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Research Paper

Neo-Liberalism and Theoretical Explanation of Poverty in Africa: The Nigerian Perspective.

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Abstract
Neo-liberalismcharacterised the revival of 19th-century concepts linked to laissez-faire economic liberalism, promotes open markets, free trade, and less government involvement in the economy. Following worldwide trends and influenced by international financial organisations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Nigeria enacted several neo-liberal policies during the 1980s. These measures include liberalising the economy, deregulating the oil industry, and privatising state-owned businesses, developments that have continued to shape socioeconomic complexities in the countries impacting wellbeing of the people including poverty index. This paper used dependency theory as its theoretical foundation to discuss how neoliberalism has impacted the pace of poverty in Nigeria. Using secondary data, the paper argued thatwhereas neoliberal policies have boosted economic growth, poverty and inequality have also increased as a result of them. Neoliberal policies like fiscal austerity and privatisation have disproportionately impacted rural and marginalised communities, resulting in an unequal distribution of wealth and a strengthening of poverty cycles. Furthermore, efforts to reduce poverty have been hampered by the focus on foreign investment over important industries like small-scale manufacturing and agriculture. Despite their distinct circumstances, Ghana, South Africa, and Kenya are among the other African nations that face comparable difficulties. These results underlined the necessity of a more comprehensive strategy for development that tackles systemic problems and gives localised approaches to poverty alleviation as top priority.

Keywords: *Dependency, Inequality, Neoliberalism, Poverty, Socioeconomic Impact*

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I. Introduction

Due to the complexity of the issue and the variety of approaches used to solve it, poverty in Africa, with a focus on Nigeria, has garnered a great deal of attention. Neo-liberal policies have been a famous and controversial strategy among these (Odili, 2019). Since the late 20th century, international economic policies have been greatly impacted by the well-known economic and political ideology known as neoliberalism. Numerous countries throughout the world, including Africa, have embraced its ideas of deregulation, free-market capitalism, and cutting back on government expenditure. Neoliberal approaches have been at the heart of economic reforms and development initiatives in Nigeria, the largest economy in Africa, since the mid-1980s (Ekanade, 2014).

Nigeria is a key illustration of the effects of neoliberalism in Africa due to its abundance of resources and diverse people. Nigeria's economy has seen tremendous changes since the Structural Adjustment

Programme (SAP) was adopted in 1986, with the help of international financial organisations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Babawale et al. 1996; Abah and Naankiel, 2016). Through market liberalisation, the privatisation of state-owned businesses, and a decrease in government intervention in the economy, these changes were intended to improve economic efficiency and growth (Mkandawire, 2001; Stiglitz, 2002). Nigeria has had modest economic improvement, but the country still faces significant poverty and inequality. Nearly 133 million people, or 63% of the overall population, live in multidimensional poverty, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). The National MPI of 0.257 shows that slightly more than 25% of all potential deprivations are experienced by the poor in Nigeria. This figure serves as a sobering reminder that despite decades of different economic policies and interventions, poverty is still a problem. Nigeria is a relevant case study for analysing the consequences of neoliberal policy because of this contradiction.

Neo-liberalism, a word used to characterise the revival of 19th-century concepts linked to laissez-faire economic liberalism, promotes open markets, free trade, and less government involvement in the economy (Harvey, 2005). Following worldwide trends and influenced by international financial organisations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Nigeria enacted several neo-liberal policies during the 1980s. These measures include liberalising the economy, deregulating the oil industry, and privatising state-owned businesses (Rodrik, 2006).

One cannot stress the topic's importance to current problems in Nigeria. Nigeria, as the biggest economy in Africa, sets trends that impact not only its populace but the entire region through the economic methods it employs. The fact that poverty rates are still high despite neo-liberal reforms raises concerns about how well these policies are working to promote economic growth and development that benefits all societal strata.

The goal of this paper is to critically examine how neo-liberalism has shaped Nigeria's poor situation. Its goal is to evaluate the theoretical bases of neo-liberal policies as well as their actual effects, especially in reducing poverty. Reviewing the neo-liberal policies that Nigeria embraced, how they were put into practice, and the ensuing socioeconomic shifts are all included in this examination. In addition, the study will look at other theories and models that might be more appropriate for addressing the subtleties of poverty in Nigeria.

