

The Nigerian State and Social Protection Under the Buhari Presidency

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Abstract

Protecting the vulnerable constituencies against risks, hazards and poverty is a common practice across countries of the world, whether developed or developing. While social protection programming in Nigeria predates political independence, the social protection efforts of the Buhari administration remain the most comprehensive in the history of Africa's largest economy. The expansive scope/coverage of the administration's social protection programming is better appreciated when viewed within the context of rising social inequality and poverty in the country as amply evidenced by a recent report of the National Bureau of Statistics. This paper examines the social protection practice of the Buhari administration which was instituted in 2016. Using secondary data and official records, the paper finds that while the social protection programming of the regime is elaborate and ambitious, it has not substantially achieved its intended consequences. The paper identifies challenges impeding the social protection efforts and proposes some mitigating measures.

Keywords

Social protection, poverty, citizens, state, government

Introduction

The question of social protection and human security occupies a central place in development discourse. To the extent that human beings are the centre of development quest, shielding human beings against vulnerabilities and risks has remained a key concern of the global community. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is the latest global blue print aimed at achieving inclusive development and human security. The SDG initiative is a bolder attempt at reducing poverty across the world than its predecessor, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It is also a more expansive framework for attaining a life of dignity for people around the world. Through

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the SDGs, countries of the world commit themselves to reduction of poverty and promotion of well-being of global citizens. All countries of the world that are signatories to the SDGs have developed national frameworks or social protection systems to achieve the goals of sustainable development. While it is true that the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the inadequacy of the social protection systems in many countries particularly in the global South (Razavi, Behrendt, Bierbaum, Orton & Tessier, 2020), some good progress has been made in social protection provisioning in other regions of the world.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a rights-based inclusive approach to sustainable development which aims to “leave no one behind” (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2017). Social protection receives good attention in the SDGs as the first three goals strongly demonstrate. The Goals of ‘No Poverty’, ‘Zero Hunger’ and ‘Good Health and Well Being’ speak to the recognition of social protection as a veritable tool of containing poverty and inequality (Plagerson & Ulriksen, 2015). Thus, citizen access to these three goals is crucial for human security. Indeed, social cash transfers (SCTs), a key component of social protection, are acknowledged to be critical to the attainment of the SDGs (Hickey & Seekings, 2020).

Social protection efforts by governments generally aim at providing support to the citizens to mitigate poverty and vulnerability. Such programmes, usually funded by a combination of national budgets and development aid, are mostly non-contributory in character (Hickey et al., 2020). Essentially, therefore, social protection is designed to build resilience against shocks—be they economic, social and environmental shocks (United Nations, 2019). Research has shown that most social protection efforts are executed as social assistance programmes which in South Asia and in most low income countries constitute more than 70% of social protection interventions (Hickey & Seekings, 2020).

At the global level, the Social Assistance, Politics and Institutions (SAPI) reports that by 2018, about 900 million people benefited from social assistance across countries of the world (UNU-WIDER-2018). In comparative terms, Africa trailed other continents in social assistance as only 60 million people representing approximately 15% of the region’s poor population benefited from 86 social assistance programmes implemented in 37 countries (Hickey et al., 2021).

The period beginning from the late 1990s has witnessed substantial growth in social protection practice and programming across countries of the world. For the developing and low income countries, the expansion of social assistance has not only re-defined state-society relations, but has also mediated the South’s interaction with international aid actors (Hickey et al., 2020).

Social protection practice has a different history across global regions. While countries in Europe and North America have a long tradition of the practice of social protection as a human right (UNDESA, 2018), the Social Protection Floor Initiative of the United Nations provided the context for the emergence of legally sanctioned social protection programming in low and middle income nations including those in Africa (United Kingdom Agency for International Development, 2019). The Social Protection Floor was instituted in 2009 as an attempt to operationalize a rights-based approach to social protection (UKAID, 2019).

The important role of social protection in political economy is evidenced by the positive consequences of social protection systems in many countries across the world even if the impacts vary across countries. Though some scholars have suggested that the “growing levels of complexity and commitment required of social protection responses” constitute key constraints to the capacity of social protection to address poverty and inequality (Plagerson & Ulriksen, 2015), the consensus in the literature is that social protection does have the capacity to mitigate risks, reduce poverty and enhance well-being of the citizenry (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2014; Aiyede et al., 2015; Hickey et al., 2020; UKAID, 2019).

