SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMES AND GROWTH OF THE NIGERIAN ECONOMY

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ABSTRACT
This study researches on the effectiveness of social protection programmes to the growth of the Nigerian economy, with specific focus on some localities in Bayelsa state. The research aims to evaluate whether existing social protection mechanism adequately addresses the need of the population under study and how it contributes to poverty reduction, social inclusion and economic growth. Data were collected using questionnaires distributed to 100 respondents, and the responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Chi-square (X^2) analysis. The findings revealed that while a significant number of respondents were aware of social protection initiatives- particularly education and healthcare support- only a minority had actually benefitted from them. The majority of respondents rate the programmes as poorly designed, inadequately implemented, and ineffective in improving the growth of the nation and the wellbeing of citizens. Furthermore, a large portion of the target population remains unemployed and excluded from key social protection benefits such as cash transfers and livelihood support. The Chi-square analysis confirmed a statistically significant difference between observed and expected responses, indicating that public perception towards the effectiveness of social protection programmes is overwhelming negative. Based on these findings, the study concludes that current social protection interventions in Nigeria are insufficient in addressing widespread poverty, inequality and growth of the country. The study recommends a thorough review of social protection frameworks, improved targeting of vulnerable groups, greater transparency, and enhanced public awareness and engagement. These reforms are essential to ensure that social protection programmes serve as an effective tool for poverty alleviation, social justice, and inclusive growth and development in Nigeria.
Keywords: Social Protection, Economic Growth, Social Justice, Inequality, Chi-Square.

Introduction

Social protection emerged to assist in addressing the poverty question, particularly in developing countries. Social protection is concerned with preventing, managing, and overcoming

situations that adversely affect people's wellbeing. It consists of policies and programmes designed to reduce poverty and vulnerability. Such policies promote efficient labour markets and reduce people's exposure to shocks (Andre et. al; 20112). They enhance people's capacity to manage economic and social risks, including unemployment, exclusion, sickness, disability, maternal and child care, old age challenges and emergencies such as flood and violent conflicts. Such interventions may be carried out by the state, non-governmental actors, the private sector, or through informal individual or community initiatives. It is from this viewpoint that the Social Protection Policy document of the Federal Government of Nigeria defined 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".

Social security is an aspect of social protection that relates with compulsory social insurance schemes financed by contributions from workers in the formal sector including civil servants. Social security can also be in form of safety nets; the term safety nets is also an aspect of social protection. It refers essentially to non-contributory cash transfer programmes that basically target the poor or vulnerable. This, in other words, relates to persons who are living in poverty and are unable to meet their own basic needs or who are in danger of falling into poverty because of adverse socioeconomic circumstances such as old age or illness. Safety nets aim to increase the consumption of basic commodities and essential services, either directly or indirectly through substitution effects. Social protection, on the other hand, refers to both contributory and non-contributory programmes. Safety nets are targeted at the poor and vulnerable (Monchuk, 2014).

In the case of Nigeria, the whole of Chapter II of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 embodies the political, economic, social, cultural and developmental rights of Nigerian citizens. The right to social security is explicitly stated, binding the state to adequately provide social security to such persons as are unable to support themselves and their dependents (Devereux, 2012; Gavrilovic and Jones, 2012).

Governments throughout the world are believed to respond to income inequality by using a set of policies to effectively help reduce social inequality and enhance social protection of citizens. Some are focused on improving household assets and human capital to improve household outcomes in the labour market, notably through investments in education; and on increasing household standards of living through areas like affordable healthcare and subsidies. In all, workers are exposed to risks, such as illness, disability, unemployment, or death, regardless of their incomes, social programmes should cover all aspect of social welfare (African Development Bank Group, 2024). However, some worker incomes may be so low as to place the workers in poverty, requiring additional programmes to increase their consumption. These social assistance programmes are by definition focused on a subset of the population, and their main objective is to redistribute income in favour of this subset. The distinction between social insurance and social assistance programmes should not imply that the former do not redistribute income. In most cases, they do (although not always in the desired direction!). Rather, the point is that, even if there were a society without poverty and thus with no need for social assistance, social insurance programmes would still be needed to pool risks among the population and protect society from negative shocks. Yet, the fact that poor workers benefit from social assistance programmes does not eliminate the need of these workers for social insurance. They face the same risks faced by non-poor workers. Clearly, it would be a mistake to think that social insurance programmes are