By doing this, the paper hopes to show that although neo-liberal policies have been pushed as a means of achieving economic progress and prosperity, their effect on poverty in Nigeria has not been entirely positive. It will contend that market-driven initiatives have the potential to deepen inequality and marginalise disadvantaged communities and that these policies frequently ignore the socioeconomic realities of emerging nations like Nigeria.

Despite their stated goal of promoting economic development, this study contends that neoliberal policies have not successfully solved Nigeria's poverty issue. Rather, these measures have frequently exacerbated social stratification and raised inequality, which makes poverty more difficult to overcome. The analysis will show that in the absence of strong social policies that guarantee the equitable distribution of economic gains, the neoliberal concentration on market-driven growth is insufficient.

The paper is concerned with neo-liberalism and theoretical explanation of poverty in Africa: the Nigerian perspective. To do this, the research adopts a qualitative method. This method involves the summary, collation and synthesis of existing literature which includes previous research reports, newspapers, journals, books as well as government and poll statistics. Thus, the study design is historical in approach.

II. Literature Review

According to the economic philosophy of neoliberalism, the government should have little influence on the economy. Neoliberalism's origins can be found in the early 20th century. Certain economists began advocating for the notion that the best method to manage an economy is through free markets, in which individuals can freely trade goods and services with minimal interference from the government (Chikozho. and Mapedza, 2017). They held that everyone benefits more from having the freedom to make their own decisions.

Concepts of neoliberalism were popular in the 1970s and 1980s. Many nations were dealing with economic issues at the time, such as high inflation and sluggish growth. Milton Friedman was a prominent economist in the neoliberal movement's growth. Friedman promoted little government involvement in the economy in his seminal book "Capitalism and Freedom" (1962). He thought that the greatest way to distribute resources and advance personal freedom was through free markets. Friedrich Hayek, the 1974 winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics, was another significant person. The 1944 book "The Road to Serfdom" by Friedrich Hayek promoted laissez-faire capitalism and cautioned against the perils of central planning.

In the 1980s, neoliberal ideas gained popularity, especially with the support of politicians like as Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan in the US (Peters, 2023). These leaders put into effect measures including tax reductions, industry liberalisation, and the privatisation of state-owned businesses.Neoliberalism's proponents contend that it has brought prosperity and economic growth to numerous nations. They cite nations like the UK and the US as instances where neoliberal policies are credited with bringing stagnant economies back to life. Nonetheless, detractors contend that neoliberalism has moreover resulted in heightened poverty and inequality (Feldman, 2019; Lane, 2023). They cite instances where financial crises have resulted from deregulatory measures, including the global financial crisis of 2008. Critics contend that the privatisation of basic services, such as healthcare and water, may result in increased costs and restricted access for the impoverished.

Neoliberalism has a few key principles:

Free Markets: Neoliberals believe that markets should be free from government interference. They think that when businesses compete without restrictions, it leads to better products and lower prices for consumers.

Limited Government: Neoliberals argue that governments should have a smaller role in the economy. They believe that too much government involvement can stifle innovation and entrepreneurship.

Individual Responsibility: Neoliberalism emphasizes individual responsibility. People are expected to take care of themselves and their families without relying too much on government support.

Privatization: Neoliberal policies often involve privatizing state-owned industries. This means selling off government-owned businesses to private companies, who are then responsible for running them.

Since the 1980s, Nigeria's economic landscape has been largely shaped by neoliberal policies, with structural adjustment programmes, or SAPs, playing a major role. The World Bank's proposals had a big impact on these policies, which President Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida's military administration implemented in 1987. Through the promotion of privatisation, trade liberalisation, and fiscal restraint, SAPs sought to transform Nigeria's economy. According to Marshall (2022), the purpose of these policies was to lessen reliance on public money while increasing the influence of the private sector and market forces.

Several state-funded initiatives aimed at reducing poverty were launched by succeeding Nigerian governments to lessen the social costs connected with the adoption of SAP. The World Bank recommended supplementary measures to address the social implications of SAPs, and several programs—such as the Better Life Programme for Rural Women and the Directorate of Food and Rural Road Infrastructure—were in line with those suggestions. But over time, poverty rates kept rising even with large investments in these initiatives.

