



TACKLING THE POVERTY PARADOX IN A 'WEALTHY NATION'

Communique Issued at the 31st Annual LAPO Development Forum held on October 24, 2024, at the Abuja Continental Hotel, Abuja.

Preamble

The 31st edition of the **Annual LAPO Development Forum**, organized by the **Lift Above Poverty Organisation (LAPO)**, took place on October 24th, 2024, with the theme "Paradox of Poverty in a 'Wealthy Nation': Policy Issues & Perspectives." His Excellency, Chief John Odigie-Oyegun, CON chaired the forum, with Mr. Andrew Mamedu, Country Director of ActionAid Nigeria, delivering the keynote address. The Honourable Minister of State, Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, Sen. Aliyu Sabi Abdullahi, CON, who was represented by the Special Adviser, Cooperative and Farmers Welfare, Hon. Victor Oyegoke attended as the Special Guest of Honour.

The forum attracted participants from diverse sectors, including government, civil society, development partners, diplomatic missions, academia, and the private sector. The deliberations produced the following 10-point communiqué:

10-Point Communiqué

1. Urgency of Multidimensional Poverty Eradication

Poverty remains a persistent challenge in Nigeria, demanding a comprehensive policy and economic reform agenda. Collaboration between the government, private sector, and civil society is essential to empower vulnerable populations through social protection initiatives.

2. Commendation of LAPO's Innovative Efforts

The forum lauded **LAPO's** pioneering contributions in micro-insurance, micro-leasing, and rural healthcare through the Benin Medical Care facility and the Community-based Cancer project. These initiatives have significantly impacted 1.7 million Nigerians, enhancing access to healthcare, financial services, and social protection.

3. Harnessing Nigeria's Agricultural Potential

Agriculture, as a key pillar of the Nigerian economy, plays a vital role in poverty alleviation and food security. The forum called for targeted support to smallholder farmers through improved access to finance, infrastructure, and markets to unlock the sector's full potential. This

includes grant support to fresh graduates to engage in commercial agriculture.

4. Policy Continuity and Sustainable Reforms

Participants emphasized the need for consistent policy implementation across successive administrations. The frequent policy discontinuation in Nigeria was identified as a barrier to sustainable poverty reduction, undermining long-term development programmes.

5. Strengthening Social Protection Programmes

There was a call for expanding social safety nets like conditional cash transfers and food bank initiatives to address the immediate needs of the poor. A transparent monitoring and evaluation system was recommended to ensure effective implementation.

6. Promoting Entrepreneurship and Vocational Education

The forum recommended integrating entrepreneurial training into Nigeria's education system to equip young people with the skills required for economic independence. Supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) will foster sustainable livelihoods and reduce youth unemployment.

7. Diversifying the Economy Beyond Oil

The forum stressed the need to shift focus from oil dependence towards developing SMEs and the non-oil sectors, particularly agriculture, technology, and manufacturing, to promote inclusive economic growth.

8. Reducing Governance Costs and Enhancing Accountability

The forum stated that the current presidential system of government is unwieldy and expensive and therefore advocated a return to regional government. It called for deliberate efforts to reduce the high cost of governance and promote accountability even as it urged citizens to engage actively in governance processes and take advantage of local government autonomy to improve grassroots development.

9. Empowering Marginalized Communities

The forum stressed the importance of inclusive policies that prioritize the most vulnerable groups, including women, persons with disabilities, and youths. The

experience of ActionAid Nigeria and **LAPO** in supporting community development was cited as a model for bridging inequality gaps.

10. Collaborative Action for Sustainable Development

Participants called for increased collaboration between government, civil society, and the private sector. **LAPO** and other development actors were encouraged to continue fostering evidence-based dialogues to shape pro-poor policies and programmes.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The 31st Annual **LAPO** Development Forum reaffirmed the need for urgent, sustained, and collaborative action to tackle poverty in Nigeria. As the world strives to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Nigeria must integrate inclusive policies that address the root causes of poverty.

To achieve lasting progress, the forum recommended:

1. **Strengthening social protection programmes** with transparent monitoring frameworks.

2. **Revamping industries and infrastructure** to reduce youth unemployment.

3. **Fostering entrepreneurship and vocational education** at all levels.

4. **Shifting economic focus** from oil to SMEs and agricultural enterprises.

5. **Increasing civic participation** to hold government accountable.

6. **Addressing the challenges of insecurity** and farmer-header conflicts which is currently hindering Nigeria's agricultural development.

Finally, **LAPO** was encouraged to deepen its investments in SME support, expand its empowerment programmes, and collaborate with stakeholders to implement innovative approaches for sustainable development. The forum emphasized that with coordinated efforts; Nigeria can bridge the poverty gap, achieve inclusive growth, and secure a prosperous future for all citizens.

Signed:

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