Against the backdrop of the ever-increasing poverty level in Nigeria which, according to the World Bank, stood at 43% in 2016 (the year the social assistance programme of the Buhari administration officially flagged off), Nigeria is a natural context for social protection practice; and indeed, has been a long-time recipient of foreign development assistance. Nwosa & Ehionem (2020) have shown that Nigeria has witnessed an extremely high poverty rate in the last two decades characterized by food and energy crises, growing inequality and a spectre of instability. According to statistics from the World Bank in the year 2020, 83 million people representing 40% of Nigeria’s 206 million population lived below poverty line even as another 25% (approximately 53 million people) were vulnerable. According to the global financial body, the worrying situation was aggravated by the deleterious effects of the COVID-19 pandemic which manifested particularly in the areas of job losses and under employment (World Bank, 2020).

The recent revelation by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) on the pervasive character of poverty in Nigeria drew compelling attention to the question of social protection in Africa’s largest economy. According to the NBS, about 133 million Nigerians live in multi-dimensional poverty. According to Plagerson & Ulriksen (2015), multi-dimensional poverty is “composite poverty caused and experienced as a complex range of related deprivations in areas such as living standards, work, health, income, nutrition, education, services, housing and assets, power and security, among others.”

It is against the backdrop of the foregoing that this paper seeks to examine social protection practices in Nigeria under the Buhari administration which was inaugurated in 1999. Although social protection programming in Nigeria

predates the Buhari regime, the Social Intervention Programme of the administration is arguably the most comprehensive social protection system in the country since the restoration of democratic rule in 1999 (Ikeanyiibe & Nzekwe, 2019). Using data generated from secondary sources and official records, the paper examines the contents and context of the social protection interventions of the Buhari presidency. It discusses the impacts of social protection programming on the citizenry and identifies challenges impeding the social protection efforts of the administration. In conclusion, the paper suggests some measures that are capable of enhancing the efficacy of social protection system in Nigeria.

Conceptualizing Social Protection

Social protection as a concept is a contested phenomenon given its wide conceptualization by scholars of diverse intellectual orientations. In the literature, social protection has been approached from three broad perspectives namely, as a human right; as an expression of minimum welfare for the citizenry; and as an instrument of social risk management (Munro, 2008).

The human rights perspective of social protection emphasizes the obligation of the state to protect the citizens against deprivations and vulnerabilities (ILO, 2013). The social risk perspective places emphasis on the need to protect human capital to reduce hazards that could impact economic growth adversely (Barrientos and Hulme, 2009). On its own, the basic need perspective advocates formulation of public and private policies that provide social assurance to the vulnerables (Barrientos and Hulme, 2009).

In broad terms, social protection involves protecting or assisting the society's vulnerable. In this group are children, women, the aged, displaced persons, the unemployed and persons living with disabilities. It encompasses efforts at securing citizens against risks or hazards of unemployment, sickness, disability, old age and death. The vast scope of social protection includes social insurance schemes, welfare transfers, public employment schemes and pension policies.

In the literature, some scholars use social protection and social security interchangeably. The former however enjoys higher usage in cross national comparative studies (ADB, 2005). Indeed, Onyeonoru (2018) has shown that social protection is broader in scope than social security as it captures persons in both formal and informal work sectors as well as those who cannot work due to certain incapacities.

The Universal Social Protection (2019) defines social protection as “a system of policies and programmes that provide equitable access to all people and protect them throughout their lives against poverty and risks to their

livelihoods and well-being". The revised draft of Nigeria's National Social Protection Policy 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" (FRN, 2021). These two definitions take a life-cycle approach to social protection. The life-cycle approach places a premium on social citizenship which imposes social obligation on the state for the minimum welfare of the citizens from childhood to adulthood. This model typifies social protection practices in socialist welfare states. Ortiz (2001) conceives social protection as the set of policies and programmes designed to reduce poverty and vulnerability by promoting efficient labour markets, diminishing people's exposure to risks, and enhancing their capacity to protect themselves against hazards and interruption. As a social policy, social protection has been associated with four instrumental purposes. First, it is intended to offer relief from deprivation; second, it is a measure of preventing deprivation; third, it enhances income capabilities; and fourth, it addresses issues of social justice and social exclusion (Sabater-Wheeler and Devereux, 2010).