According to Marshall (2022), despite the introduction of SAPs and pro-poor initiatives, there was an unsettling trend in Nigeria's poverty rate. Before SAP was implemented in 1980, the poverty rate was 28.1%; by 1985, it had increased to 46.3%. The poverty rate only slightly dropped to 42.7% by 1992 despite six years of SAP installation, before skyrocketing to 96.1% in 1996. Nigeria had an astounding 70% poverty rate by the time Chief Olusegun Obasanjo took office in 1999. This trend continued into 2021, garnering Nigeria the awful moniker of the "poverty capital of the world."

SAPs were intended to stimulate the private sector, but due to the misappropriation of public finances, many of the monies ended up in overseas investments and Swiss bank accounts, and the real implementation failed. This misappropriation of funding reduced SAPs' efficacy and ultimately led to their demise, which the World Bank allegedly predicted.

Neoliberal practices were further entrenched in Nigeria under President Obasanjo's administration. Following his government election, Obasanjo launched many new pro-poor initiatives, such as the National Poverty Eradication Programme and the Poverty Alleviation Programme, both of which received support from foreign organisations like the Food and Agricultural Organisation and the World Bank. To coordinate his administration's efforts against poverty, President Obasanjo presented the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) in 2003. This approach placed a strong emphasis on the privatisation, deregulation, and liberalisation of the private sector as a means of fostering economic development driven by the private sector and restructuring public institutions for increased efficiency and transparency.All things considered, Nigeria's experience with neoliberalism, as demonstrated by SAPs and later policies, highlights the difficulties and complexities involved in putting market-driven economic reforms into practice in the setting of developing nations.

According to Mbah et al. (2023), Nigeria's neoliberal economic policies have failed, and as a result, there has been a rise in criminal activity there. They contend that neoliberal economic policies like deregulation, privatisation, and the elimination of government subsidies weaken the foundation of the Nigerian economy and consequently fuel crime nationwide. Although criminal activity is closely linked to neoliberal states, deregulation and privatisation have made it easier to create a large pool of unemployed labour by undermining local creativity and established industries. This helps to explain Nigeria's extreme economic marginalisation as well as the stagnant pool that is marked by extreme poverty.

Neoliberal feminism and Africa were examined by Akinbobola (2019), with an emphasis on Nigeria. Neoliberal feminism, according to Akinbobola, is more likely to be accepted in Nigeria than some of the other feminisms that are currently in vogue. This is because its high rates of unemployment and poverty have encouraged an entrepreneurial mindset that is more individualised and, in some ways, consistent with this kind of feminism.

The neoliberal economic nexus, which offers a broad perspective and a heuristically excellent foundation for explaining the intensity and seeming intractability of the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, was examined by Aloysius-Michaels et al. (2020). The paper makes the case—based on dialectic theory—that the neoliberal economy imposed a dysfunctional system on the populace that was unable to offer social safety nets, high-quality education, and reasonably priced healthcare. The state's subsequent inability to provide civilians with basic amenities surely created a depressing environment that was ideal for the emergence of the Boko Haram insurgency.

According to Anazonwu (2023), children in neoliberal Nigeria are not taken care of by social safety nets because of a gap in policy implementation caused by the adoption of neoliberal economic policies. The rate at which children are excluded and integrated in the areas of education, health, protection, nutrition, and overall well-being has increased as a result of these gaps. This is mostly because neoliberal policies prioritise increasing market forces, promoting free competition, improving mass production, drawing in foreign investment, and maximising consumption—all of which hurt the welfare and development of children.

Okolie (2022) investigated how Nigeria's COVID-19 management was impacted by neoliberalism. Neoliberalism hindered provisioning and social investment projects because of its focus on privatisation and austerity. Nigeria's health sector was severely hindered by privatisation, which resulted in the demise of public health institutions and the growth of unofficial and commercial health delivery systems. It damaged the health of impoverished Nigerians, restricted access to high-quality healthcare for all, and made the health system unable to handle emergency medical emergencies like COVID-19. The lack of well-coordinated social investment initiatives to lessen the effects of the lockdown led to an increase in social inequality and hardship because it was harder for those in the informal economy to adhere to the Covid-19 recommendations. In reaction, the government enforced the rules with repression.

