adopted as the cornerstone for all virtually all policies. We have been consistent in our view that the notion of democracy dividend will be hollow unless we succeed in making impact on poverty level in this country.

If we accept that democracy is about freedom to choose, then we cannot build a democratic society when a large number of people are so poor that they are denied choices due to lack of opportunities to live a tolerable life, materially, psychologically, socially and culturally.

If I am to paraphrase the expression 'Na democracy I go chop': I would say we can only insist regard for democratic principles and norms only when enough people have a minimum of physical requirements with which to lead a life worthy of human dignity.

The current statistics on poverty in our country is alarming. Life expectancy among our citizens is just over 50 years, only 55 per cent of adults are literate, around 49 per cent have access to safe water and health services, and just over 33 per cent will survive to the age of 40.

It is estimated that by the end of 1997, nearly 49 per cent of our citizens lived below the poverty level. Statistical evidence indicate that the rate of impoverisation between 1993 and 1997 was highest in the history of modern Nigeria. What is worse, the population of the extreme poor has accelerated even faster, from 28 per cent in 1985 to 40 per cent in 1992 and 66 per cent in 1997 of the total population of the poor. Nigeria's population of the poorest among the poor trebled within twelve years, reaching a phenomenal figure of over 37 million in 1997. It is hardly surprising that Nigeria now ranks among the 25 poorest countries in the world!

This Administration demonstrated its commitment to poverty eradication even before its inauguration, when we established a sub-committee of the Transition Implementation Committee that was dedicated to exploring the issues involved in poverty, and how best to tackle them.

Soon after inauguration, the **Ahmed Joda Panel** worked on streamlining and rationalising of poverty alleviation institutions and agencies. Consequently, six of these agencies were wound up, nine were merged and six others were re-structured. Furthermore, pending the formulation and adoption of a more permanent programme, an ad-hoc programme to provide jobs to 200,000 unemployed, popularly called PAP 2000, was introduced in January, 2000. This programme was a stop-gap measure designed as an immediate palliative to the despondency and restiveness among jobless youths.

Subsequently a Technical Review Committee headed by Professor Ango Abdullahi reviewed PAP and produced the draft National Policy on poverty eradication. Thereafter, White Paper Committee that included membership from relevant Ministries and Agencies articulated Government's position on the National Policy document and combined it with other existing policy documents, to come up with the blueprint on the National Poverty Eradication Programme [NAPEP].

NAPEP has been conceived through a consultative process that involved all stakeholders in poverty eradication in Nigeria namely: the Federal, State and Local Governments, civil society organisations, research institutions, the organised private sector, women groups, and concerned individuals.

The aim is to address the most pressing manifestations of absolute poverty, and to eradicate it in the shortest possible time.

It was recognised that there are certain fundamental reasons for the inadequacy in anti-poverty measures over the years. These include the absence of a policy framework, poor implementation arrangements, inadequate participation by stakeholders and lack of co-ordination. In the conceptualisation and design of NAPEP, all these problems have received attention. This background is what differentiates this latest poverty eradication effort of Government from all past efforts.

The Federal Government is concentrating its effort on eradicating absolute poverty. At the basic level, poverty eradication therefore, encompasses availability of food, water, clothing, shelter, education, healthcare, energy, transport and recreational facilities. It also includes access to credit, employment and other means of self-actualisation. The provisions of these facilities to all Nigerians are the ultimate targets of the Federal Government.

NAPEP is composed of four schemes, which are to be implemented by Ministries, Parastatals and Agencies

of the Federal Government, in close collaboration with States, Local Governments, and Communities in a bottoms-up approach. Important stakeholders like the financial institutions, the organised private sector, NGOs, CBOs and traditional rulers, will also participate. The four schemes of NAPEP are:

- ▶ the youth empowerment scheme (YES)
- ▶ rural infrastructural development schemes (RIDS)
- ▶ social welfare services scheme (SOWESS)
- ▶ natural resources development and conservation scheme (NRDCS)

Details of these schemes have been articulated in various documents, which have been circulated to all participants of this Retreat. As a participatory and grassroots-based programme, it is envisaged that the programme will develop and be strengthened over time. The contributions of stakeholders at all levels will be considered, discussed and incorporated, so as to ensure sustainability.

I am aware of the growing dissatisfaction, lack of confidence and frustration of the people of this country, on Government programmes. These feelings of despondency must have been as a result of the past failed efforts at reducing poverty and failure of other projects, due largely to poor conception, low consultation, poor implementation, corruption and other factors.

The persistence of this lack of faith and confidence in Government efforts will do this programme no good, as to disbelieve the workability *ab-initio* is to destroy the basis for its start-off and subsequent success.

While I am not blaming the individual Nigerian for the above feeling, I have already directed that the NAPEP Secretariat embark on a very pragmatic and serious campaign at re-orientating and re-indoctrinating the populace, such that the full contents and essence of the Schemes are made known to the people.

Your contributions at the State level will be invaluable to the success of the programme. As the link between the Federal and Local Government levels, you will be expected to be effective communicators of information, monitors of progress, and programme implementers. I have no doubt that you are all up to the task ahead. For the State Governors in particular, I do hope that you will fully support and adopt the Poverty Eradication Schemes of the Federal Government in your States, so that our efforts provide a multi-dimensional approach towards the eradication of the scourge of poverty in this country.

Let us all harness every available resource and opportunity to hasten the transformation of the nation into a poverty-free country. Let us dedicate ourselves to policies that enhance equitable re-distribution of wealth of this nation, creating jobs and opportunities for our people and empowering people (particularly women, the poor and the disadvantaged) to participate meaningfully in the development process.

I thank you all. And may God bless our deliberations.

Our Administration is fully committed to the pursuit of policies and programmes designed to reverse the disturbing trend in poverty. We are determined to make the ordinary Nigerian the centre of development, by ensuring his access to affordable food, education and health. With food security through the revitalisation of the nation's agriculture, with educational and health institutions that are dedicated to the service of the people and, with a reasonable level of employment generated by both the public and a re-invigorated private sector, Nigeria should, within a reasonable period produce, a picture of human development that truly reflects the country's potentials. We are determined to succeed in this national endeavour.