In recent time, there has been a fundamental thought shift in the literature from isolated social assistance programmes to integrated social protection systems. According to Browne (2015), this paradigm shift is chiefly driven by the donor community which is now more disposed to integrated social assistance practice. While social assistance is usually provided by the state as an integral part of the social contract (Harvey et al., 2007), non-state actors and organizations including the private sector, family and communal groups are also key actors in social protection (Holmes and Akinrimisi, 2012). In most cases, these non-state actors complement government social protection efforts by engaging in social delivery, granting resource assistance to the state or giving technical support in the areas of designing and implementing social aid programmes.

Among the prominent varieties of social protection that have been cited in the literature are social assistance, social insurance and labour market interventions (Barrientos, 2010; Norton et al., 2001; Arnold et al., 2011). Whereas social assistance is a non-contributory direct and regular transfer of cash or in-kind resources and is usually financed from the state treasury (Barrientos, 2010; Arnold et al., 2011), social insurance is a contributory programme usually associated with formal employment where both the employer and the employee make regular payments (Barrientos, 2010). Labour market interventions involve the protection of formal sector workers in order to attain basic standards and rights. Given that most poor people work in the informal sector (at least in developing low-income countries), these categories of informal workers are excluded from labour market interventions of the state (Browne, 2015). Otoo and Osei-Boateng (2012) note that contemporary forms of social protection across Sub-Saharan Africa exclude remarkably large

sections of African population as a result of the heavy preference for contributory social assistance. For instance, Hagen-Zanker and Tavakoli (2012) find that formal social assistance gulps about 75 % of social protection spending in Nigeria. Okoosi-Simbine (2015) has also shown that while the informal sector dominates the national economy, it is largely neglected and hardly captured by governmental interventions. The consequence of this formal sector bias is growing poverty given the weakening of the extended family system as a provider of social assistance by globalization and urbanization.

Targeting of deserving or eligible beneficiaries is a key element of non-contributory social aid programme such as the conditional cash transfer. Targeting is aimed at achieving efficiency in the implementation of the social aid policy. It is an established assumption in the literature that where targeting is inclusive and objective, social assistance has the capacity to enhance state-society relations and strengthen social cohesion (Koehler & Mathers, 2017; Alik-Lagrange et al., 2021). Social cohesion according to Loewe et al. (2019) connotes “the vertical and the horizontal relations among members of society as characterized by a set of attitudes and norms that includes trust, inclusive identity and cooperation for the common good. Targeting has however remained a difficult task to achieve in social assistance efforts of developing nations. According to Merrien (2013), targeting CCT recipients in these countries is susceptible to error of inclusion and error of exclusion. Inclusion error involves incorporating ineligible beneficiaries in the programme while exclusion error relates to excluding eligible recipients. These errors define the implementation of cash-based social protection in Africa as inaccurate or inadequate data as well as low penetration of information and communication technology (ICT) impede efficient implementation of welfare programmes. In Nigeria for instance, there have been controversies over the figures released by the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs on the scope of, and expenditure on, the conditional cash transfer. Two major sources of controversy are the number of beneficiaries of the programme quoted by the implementing state agency and the methods of implementation of the programme (The Guardian, 2021).

Literature has identified two methods of overcoming these errors of inclusion and exclusion. The first relates to asking prospective recipients to file applications to government offices which are then reviewed by designated government departments to determine eligibility. The Brazilian Bolsa Familia assistance programme typifies this method. The second method involves conducting survey of prospective beneficiary populations to determine specific households that are deserving of social aid through income or consumption levels (Merrien, 2013). The conditional cash transfer in Nigeria approximates

this method. However, in countries that are challenged by poor social data management, this method may have limited value.

Expenditure on social aid programmes has remained one major means of establishing state commitment to social protection (Holmes and Lwanga-Ntale, 2012). In most countries, social protection is funded by the national purse with support from donors and development partners (Hanlon et al., 2010). Harris (2013) reports that in many cases, donors or development agencies are not always willing to commit to long-term funding support and thus only provide start-up or take-off resources which recipient governments build on and eventually take ownership of the programmes.