Theoretical Framework

Dependency theory is applied in this investigation. A critical paradigm known as dependency theory looks at the link between established and emerging nations, emphasising how the latter rely on the former for economic development and progress. According to this theory, the underdevelopment of nations in the global South, like Nigeria, is caused by their integration into the global capitalist system, which upholds economic exploitation and dependency, rather than internal shortcomings (Randall and Theobald, 1998).

According to dependency theory, structural and historical causes have trapped states like Nigeria in a cycle of dependence on wealthier countries. These elements include unfair trade practices, colonialism, and the predominance of multinational firms in the world economy. Dependency theorists contend that because the capitalist system is marked by uneven exchange and income distribution, it keeps developing nations like Nigeria impoverished by ensuring that their interests are subordinated to those of the global North (Ake, 2002).

Frank (1950) was a leading proponent of dependence theory, contending that the global North's progress is to blame for the underdevelopment in the global South. Frank highlighted how imperialism shaped developing nations' economic systems, arguing that their integration into the world economy serves the core capitalist nations at the price of the developing nations' progress. Dependency theory sheds light on how Nigeria's economy is influenced by its ties to richer countries and global economic institutions, particularly from a neoliberal perspective.

Neoliberalism, which emphasises free market ideas and little government interference, has made Nigeria even more dependent on commerce, investment, and help from abroad, which has made internal poverty worse.

One important component of Nigeria's economic dependency is its reliance on foreign aid. International organisations and donor nations frequently provide aid to the nation to solve a range of development issues, including poverty. But frequently, this assistance is contingent on neoliberal policies that give priority to market liberalisation, deregulation, and privatisation. Even while these reforms are meant to spur economic progress, they frequently worsen poverty and create inequality by enriching elites and multinational firms at the expense of the underprivileged.

Moreover, Nigeria's reliance on wealthier countries has been sustained by its inclusion into the global economy through trade and investment. The economy of the nation is mostly dependent on the export of natural resources, such as oil, which account for a sizeable amount of its GDP. The terms of trade are frequently unfavourable, though, with Nigeria paying less for its exports than it does for the value-added goods it imports. This unequal exchange restricts the nation's capacity to create income and make investments in infrastructure and social services, which helps to ensure that poverty persists.

Additionally, extractive industries and other sectors that don't always support sustainable development or the reduction of poverty tend to receive the majority of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Nigeria. FDI inflows, on the other hand, have the potential to worsen social inequality, environmental damage, and economic instability, further marginalising disadvantaged groups, and extending poverty.

In essence, dependence theory emphasises Nigeria's economic reliance on wealthier countries and international economic institutions, offering a useful framework for comprehending poverty in the country from a neoliberal standpoint. Policymakers may create more equitable and long-lasting plans for combating poverty and advancing inclusive development by looking at how Nigeria's reliance on foreign commerce, investment, and aid exacerbates poverty and continues its underdevelopment.

Socioeconomic Impact of Neoliberalism Polices in Nigeria

Over the past few decades, the implementation of neoliberal policies has had a considerable impact on the socioeconomic landscape of Nigeria. Neoliberal policies are criticised for their detrimental impact on social welfare, poverty, and inequality, while its supporters contend that these policies promote economic growth and progress.

Nigeria's economic growth has been linked to neoliberal policies, especially during the 2000s when liberalisation and oil income drove the country's economy. Nonetheless, there have been notable differences in this rise between various socioeconomic categories and between urban and rural locations (Olajide and Lawrence, 2022). Neoliberal policies have helped some demographic groups and urban centres, but they have frequently left rural areas and marginalised communities behind. This unequal growth distribution has made poverty in some areas worse and maintained existing inequities.

Neoliberalism's concentration on foreign investment at the expense of businesses like small-scale manufacturing and agriculture, which are essential for reducing poverty, is one of the main complaints levelled at it in Nigeria. For example, efforts to reduce poverty in rural regions have been hampered by the neglect of agriculture, which employs the majority of Nigerians (Ogunlela and Ogungbile, 2016). Neoliberal policies have prioritised large-scale agribusiness and export-oriented cash crops above smallholder farmers and agricultural development. This has made many small-scale farmers impoverished and contributed to the downfall of rural economies.

