

## Towards The Harmonization of Social Protection System in Nigeria: The Quest for Social Inclusion

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**Abstract:** President MuhammaduBuhari Administration is committed to the attainment of social inclusion in Nigeria, which entails investing in social programmes and amenities in support of the poorest and vulnerable members of the society. The recently adopted National Social Protection Policy contains comprehensive policy measures and programmes that can meet this desire. Unfortunately, 'social protection' is not mentioned in the current development plan of Nigeria called, the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan nor in the 2018 National Budget presented to the National Assembly, even though the activities that aptly fall in the domain of social protection are contained in these official documents. It is in putting these strands together under a single action perspective that the social inclusion objective can be attained in a sustainable manner. This is the imperative of harmonization which is to create a system with internal cohesion and a sense of community among social protection stakeholders. The analysis shows that the social protection environment in Nigeria is internally not at variance with itself because of the adoption of a common approach and framework by stakeholders even though working independently in the recent past. However, major sponsors of social protection have institutional idiosyncratic nuances which do not threaten the common social protection framework in Nigeria. This is a boon to the harmonization sought. This paper highlights the issues and measures of harmonization of social protection in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** social inclusion, social protection, harmonization, institutional idiosyncratic nuances, system and social protection community.

### I. Introduction

President Muhammadu Buhari Administration has adopted the Economic Recovery and Growth(ERGP) as his comprehensive medium term development plan for the period 2017-2020(FNBNP,2017A). ERG Particulates the Administration's vision for Nigeria which is of 'sustained inclusive growth to achieve maximum welfare for the citizens'. One of the five principles driving the vision is the promotion of national cohesion and social inclusion. This principle is restated as the component of the second objective of ERGP being investing in the people of Nigeria with 'social inclusion' as the cardinal point of the objective, along side job creation and youth empowerment as well as improved human capital. Social inclusion, considered a priority objective, is seen as government's commitment to provide support for those poorest and most vulnerable members of the society by investing in social programmes and providing social amenities'(FMBNP,2017A:15). ERG plays out 60 strategies for the attainment of its objectives. There are two strategies directly on social inclusion and another two on the related issue of job creation. The dimensions of social inclusion and the optimizing activities are articulated in the ERGP (see Box 1). The core social inclusion activities are simply identified as 'social safety net programmes' and 'social programmes'.

Box 1: The Dimensions and Optimizing Activities of Social Inclusion In ERGP			
No:	Strategy	Key Activities	Lead
42	Implement and increase social safety net programmes targeted at the vulnerable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustain the Conditional Cash Transfer programme to reach 1 million of the poorest and most vulnerable households, especially through mothers as captured in the Social Register</li> <li>• Upscale the Home Grown School Feeding Programme to provide a meal a day to at least 6 million primary school children (and support the agriculture sector)</li> </ul>	Office of the Vice President  Ministry of Youth and Sports  Ministry of Women Affairs
43	Introduce social programmes for the aged and physically challenged	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce a national relief programme for the aged</li> <li>• Launch a national programme for the physically challenged</li> <li>• Design infrastructure to enable access for the physically challenged</li> </ul>	Ministry of Women Affairs
44	Boost job creation and public work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scale-up the N-Power volunteer corps to provide temporary employment for 500,000 graduates</li> </ul>	Office of the Vice President

	programmes	<p>annually in education, agriculture and health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish a job matching programme for new graduates by incentivizing employers to retain National Youth Service Corp members at the end of their service</li> <li>Sustain and scale up the GEEP to deliver credit to 1.6 million farmers, youth, women, market traders and MSMEs</li> </ul>	Ministry of Women Affairs
45	Improve employability to close the skills gap	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Execute the N-Power Knowledge Programme to train participants in animation, software engineering, graphic arts, and device repair and assembly</li> <li>Roll out the targeted skills-to-job N-Power Build Programme to build a competent workforce of technicians and artisans</li> <li>Develop a national manpower policy to match job skills requirements and education programmes</li> </ul>	Office of the Vice President  Ministry of Labour and Employment

Source: ERGP (FMBNP, 23017A: 108-111)

The concern for social inclusion by Buhari Administration predates its inauguration on May 29, 2015. It was a key campaign issue by the ruling political party, the All Progressives Congress (APC). This is stated in President Muhammadu Buhari's campaign document 'Our Manifesto for a Better Nigeria' and APC's 'Roadmap to a New Nigeria'. Social inclusion was identified as a social welfare issue and its pursuit was justified on the ground of pervasive poverty in the face of impressive GDP growth recorded and the 'absence of a safety net for the poorest and most vulnerable' in the country. Although not well articulated, the components of the 'social welfare' issues sought are named to include phased social security benefits scheme for the unemployed and vulnerable, direct conditional monthly cash transfers of ₦5,000 to the poorest and most vulnerable citizens, legislation to protect the vulnerable and disabled persons from discrimination and exploitation (Ukpong, 2016).