The costs of financing social protection vary across national and regional contexts. Grosh et al. (2008) find that emergent economies spend between 1 to 2 % of their GDPs on social protection while some low-income countries commit lower threshold to social assistance. According to Gentilini et al. (2014), the World Bank 2014 Review reports that a total of 107 developing countries spend approximately 1.6% of their GDPs on social aid. Research studies have shown a direct relationship between the level of economic development and social spending, although with national and regional variations. Whereas state's social obligations demand heavy fiscal expenditure, the revenue base of government moderates the demand (Saez, Alvarez-Garcia and Rodriguez, 2017). Writing on the Nigerian case, Sule (2015) has shown that in the two fiscal years of 2007 and 2008, social expenditure constituted a paltry 2.7 % of national spending representing 0.83 % of GDP and 1.99 % representing 0.58 % respectively. Also, available statistics from the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) indicate that between 2014 and 2017, allocation to social spending in the national budget declined by 1.52 % compared to fiscal years 2011-2013.

In terms of the impact of social assistance on poverty reduction, Grassman and Behrendt (2006) have reported that the cash transfer programme has produced significant positive effects on poverty alleviation in Senegal and Tanzania, two African countries with high poverty levels. Onyeonoru (2018) also finds that the cash transfer programme resulted in a reduction in the rate of poverty in Zambia by 22%.

State, Social Mandate and Social Protection

Man has always craved convenience and protection from hardship and risks. The transition from the pre-modern Hobbesian state of nature to the contemporary modern state is a demonstration of human desire to escape from the brutish, nasty and short life that defined the state of nature. The modern state that succeeded the state of nature was created for a social purpose which included the security of man against the risks of the unregulated state of nature (Lessnof, 1990).

The social contract theory upon which the successor state to the state of nature was anchored imposed social obligation on the state for the welfare and

protection of the citizenry (Flanagan, 1999). According to Loewe and Zintl (2021), social protection is a core element of social contract which mandates the state to deliver protection, provision and participation to the citizens, three “Ps” that enhance state legitimacy. Thus, as Besely (2020) contends, social protection provides incentives for citizen compliance which is more effective and less expensive than naked force or coercion.

In most cases, the constitutions of nations, regardless of the ideological orientation or economic philosophy of the countries, assign social and developmental responsibilities to the states. In other words, across countries of the modern world, whether capitalist or socialist, protection of the citizens against life risks and hardships is a prominent social responsibility of the state, although the depth of this responsibility or the degree of state welfarism varies according to the ideological orientation of the dominant class (Esping-Andersen, 1985). For instance, chapter 2 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as amended, which is the basis for social protection provisioning in Nigeria (FRN, 2021), outlines the political, economic, social and developmental rights of the Nigerian citizens even though section 6(6) (c) of the same constitution declares the rights as formal but non-justiciable rights (Aiyede et al., 2015; Onyeonoru, 2018; Agbaje, 2015). The Nigerian case is in contrast to the Kenyan experience where Article 43 of the Kenyan Constitution binds the Kenyan state to guarantee economic, social and cultural rights to Kenyan citizens (Devereux, 2012). Alik-Lagrange et al. (2021) have posited that framed from socio-contractual perspective, social provisioning by the state is hinged on the acceptance of state legitimacy by the citizens.

In the modern world, nations discharge their social responsibilities to the citizens through social policies which come in diverse forms. A prominent variety of social policies is social protection policy which primarily seeks to protect different categories of citizens against risks, deprivation and hazards. In all social policy contexts, the primary aim of social protection is to enhance the access of low income earners to basic social goods. As a causative action to combat vulnerability, risks and deprivation, social protection applies to both the poor and the non-poor particularly in periods of shocks and life-cycle circumstances (Norton et al., 2001).

Across welfare regimes, social protection serves three basic purposes: it enhances the capacity of the vulnerable to cope with hazards and constraints; it enables chronically poor people to exit poverty; and it enables the less productive poor to earn a dignified living (CPRC, 2004).

While there has been a phenomenal global expansion of social assistance enterprise, more than 55% of the global population still lacks access to social protection system (ICP-IG, 2019). The World Bank’s 2017 Atlas of

Sustainable Development Goals which monitors the performance progress of countries in respect of attaining the goals of sustainable development reports that in 2013, 35 million more Nigerians lived in absolute poverty than in 1990. Similarly, it was reported that in 2018, an estimated 86.9 million of 180 million people in Nigeria lived in extreme poverty (World Poverty Clock, 2018). Relatedly, while the recent decades have witnessed social protection 'revolution' (Hanlon et al., 2010), variations exist in forms and reach of social assistance programmes across practising countries and global regions.

In contemporary times, many countries in the South are witnessing substantial undermining, if not gradual erosion, of social contract. Leaving aside the growing social inequalities in these countries, the capacity of the state to make the needed interventions has been variously hampered by the structural adjustment programme (SAP), the 2008 global economic meltdown and the COVID-19 pandemic (Razavi et al., 2020).