In a similar vein, the emphasis on luring in foreign capital has frequently led to the disregard for indigenous sectors (Osemene, Kolawole and Olanipekun, 2017). In a market dominated by multinational corporations, small and medium-sized firms (SMEs), which are vital to the creation of jobs and the elimination of poverty, have found it difficult to compete.

Another feature of neoliberalism is the privatisation of state-owned businesses, which has caused job losses and created economic instability for many Nigerians (Akinwale, 2014). The economy has been restructured as a result of this. Although some people have benefited from these policies, others have lost their jobs, labour has become more informal, and working conditions have become unstable. Vulnerability to poverty has been made worse by the absence of social safety nets and lax labour laws, especially for the urban poor and those employed in the unorganised sector (Adamaagashi, 2023).

Many people now work in positions that aren't protected or formally recognised as a result of these changes. Their work is now riskier and more uncertain as a result. Additionally, it implies that they are less likely to have access to retirement benefits or healthcare. Those who already struggle to make ends meet in cities and those employed in the informal economy are typically the ones most impacted by this. The lack of strict regulations ensuring that workers receive fair treatment and have certain rights is one of the main issues. Workers are more likely to be taken advantage of or treated poorly in the absence of these safeguards. Equally, without safety nets like unemployment benefits, losing a job can push someone and their family into poverty pretty quickly.

Therefore, although Nigeria's economy has changed somewhat as a result of neoliberal policies, these changes haven't all been favourable. They've made it more difficult for a lot of folks to get steady, secure employment. Families and communities may be greatly impacted by this, becoming even more impoverished.

In Nigeria, the neoliberal agenda has also placed a higher priority on fiscal austerity and lowered government spending on social services like social protection, healthcare, and education. The impoverished, who significantly depend on public services for their fundamental needs, have been disproportionately impacted by this (Mbah, 2014). According to Anazonwu, Mbah, and Ajaero (2023), the implementation of user fees and cost recovery mechanisms has impeded the availability of necessary services, hence intensifying access disparities and prolonging poverty cycles.

The main takeaway from this is that fewer individuals receive the assistance they require when the government invests less in programmes like healthcare and education. Imagine that you are ill, but the cost of visiting a doctor is too much for you to afford. Or you wish to enrol your children in school, but all of a sudden you find yourself unable to pay the additional fees. It's unfair and perpetuates the cycle of poverty for those who are impoverished. In summary, Nigeria's already limited finances for social services are being further squeezed by neoliberal policies. Because they depend on these services the most, the poorest people are most affected.

The government is making it much harder for people to escape poverty by raising the cost of necessities like healthcare and education.

One of the main complaints is that the bulk of Nigerians have been left behind by neoliberal policies, which have largely benefited a tiny number of rich individuals. These policies have resulted in the concentration of wealth among a privileged few rather than improving the lot of the populace as a whole (Koechlin, 2013). Odili (2019), who emphasises how neoliberal techniques have given preference to the growth of wealth among a chosen elite, while leaving others struggling to improve their economic circumstances, supports this point of view.

Furthermore, the demands of society's most vulnerable citizens have frequently been overlooked in favour of market-driven solutions. Neoliberalism's key tenets of trade liberalisation and structural adjustment programmes have made industries like agriculture vulnerable to fierce international competition. The local producers, many of whom are already impoverished, have suffered as a result. Due to the disruption of traditional livelihoods and the displacement of local producers, these policies have made rural poverty worse.

Neoliberal ideas have essentially had a significant socioeconomic impact on Nigeria, with varying degrees of success in reducing poverty. Although these measures have aided in times of economic expansion, they have also made poverty cycles more persistent, increased inequality, and jeopardised social welfare. In the future, a more balanced strategy that gives social justice, inclusive development, and poverty reduction tactics specific to Nigeria's circumstances top priority is required.

Comparative Analysis of Impact of Neoliberal Policies on Poverty in Africa.

a. Ghana

Neoliberal policies have been included in Ghana's economic reform programme, just like they have in Nigeria. These measures consist of market liberalisation, deregulation, and privatisation. Ghana's high rates of poverty persist despite early economic progress and advancements in macroeconomic metrics like GDP growth and decreased inflation. About 23.4% of Ghanaians were estimated by the World Bank to be living below the poverty level as of 2020 (World Bank, 2021).