only for the non-poor (Barba, et al; 2020). The inadequacy of social development has led to criticism of the development strategy in Nigeria and the questioning of the effectiveness of social protection programmes in Nigeria. This is the reason why the study is quite important to determine if the social protection programmes are effective in Nigeria or not.

The main objective of this study is to determine the effect of social protection programmes on the economy of Nigeria with focus on the state of Bayelsa; with emphasis on, poverty reduction policies, social insurance schemes, gratuity/ pension payments, cash transfer programmes, equity and justice. The study tests the validity and attainability of the objective through the hypotheses that are all stated in the null form. The significance of studying the effect of social protection programmes on the growth of the Nigerian economy, lies in gaining a comprehensive understanding of poverty policies, social insurance schemes, social justice, equity and gratuities and pensions on how they affect wellbeing of Nigerians. This research can help in the enhancement of policies that will help protect citizens benefit from social welfare, foster sustainable development, and contribute to global efforts in addressing social protection short-comings. The study also provides essential insights for developing targeted social protection programmes and promoting a balanced approach to economic development that considers the social welfare strategies and economic wellbeing. The study informs scholars, students, policy to be to be very conscious about the issue of social protection and welfare. The scope of this study encompasses an in-depth examination of the effect of social protection programmes on the growth of people in Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

Literature Review

Different people, have often used social protection as the same thing with such terms as welfare, social security, safety nets or social insurance mechanism. While these terms might be part of the social protection, none of them standing alone can be said to mean social protection. Social protection can be viewed broadly as all public and private initiatives that provide income or consumption transfers to the poor, protect the vulnerable against destitution, and enhance the social status and rights of the marginalized; with the overall objective of reducing the economic and social vulnerability of the poor and marginalized groups (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler, 2004). Social protection is a multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary approach that contributes to poverty reduction, articulating policy priorities of government towards sustainable development. Social security as an aspect of social protection is the compulsory social insurance schemes financed by contributions from workers in the formal sector including civil servants. Hence, social security in this strict sense does not include informal sector workers such as agricultural workers and the self-employed.

Social Protection refers to policies and programs designed to reduce poverty and vulnerability by promoting efficient labour markets, diminishing exposure to economic and social risk and enhance individuals' capacity to manage such risks. It encompasses various mechanisms such as social insurance, social assistance and labour interventions (Barrientos, 2013). Government, international organizations and non-governmental actors implement social protection schemes to safeguard individuals and communities against economic shocks, health crisis, unemployment and aging related issues. The concept has evolved significantly over, with its economic development strategies. Components of social protection include; Social assistance and

labour market programs. Some of the objectives of social protection are; social insurance (this program require contributions from individuals, employers or the state and offer protection against risk such as unemployment, illness, disability and old age, (ILO, 2017)), labout market programs (policies that promote employment and worker protection through minimum wages, job training and public works program) and social assistance (which is a non-contributory program that is aimed at the poorest and most vulnerable, and they include cash transfer, food assistance, housing services (Devereux & Sabates-Wheeler, 2013)).