Social Protection Efforts of the Buhari Administration

Since the first social protection law in Nigeria tagged the 1942 Workmen's Compensation Act was enacted by the colonial government, a plethora of social protection systems has been introduced in the country. Aiyede et al., (2015) have shown that these include the Armed Forces Pension Decree 103 of 1979 which led to the institution of the non-contributory defined pension scheme; the National Provident Fund of 1961 which was replaced with the National Social Insurance Trust Fund of 1993; the Pension Reform Act of 2004 as well as the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS).

The National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) is the overarching policy framework for social protection efforts of the Nigerian government. While the policy was first introduced in the year 2004 under the Obasanjo administration, the revised draft of the policy was released in June 2021. The revised draft and its components thus represent the policy framework that drives the social interventionist programmes of the Buhari administration. Motivated by the increasing population of Nigeria with the attendant expansion of poverty, the policy seeks to confront this challenge "through enhanced reduction of inequality and inequity as well as provision of social incentives (FRN, 2021).

Setting its overall goal as the establishment of a gender-sensitive and age-appropriate framework for "a minimum social floor for all Nigerian citizens for a life of dignity", some of the objectives of the policy include: reducing poverty among the people vulnerable to being poor; empowering the poor and people susceptible to economic shocks; enhancing human capital development to ensure a life of dignity; ensuring citizen access to basic social services and infrastructure; and to promote synergy and coordination among all social protection intervention agencies".

Arranged into 6 chapters that address different areas of the policy, the document is touted to be a product of a bottom-up approach benefiting from the inputs of wide stakeholders in welfare provisioning. With the realization

that only economic growth cannot deliver the desired change, the policy is oriented towards inclusive growth, equality and security that ensure a life of dignity. As a composite policy document, the current National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) has the following components: Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT), Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP), N-Power, Government Enterprises and Empowerment Programme (GEEP, popularly known as Trader Money), National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), In Care of the Poor (COPE), health fee waiver for pregnant women and under-five children, and Community-Based Health Insurance Scheme (CBHIS). It is important to point out the fact that the conditional cash transfer as a social assistance policy made its debut in the year 2007 under the defunct National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP). The implementation of the programme at that time was variously characterized by delayed payment, short payment and corruption leading to the transfer of the implementing Unit of the programme to the Office of the Special Assistant to the President on Millenium Development Goals (Gbeneol, 2013). On its own, N-Power scheme is a volunteer programme aimed at providing temporary job opportunities in such areas as primary education, agriculture, public health and community education (Ademefun et al. (2020). The programme runs for 2 years after which the beneficiaries who receive N30,000 monthly stipend are expected to exit from the programme. All the aforementioned social aid programmes are implemented and financed by the federal government with substantial assistance from the donor community and development partners. Some of these programmes are however domesticated and modified by some state governments in Nigeria which are then implemented in these states with their own funds and externally generated funds from international donors as demonstrated in the table below.

Table 2: Social protection interventions implemented at both the federal and state levels in the last few years

Federal/States	Programmes	Objectives
Federal Government (NASSCO/NSIP/NCTO)	Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT)	To improve consumption of the poorest of the poor households
Federal Government (NASSCO/NSIP/NCTO)	N'Power	To provide employment for unemployed youths
Federal Government (NASSCO/NSIP/NCTO)	Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP)	To provide soft loans to market men and women, and those in MSMEs

Federal/States	Programmes	Objectives
Federal and State Governments	Home Grown School Feeding Programme	To provide one meal for primary school on daily basis to improve school enrolment
Federal Government/FMLE/NSITF	Social Insurance for Employment Injury	To provide social insurance for those who sustain permanent injury during the course of work
Federal and State Governments/PENCOM	Pension Scheme for Retired people	To have access to income in old age
Federal and State MOA	Fertilizer market stabilization programme	Allows poor farmers have access to subsidized fertilizers in their localities
Federal and state MOA	Growth enhancement scheme	Poor farmers receive 50% subsidy on fertilizers for a maximum of two bags through the use of the mobile phones(e-wallet)
NAPEP(2 States in the six geopolitical zones of the country)	Home Grown school feeding(HGSFHP)	To increase enrolment, retention and completion roles of primary school
NAPEP/OSSAP-MDG(started in 2007)	In care of the people(COPE), currently on the 3 rd phase	To break intergenerational transfer of poverty and reduce the vulnerability of the core poor in the society
NDE	(a)vocational skills, development programme (b)small scale enterprise programme (c)Rural Employment promotion programme (d)special public work programme	The NDE programme is to combat unemployment in Nigeria
SURE-P	(a)maternal and child health care (b)public works(FERMA) (c)vocational training (d)GIS (e) CSWYE	To cushion the effect of the partial removal of the fuel subsidy, reduce unemployment and poverty in Nigeria
Federal Government	U-WIN	To encourage entrepreneurship and reduce unemployment
Federal Government	National Programme on Immunisation	To significantly and rapidly improve routine immunization coverage on sustainable bases and reduce disease burden arising from vaccine preventable disease