Despite having different backgrounds, Ghana and Nigeria share several problems that should be considered while comparing the two nations. Both countries have a history of colonial domination, a diversified population, and abundant natural resources. These parallels imply that their different socioeconomic backgrounds are not the only reason for the disparities in their poverty levels. The unequal distribution of income is one reason why poverty persists in both Ghana and Nigeria despite neoliberal changes (Oluwadara, 2022). The advantages of these measures haven't been distributed equally throughout society, even though they may have boosted economic growth. Rather, many more have been left behind as money and opportunities have consolidated in the hands of a select few.

Furthermore, market forces are frequently given precedence over social welfare programmes in neoliberal policy. Because those who are already disadvantaged may find it difficult to compete in a deregulated and privatised economy, this concentration on market mechanisms may worsen inequality. Vulnerable groups face the dangers of poverty and unstable economies in the absence of sufficient safety nets and support networks. The effect of outside pressures on the economies of Ghana and Nigeria should also be taken into account. International financial institutions and developments in the world market have a significant impact on both nations. This implies that although neoliberal changes have boosted economic development, they have not been adequate to considerably reduce poverty.

B. South Africa

Another fascinating example of neoliberalism in Africa is South Africa. Neoliberal policies were implemented in South Africa after apartheid ended to bring in foreign investment and integrate the nation into the global economy. But even with the most developed economy on the continent, South Africa still has severe problems with inequality and poverty.

Additionally, both nations have significant unemployment rates, which exacerbates poverty. Millions of South Africans are unable to find steady work due to the country's abnormally high unemployment rate. A sizeable section of the population lived in poverty as of 2021, with the official unemployment rate being 34.4%, according to Statistics South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2021). This demonstrates how ineffective neoliberal approaches are at resolving systemic problems like inequality and unemployment. Similar issues with unemployment plague Nigeria, particularly among its youth population.

Furthermore, the social welfare systems in South Africa and Nigeria have suffered as a result of the adoption of neoliberal policies. Public services, including healthcare and education, have frequently deteriorated as a result of privatisation and deregulation, disproportionately harming the poor. For instance, Nigeria's poor public healthcare system results in pervasive health inequities and restricted access to necessary medical care

(World Bank, 2021). In a similar vein, inequality in South Africa's access to high-quality education contributes to poverty cycles (Statistics South Africa, 2021).

c. Kenya

Neoliberalism has also been adopted by Kenya as a component of its economic development plan. To entice foreign investment and foster economic growth, the nation has embraced privatisation, trade liberalisation, and fiscal austerity measures. Nonetheless, Kenya faces pervasive poverty and inequality, just like Nigeria. About 36.1% of Kenyans were estimated to be living below the poverty level as of 2020 by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). This suggests that poverty is still a problem even in the face of economic liberalisation attempts.

Kenya's experience highlights the shortcomings of neoliberalism in combating inequality and poverty. Adopting such policies attempts to boost economic growth and draw in foreign investment, but they frequently don't result in real changes to people's lives, especially for those who are impoverished. The issue of inequality presents a significant commonality between Kenya and Nigeria. Even with the adoption of neoliberal policies, there is still a great deal of income inequality in both nations. For instance, there are still wealth distribution gaps in Kenya, where a tiny minority of people own a sizable share of the nation's resources (Bigsten and others, 2016).

The necessity for a reevaluation of economic policy is shown by the fact that poverty and inequality still exist in Kenya and Nigeria despite their adoption of neoliberalism. Although market-oriented methods are given priority under neoliberalism, structural problems including social exclusion, lack of access to healthcare and education, and insufficient social safety nets are becoming increasingly important to address.

The comparative analysis of Nigeria with Ghana, South Africa, and Kenya reveals several important insights regarding the relationship between neoliberal policies and poverty in Africa:

Economic Growth vs. Poverty Reduction: Neoliberal reforms may boost economic expansion, but poverty alleviation is not always a result of them. Prolonged poverty and inequality are associated with high rates of economic growth, indicating that the advantages of this expansion are not shared equally.

Structural Challenges: The fundamental structural problems that underlie neoliberal policies—such as unemployment, inequality, and limited access to essential services—are frequently ignored. Due to the underlying nature of these problems, broader solutions other than market-oriented changes are needed.