Social Inequality refers to the unequal distribution of resources, opportunities and privileges within a society. These disparities manifest in various forms, including differences in income, education, healthcare access and political representation. Social inequality is often rooted in historical, economic and institutional factors that systematically disadvantage certain groups while favouring others (Bonilla et. al, 2003). While some level of inequality exists in all societies, extreme or persistent inequality can lead to social unrest, economic inefficiencies and reduced social mobility. Addressing social inequality is a major goal of public policy, social justice movements and international development organizations (Bonilla et. al, 2003). Social inequality has different dimensions which include; economic inequality (differences in income and wealth distribution which is measured through the gini coefficient), educational inequality (unequal access to quality education based on socioeconomic status, gender or geography which leads to long term disadvantages in employment and income potential), health inequality (disparity in access to healthcare services, life expectancy and health outcomes which leads to poorer population that often experience higher rates of disease and lower life expectancy due to adequate healthcare access (Bedir, 2016), gender inequality (which implies systematic disadvantages faced by women and gender minorities in wages, political participation and social roles, which leads to gender pay gap, underrepresentation in leadership and gender-based violence (Boachie, 2016)), racial and ethnic inequality (discriminating based on race or ethnicity, leading to disparity in employment, housing, education and criminal justice) (Bonilla-Garcia, A. 2003), political inequality (unequal influence in political decision making and governance).

The effect of social protection programs depends on, how they are implementation, the way are designed to suite the society under study and the specific context in which they operate. These programs aim to reduce poverty, inequality and vulnerability by providing financial support, services or opportunities to marginalized populations. That is why social protection programmes is believed to be an important in the front burner for every economy (Barrientos, 2013). Some factors exist to help evaluate their effectiveness; inequality reduction, economic security (providing safety net during economic shocks, unemployment, crises), human capital development (promoting education, health, skill development) and social inclusion (OSECD, 2019). Some of the metrics for evaluating effectiveness of social protection programmes in Nigeria can be through; Reduction in poverty headcount ratios (variable to use include: poverty head count ratio i.e, percentage of people below the poverty line or the poverty gap index); Decrease in Gini coefficient (variables to use can be: gini coefficient or share of income held by bottom 20%); Higher employment rates or labour market participation (variables to us can be: employment rate); Increase in school enrollment and attendance rates; Income percapita; Improved income stability and reduced income shocks; Enhanced access to savings, credit or productive assets; Improved health indicators, such as immunization rates or maternal health; Enhanced productivity among

beneficiaries due to skills training; Reduced child labour and gender disparities; Dependency ratio and Government spending on social protection.

The Principle of Social Control: The Principle emphasises the important role of social control in maintaining social stability and cohesion which are necessary for the well-being of the individual and groups in a given society. Government shall consciously use appropriate social protection instruments to discourage actions that could lead to social dislocation and problems. Principle of Social Inclusiveness- demands that increasing provision be made for economic, social, political and cultural opportunities for citizens' participation in the normal activities of their society without stigma or discrimination. Government shall take necessary measures to widen access and increase participation.

The social risk management theory by Barrientos, (2000), see social protection as a way to help individuals manage risk such as unemployment, illness and old age. It classifies risks into idiosyncratic risks, covariate risks and the systematic risks although; social protection intervention can be preventive, mitigative or coping strategy and it can be applied formally and informally. Another theory that explains social protection is Welfare state theory that was proposed by Esping-Andersen (1990) asserting that social protection is part of the welfare state, where governments intervene and ensure equal opportunities and he categorized welfare states into three types which are; the liberal welfare states, conservative welfare states and the social democratic welfare state (Bedir, 2016).

Boachie (2017) investigated the influence of health on GDP in Ghana using ARDL bounds test for the period 1982-2012 whereby GDP per capita and life expectancy measure economic growth and health respectively. The result disclosed that good health positively and significantly fosters GDP at both short- and long-run. Bedir (2016) assessed the connection between income and health expenditures in some selected developing countries in Asia, Middle East African and Europe for the period 1995-2013. The results on one hand revealed a one-way causality from health to income for South Africa, Egypt, Korean Republic, Hungary, and the Philippines. On the other hand, the results also revealed causality from income to health for China, Greece and UAE among others. Meanwhile two-way causality was also found for Russia and Czech Republic. Ogunjimi and Adebayo (2019) assessed the nexus among GDP, health outcomes and health expenditure in Nigeria between 1981 and 2017 using Toda-Yamamato Causality and ARDL bound statistical test. The outcomes showed a one-way causality from health spending to infant mortality; a unidirectional causality from GDP and health spending to life expectancy and maternal mortality was found; and a causality from GDP to health expenditure was also established.