Federal/States	Programmes	Objectives
Federal Government	Nigeria Youth Employment and social support operations	To improve human development among the poor and reduce intergenerational poverty by delivering immediate employment to youth and empowering them for future jobs
Ondo (2009 to date)	ABIYE (safe motherhood programme)	To ensure that infant and maternal mortality is brought down drastically in Ondo state within 2 years of establishment
Nasarawa and Taraba	Women in Agriculture programme	To empower women and reduce vulnerability
Adamawa	Local Apprenticeship Scheme	To reduce youth unemployment, skill acquisition
Jigawa	Multipurpose women centres	Empowerment of women
Lagos	Microfinance programme for women	Women empowerment
Ondo, Taraba, Bauchi and Sokoto	Donor- supported OVC programme	Human capital development
Ekiti	Cash transfer programme for elderly	Improve living conditions of the elderly citizens
Jigawa	Cash transfer programme for the person with disabilities	Reduce street begging and improve socio-economic wellbeing of the beneficiary
Bayelsa	Child development account	Improve school enrolment and retention
Ondo and Kaduna	Millennium village project	For poor peasant farmers with the aim of accessing fertilizer at appropriate time and at subsidized rate
Benue, Bauchi, Kano, Lagos and Cross River	The fairly nutritional support programme(FNSP)	To increase enrolment, retention and completion roles of primary school
Katsina, Yobe, Jigawa, Kebbi, Zamfara and Sokoto	RTIF plumpy nut, emergency nutrition programme	To treat moderate and severe acute malnutrition

Federal/States	Programmes	Objectives
Kogi	Community-based Health Insurance Scheme(CBHIS)	To protect the form all sector and marginalized group against the burden of high out-of-pocket health expedition
Kano, Bauchi and Katsina	Conditional cash transfers(CCTs) for girls' education	To reduce girls' drop-out rates due to early marriage, specifically in the transition period from primary to secondary school
Zamfara and Jigawa	The Child Development Grants Programme(CDGP)	To reduce infant mortality and stunting
Osun	Osun Youth Empowerment Scheme(OYES)	To tackle unemployment and energise the economy of the state
Cross-River	CCT for poor households	
Ondo/Lagos	Free transport for school children up to secondary level	Human capital development

Source: NSPP 2021

All the federal government-initiated social aid programmes listed in the table above are implemented within the context of the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) which was instituted in the year 2016 by the Buhari administration. Its basic rationale is to address pervasive poverty and hunger among the targeted beneficiaries including youth, children and women. Four main programmes were initially established under the NSIP with each programme targeting specific beneficiary population. The four programmes were the Home Grown School Feeding Programme targeting primary school pupils; N-Power programme targeting unemployed youth graduates; Conditional Cash Transfer targeting Nigerians “at the base of poverty pyramid” (FRN, 2021); and Government Enterprises and Empowerment Programme which targets traders, artisans, farmers and youth. The GEEP is popularly referred to as ‘Trader Money’. A budgetary allocation of N500b was appropriated for the implementation of the NSIP at its take-off (FRN, 2021). While this budgetary vote for social assistance may seem impressive, comparative studies on social spending in 6 Sub-Saharan countries show that Nigeria’s spending on social aid is significantly low compared to other surveyed countries (Onyeonoru, 2018).

The Minister of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management, Hajiya Sadiya Umar Farouk, recently disclosed that the federal government has been spending USD 1 billion annually on the NSIP since its inception in 2016. In the national budget for the fiscal year 2021, N400 billion was directly

appropriated to the NSIP while another N365 billion was earmarked for its upscaling (Premium Times, 2021). In the 2022 budget, about N400 billion was voted for the NSIP.