Governance and Implementation: The ability of governance and the methods used for implementation determine how successful neoliberal programmes are. Reforms may not have the desired effects if there is corruption, a lack of accountability, or weak institutional structures.

The comparative analysis highlights the intricate connection between poverty and neoliberalism in Africa since Nigeria faces comparable difficulties to other nations that have adopted comparable economic strategies. Neoliberal reforms have not been adequate to successfully address poverty, even though they may spur economic growth. Nigerian poverty must be addressed with a multidimensional strategy that emphasises inclusive growth plans, strengthens governance, and addresses systemic problems.

III. Conclusions

Neoliberal policies have had a significant and intricate effect on poverty in Nigeria. Despite the claims of supporters that these measures foster economic expansion, the data points to a different picture. Even during times of economic growth, not everyone in society has benefited equally. Rather, neoliberalism has made social welfare issues worse, increased poverty in some areas, and widened gaps in already existing inequities.

The emphasis on drawing in foreign capital has frequently come at the expense of important industries like small-scale and agricultural businesses, which are essential for reducing poverty. Especially in rural areas where most Nigerians live, ignoring these industries has impeded efforts to reduce poverty. Vulnerable communities have been further marginalised by the privatisation of state-owned businesses, which has also resulted in job losses and exacerbated economic instability. In addition, the impoverished have been disproportionately impacted by fiscal austerity measures and decreased governmental spending on social services, which has made it more difficult for them to obtain social assistance, healthcare, and education. This lack of access exacerbates inequality and prolongs cycles of poverty.

Despite the implementation of neoliberal reforms, a comparative comparison with other African nations, including Ghana, South Africa, and Kenya, indicates comparable patterns of enduring poverty and inequality. These results highlight the shortcomings of neoliberalism in tackling systemic problems and the necessity of reassessing economic strategies to give priority to social justice, inclusive development, and poverty reduction tactics that are appropriate for Nigeria.

In summary, neoliberal policies have not been successful in reducing poverty and inequality, even though they may have aided in Nigeria's economic progress. Going forward, a more balanced strategy that targets the underlying causes of poverty and gives priority to the needs of society's most vulnerable citizens is desperately needed.

Recommendation

1. **Inclusive Policy Formulation:** In light of the detrimental impact of neoliberal policies on poverty in Nigeria, inclusive development solutions ought to be given top priority by policymakers. This entails taking into account the demands of all societal groups, with a focus on marginalised and rural people in particular. The government can guarantee that economic progress benefits everyone, not just a chosen few, by concentrating on businesses like small-scale and agricultural sectors, which are essential for reducing poverty.
2. **Support for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs):** Large multinational firms have been given preference over small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria under neoliberal policies. Policies supporting SMEs should be put in place by policymakers to rectify this imbalance and encourage inclusive growth. This can entail giving SMEs access to financing, technical support, and market connections so they can compete more successfully in the global economy.
3. **Investment in Social Services:** The impoverished in Nigeria have been disproportionately impacted by the decrease in state investment in social services like healthcare and education. The government ought to give social service spending priority to lessen the negative effects of neoliberal changes on poverty. This would entail boosting financing for public hospitals and schools as well as putting policies in place to guarantee that everyone, regardless of financial level, has access to basic services.
4. **Strengthening Labor Regulations:** Neoliberal policies' in formalization of labour and unstable working conditions have made people more susceptible to poverty, particularly the urban poor and those employed in the informal sector. Legislators should make sure that workers have access to social protections like healthcare and retirement benefits in addition to tightening labour laws to address this. The government can assist in keeping workers out of poverty by protecting their rights and preventing employment insecurity and exploitation.
5. **Reevaluation of Economic Policies:** The failure of neoliberalism to effectively combat poverty and inequality is demonstrated by the experiences of other African nations, such as Ghana, South Africa, and Kenya. Nigeria's economic policies need to be reevaluated in light of these difficulties. Rather than concentrating just on market-driven solutions, policymakers should take into account alternative strategies that give social equity and poverty reduction top priority. To address the underlying causes of poverty, this may entail taking a more balanced strategy that combines targeted interventions with market mechanisms.

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