Bhargava et al. (2001) examined the impacts of adult survival rates (ASR) on economic growth. The results indicated positive impacts of ASR on GDP growth rates in low-income nations whereas the estimated impact was negative for highly developed countries. Wang (2015) using GMM estimated the optimal health care spending among the OECD between 1990 and 2009. The outcome of the study disclosed that when the percentage of health expenditure to GDP is below the optimum level of 7.55 per cent, increases in health expenditure effectively resulted in an improved economic productivity, whereas health expenditure beyond this level would not improve health care service. This study's method of data analysis that is used in this study is unique with

regards to the variable used, which will make it different from those that were used in the cited literatures as well as the scope of the study that reveals the uniqueness of this study.

Research Methodology

This study draws breath from the Social Risk Management theory by Holzmann and Jorgensen (2000), considering social protection as a way to help individuals manage risk; It classifies risks into idiosyncratic risks, covariate risks and the systematic risks although; social protection intervention can be preventive, mitigative or coping strategy. Another theory that explains social protection is Welfare state theory that was proposed by Esping-Andersen (1990) asserting that social protection is part of the welfare state, like the liberal welfare states, conservative welfare states and the social democratic welfare state.

The capability approach is another theory that helps explain social protection. This approach was propounded by Sen (1999), explaining that social protection should enhance people's capabilities and the freedom to live fulfilled. The theory emphasized that government should focus on improving people's ability to participate in economics and social life; the theory also asserts that poverty is not just about lack of income but also deprivation of opportunities. Although some other theories that can be researched future to aid a better understanding of social protection programmes in Nigeria are; the social exclusion theory, the feminist theory and the disability rights theories of social protection. The variables try to show the effectiveness of social protection programmes through the variables that are considered; poverty reduction policies, social insurance schemes, human dignity, equity and social justice, cash transfers and gratuity and pension payment. Social inequality on the flip side is often rooted in historical, economic and institutional factors that systematically causes disadvantage for certain groups while favouring others (Milanovic, 2016, World Bank 2012, UNDP 2016, ILO 2017).

Having the objective of the study as determining the effectiveness of social protection programmes which are aimed at enhancing living standard and wellbeing; the model that is specified is based on the variables used in the study. The variables used in the study are poverty reduction policies, social insurance schemes, human dignity, equity and social justice, cash transfers and gratuity and pension payment; by implication, there should be a functional link between the dependent variables and the independent variables as expressed in this model below. They can be specified as follows: **PRP** represents poverty reduction policies; **SIS** represents social insurance schemes; **HDEJ** represents human dignity, equity and social justice; **CTGPP** represents cash transfers and gratuity and pension payment.

The method of data analysis is the descriptive data analysis method due to the fact that the work is a primary data work which is for the evaluating the causal effect of one variable on the other. This is for the determination of social protection program in Nigeria. This study used primary data which will be sourced in Bayelsa state capital, Nigeria. The data of concern include government social welfare and protection programs (which are poverty reduction policies, social insurance schemes, human dignity, equity and social justice, cash transfers and gratuity and pension payment). These indicators/ variables are all in line to determine the effectiveness of social protection programmes in Nigeria. The data was sourced from primary data emanating from responses from respondents in Yenagoa, Bayelsa state.

Presentation and Analysis of Data
Presentation of Result
Responses and their percentages from distributed questionnaire (Research Question One)

S/N	Questionnaire	Respondent	Percentage (%)
1	Returned	100	64%
2	Returned but not properly filled	36	36%
3	Not Returned	0	0
	Total Distributed	100	100%

Source: Field work 2025

The data presented in table above shows that out of the 100 copies of questionnaire that were distributed 100 (100%) were returned and 36 (36%) were not properly filled.