As the Buhari presidency terminates this year, the continuation or otherwise of the social investment programme of the All Progressives Congress (APC) will depend on the outcome of the 2023 presidential election. However, given the tendency of new regimes for new programmes/policies in Nigeria, a tendency rooted in the zero-sum character of Nigerian politics, the sustainability of the NSIP will be seriously threatened if the APC loses federal power in the next elections.

Challenges of Social Protection in Nigeria

Nigeria is a relatively new entrant into the social protection market (Holmes and Akinrimisi, 2012). In spite of this, however, the country has witnessed and is still witnessing implementation of several social assistance programmes initiated by federal and state governments. These programmes include Workmen Compensation scheme, Nigeria Social Insurance Trust Fund, National Directorate of Employment scheme, National Pension scheme, National Health Insurance Scheme, National Housing Fund, Employee Compensation scheme, Free or low cost education scheme, Credit facility for artisans and small/medium scale traders as well as Free or low cost medicare.

Challenges facing social protection in Nigeria derive mainly from three sources: character of the inter-governmental relations within Nigeria's federal framework; underdeveloped nature of the national economy; and poor data management. In comprehensive terms, Mustapha and Uyot (2012) list the constraints to include insufficient funds, inflation, policy inconsistency, unreliable data, low income, poverty and negative politicking.

Funding has been cited in the literature as the most potent challenge against social protection in Nigeria (Onyeonoru, 2018; FRN, 2021; Aiyede et al., 2015). According to Mustapha and Uyot (2012), major sources of financing social protection in Nigeria include budgetary votes, extra-budgetary allocations, employer contributions, employee contributions and profits on pension investments. Out of these sources, fiscal appropriation from the national budget has remained the most reliable source of funding; yet it has its own limitations. It is a known fact that the Nigerian economy is anchored on oil revenue from international oil market and the volatility of the oil price in the global market constitutes a key challenge to state's commitment to public welfare. The funding of Nigeria's national budget is predicated on oil earnings which usually fluctuate in the international oil market. Any time the price of oil falls, it reduces the revenue accruable to the Nigerian government which

reduces the capacity of the Nigerian state to finance social protection (Onyeonoru, 2018). Similarly, Shadare (2022) has noted that the unpredictability of international oil market naturally affects fiscal allocation to the social sector which may compel a significant cut back on welfare spending.

Another constraint against social protection practice in Nigeria is the impact of the nature of inter-governmental relations in which political differences and inter-governmental competition may undermine the efficacy or efficiency of social assistance programming. Deriving from the cultural pluralism that defines the multi-ethnic character of the Nigerian nation, social assistance programme in the country is seriously challenged by the adversarial character of interactions among the three tiers of government of the Nigerian state. Particularly, the constitutionally guaranteed autonomy of the sub-national units significantly undermines horizontal coordination between the national and sub-national governments (UNDP, 2008; FRN, 2021). The adversarial nature of inter-governmental relations is more apparent in the context of implementing a social assistance programme that is located in the concurrent legislative list which confers legislative powers on both the federal and state government on certain items.

Poor and unreliable data also constitutes an obstacle to social protection. There are two main dimensions to the challenge of data. One, there is generally poor social data mapping in Nigeria which could assist in the designing of social assistance programmes. Two, poor data also constrain accountability in the implementation of social assistance programmes. In the absence of reliable data, it is difficult to establish the effectiveness or impacts of the social assistance programmes.

Concluding Remarks

There is no denying the fact that the Nigerian state is a late entrant into the social protection market. Nevertheless, successive administrations in the country have implemented series of social protection systems with varying consequences for the vulnerable constituencies. This paper has examined social protection provisioning under the Buhari presidency which arguably is the most comprehensive social protection system in post-colonial Nigeria. The paper has discussed the context and contents of the regime's social intervention programmes; and has identified some of the challenges impeding the achievement of the intended consequences of social protection programming. To overcome these challenges, there is a need to develop friendly and coalescent inter-governmental relations within the Nigerian federation in a manner in which the three levels of government would regard one another as partners in socio-economic development rather than rivals competing for political influence and relevance. The ruling elites in Nigeria should also muster the requisite political will to diversify the national economy with a view to creating other reliable sources of national revenue to augment oil earnings. Furthermore, concerned state agencies including the National Bureau

of Statistics (NBS) should make intentional efforts to improve their data-generating capacities so as to generate reliable social data not only for the purposes of social protection provisioning but for national development.

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