From the analysis, the number of unemployed are majority, comprising of 96% of the total respondents whereas, the remaining 4% did not respond to the status of employment.

Research Question on Awareness and Access to Social Protection Programmes in Nigeria
Responses relating to awareness and access to social protection programmes in Nigeria

S/N	Response Variable	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
1	Yes	58	58%
2	No	20	20%
3	No response	22	22%
	Total		100%

Source: Field work 2025

The table reveals that majority of the respondents (58% of the total) are aware and have access to social protection programmes in Nigeria, while 20% of the total number of respondents are not aware and don't have access to social protection in Nigeria. Although, 22% of the respondents did not respond to the question. The respondents are more aware of education support programmes (50% of the total) while, 16% are also aware of cash transfer as a social protection programme. In respect to food subsidy, only 8% are aware of such programmes whereas, 36% of respondents are aware of health care programmes; only 4% are aware of livelihood support programme from the respondents but 26% of the respondents did not respond in respect to the awareness of social protection programmes. It is revealed that 58% identified that they have benefitted from cash transfer while, 16% responded that they are not beneficiaries of a cash transfer. For the food subsidies, healthcare programmes, educational support and livelihood support programmes; 66%, 38%, 24% and 70% are beneficiaries of these programmes, while 8%, 36%, 50% and 4% of respondents say that they are not beneficiaries to the above listed social protection programmes.

Research Question on Effectiveness of Social Protection Programmes
Responses on effectiveness of social protection programmes in addressing poverty and vulnerability; the analysis that shows the level of effectiveness of social protection programmes in addressing poverty and vulnerability of people. From the responses,14% of questionnaires were returned without any response variables on the effectiveness of these programmes in tackling

poverty and vulnerability on the first instance; 8% of responses is of the affirmation that these programmes address the challenges list. 20%, 26% and 32% responded, good, fair and poor respectively. The analysis also shows that 36% of the respondents believes that social protection enhances wellbeing, while 50% of respondents reveals that social protection does not enhance well-being of citizens. Although, 14% of the respondents did not respond to the question.

Research Question on Program Design and Implementation

Responses on the rating of the design of social protection programmes in Nigeria, the response variable; good, fair, poor and no response has responses of 18%, 24%, 34%, 24% and 24% respectively. Revealing that majority of the respondents rates the design of social protection programmes in Nigeria poorly. On the responses on the determination, if the programmes are targeted towards the most vulnerable population; it was revealed that 52% of the respondents are of the view that the social protection programmes are not targeted towards the most vulnerable population in Bayelsa state. 20% of the total respondents are of the opinion that the programmes are targeted towards the vulnerable in the society; although, 28% of the supposedly respondents did not respond to this question.

Responses on any gaps in the implementation of social protection programmes it was shown that 36% of those that responded to the affirmative of gaps that are obvious in the implementation of social programmes, while 20% are not aware of any gaps in respect to the implementation of social protection programmes in Bayelsa state. The research hypotheses stated in the first chapter is hence, tested to determine how valid they are to this study. In testing the general perception of respondents regarding the effectiveness and adequacy of social protection programmes using the data. To determine if no relationship exists between social protection progrannes and economic growth in Nigeria, the null hypotheses were tested and the result gotten was confirmed that observed and expected responses have a significant difference.

The Chi-square (X^2) = 466.2+366.7+132=964.9, given the degree of freedom as 2 and a 0.05 significant level, the critical value is 5.991. The null hypothesis will be rejected because the calculated value is > the critical value (964.9>5.991). There is a statistically significant differences in how respondents perceive the social protection programmes. This suggests strong dissatisfaction or varied awareness and experience among respondents; Poverty policies and programmes, social insurance schemes, Human dignity and social justice, Cash transfer effectiveness, Pension and gratuity impact. Thus, the social protection programmes are largely perceived as inadequate and ineffective by the respondents.

Result Discussion

To evaluate the validity of the hypothesis from the objective outlined in the earlier section, a Chi-square (X^2) test of independence was conducted. The objective was to determine whether there is a significant difference in the responses of participants regarding the effectiveness, adequacy, and accessibility of social protection programmes in Nigeria. The hypotheses which state that; there are significant relationship between responses/ opinions concerning the adequacy and effectiveness of social protection programmes in Nigeria.

The result of the Chi-square test reveals that there is a statistically significant difference in the respondents' perceptions and experiences regarding social protection programmes in Nigeria. This indicates that a majority of respondents perceive these programmes as adequate, poorly designed and ineffective in addressing poverty, promoting social justice and improving wellbeing.

The findings support the research hypotheses that current social protection mechanisms do not significantly impact the livelihoods of the population, particularly in Bayelsa State.

The findings of this study, reveal significant gaps in the awareness, design, accessibility, and effectiveness of social protection programmes in Nigeria. The following policy implications emerge:

1. Reassessment and Strengthening of Social Protection Policies: There is a pressing need for federal and state governments to reassess existing social protection frameworks. The overwhelming perception of ineffectiveness and poor design suggests that current strategies do not adequately target or benefit the most vulnerable groups. Policymakers must ensure that social protection programmes are needs-based, inclusive, and context-specific.

2. Improved Targeting Mechanisms: With 52% of respondents indicating that programmes are not directed toward the most vulnerable, government agencies should adopt more data-driven targeting tools (e.g., community-based targeting, proxy means testing) to enhance accuracy in identifying beneficiaries, especially in states like Bayelsa where poverty remains high.

3. Transparency and Accountability: the study reveals a considerable level of public skepticism regarding the administration of these programmes. To build trust, greater transparency and accountability mechanisms -such as digital tracking of funds, independent adults, and community monitoring – should be institutionalized in the implementation of social protection schemes.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, while social protection remains a critical policy tool for addressing poverty and inequality in Nigeria, its current structure and implementation fall short of expectations. Without meaningful reform, the promise of social protection will remain largely unfulfilled for the majority of vulnerable Nigerians. Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made to enhance the design, implementation, and impact of social protection programmes in Nigeria:

Review and Strengthen Social Protection Frameworks: There is a critical need for policy makers at the federal and state levels to undertake a comprehensive review of existing social protection programmes. The focus should be on aligning policies with the real needs of vulnerable populations, especially in economically challenged states like Bayelsa. Improve targeting mechanisms: The government should adopt more effective targeting strategies to ensure that benefits reach the most vulnerable groups. This includes using community-based approaches, poverty mapping, and digital registries to accurately identify and reach intended beneficiaries.

Raise awareness and promote pubic sensitization: Many respondents indicated a lack of awareness about existing programmes. Therefore, awareness campaigns using radio, local community outreach, religious institutions, and schools should be intensified to educate citizens about their rights and access channels to available social protection schemes. Expand programmes coverage and diversification: The concentration of support on education and healthcare should be complemented with programmes such as: conditional and unconditional cash transfers, food subsidies, skills acquisition and livelihood empowerment, social pensions for the elderly and

persons with disabilities. This will help to diversify support and address the multidimensional nature of poverty.

Establish Feedback and Grievance Redress Mechanisms: To promote inclusiveness and continual improvement, there should be clear and accessible platforms for beneficiaries to provide feedback and report grievances regarding services delivery or exclusion from benefits. Institutionalize monitoring and evaluation: A robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework should be established to assess programme outcomes, identify implementation gaps, and provide data to inform evidence-based policy adjustments. These recommendations, if implemented effectively, will contribute significantly to improving the impact of social protection programmes in Nigeria and help in advancing the country's goals and help in advancing the country's goals of poverty reduction, social justice and inclusive development.

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