Being a major political promise, upon its inauguration, the Administration quickly brought together all the strands of the 'social welfare' under a single initiative called 'Social Investment' with five programme components namely N-Power (job provision), Home Grown School Feeding (HGSF), Cash Transfers (NCTP), Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP) and STEM Bursary Programme. A Social Investment Office was established in the Office of the Vice President to coordinate the implementation of the programmes called Special Intervention Projects (SIP). In its first budget as a government called '2016 Budget of Change', the Administration made a princely allocation of ₦500 billion – Job Creation, ₦191.5 billion, School Feeding, ₦93.1 billion, Conditional Cash Transfers ₦68.7 billion, Enterprise Programme ₦140.3 billion and STEM Education Grant ₦5.58 billion for the 'social welfare' programme (FMBNP, 2016A and 2016B). According to President Muhammadu Buhari, the 2016 budgetary provision deliberately introduced a job creation and social safety net for the poor and vulnerable members of our society'.

The implementation of 'social welfare' programmes could not commence immediately in 2015 following the inauguration of the administration and this was widely criticized. The official defence was that the past administration of President Goodluck Jonathan did not have provision for this programme in its 2015 budget. However, with the unprecedented provision in 2016, and later 2017, it was expected that the programme would be executed with dispatch. The SIP as a programme has the overarching goal of restoring livelihood, economic opportunities and sustenance for the poor. The programme did not commence as early as it was being expected, and when it did, it was faltering, forcing many and the National Assembly to question the capacity of the Social Investment Office to execute it (Adetayo, 2016; Ameh, 2016). Three sets of factors were discovered as underlying the false start of the programme – absence of policy framework, poor conceptualization and funding pressure (Ukpong, 2016). Accordingly, calls were made for the amplification of the programme to have a policy framework and specifically, a call to implement the social welfare programme as a social protection system to allow the harnessing and unleashing the benefits of social protection as an efficient and effective delivery approach (Ukpong, 2016; Punch Editorial, 2017 and Inyang, 2017).

The public demands at this point for a policy framework with a system approach to handle the social inclusion dividend resonated in the latest vigorous activity of crafting a National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) which got on in earnest since 2012 in the country. Sponsored by UNICEF and supported by the World Bank under the auspices of the National Planning Commission (Ministry of Budget and National Planning since

2015), the drafting of NSPP, with the technical support provided by the Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER), was completed and formally adopted by the Federal Government of Nigeria on Wednesday, July 19, 2017. Nigeria now has a formal policy on social protection. While the formalisation of the National Policy was being anticipated, significant event on the development process Social Protection (SP) in Nigeria took place. The first summit of the social protection community was convened.

This was the first of such national gathering outside of the zonal and national meetings on data gathering and (re)validation exercises during the process of developing the NSPP. The Social Protection Cross-Learning Summit (SPECS, 2016) organized by the Federal Ministry of Finance and sponsored by the World Bank and UKaid, with the theme 'Evidence and Learning in Improving Social Protection in Nigeria' was held on March, 22-26, 2016 at the Sheraton Hotel and Towers, Abuja. The summit was under the guidance of National Safety Nets Coordinating Office (NASSCO) in the Office of the Vice President. The overall purpose of the summit was to 'promote on-going efforts of the Federal Government of Nigeria to reduce poverty, economic shocks and social vulnerabilities of families by reforming and driving a sustainable and an all-inclusive national social protection programme'. The other specific objectives included creating 'forum for dialogue on reformation and refinement of the Social Protection practice and policies in Nigeria and influencing design and implementation of social safety nets (SSN) in the country for greater impact' (FMF, 2016: 1-2).

Logically, it would have been expected that following the official adoption of a National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) in the country and based on the outcome of the SPECS, 2016 which had built consensus on the practice of Social Protection (SP), national approach and recognition would have emerged. When President Muhammadu Buhari presented the 2018 budget to the National Assembly on Tuesday, November 7, 2017, curiously there was no mention of social protection in his speech. Instead, he reported on the Administration's implementation of Social Investment Programme (SIP) with the following achievements which are consistent with the domain strategies set in ERGP (see Box 1):

- Over 4.5 million Primary 1 to 3 pupils in public schools are being fed under the School Feeding Programme;
- 200,000 unemployed graduates have been employed under the N-Power Scheme in Education, health and agricultural sectors;
- Over 250,000 enterprises have benefited from the sum of ₦12.5 billion, which has been disbursed to entrepreneurs to expand their businesses; and
- Over 110,000 households are currently benefitting from the Conditional Cash Transfer programme across the country

Given the 'tremendous success' recorded in SIP, the Administration is determined to continue with the programme in 2018 and has accordingly made a provision in the sum of ₦500 billion, as consecutively in the last two years, as a priority activity for the 'consolidation of the SIP'. This is a reflection of the Administration's commitment to 'pursuing a gender-sensitive, pro-poor and inclusive growth, being interested in catering for the most vulnerable' (FMBNP, 2017B: Paragraphs 46 and 72).

The apparent lack of traction in the advancement of SP practice in Nigeria is apt to generate policy and programme concerns. As shown above, there are many actors and perspectives within the social protection community in Nigeria. This has given ground to the misgiving of the existence of divergence and conflict within the social protection environment in Nigeria. Although consolidation or synthesis of practice can be pointed to in the convergence represented by the recent adoption of NSPP, this is yet to be reflected nationally in the practice of SP. For example, it is the same national institution, the Federal Ministry of Budget and National Planning which has midwived the NSPP that is also responsible for budgeting and coordination of international development partners in Nigeria. Up till now, there is yet to emerge from FMBNP, for example, a common concept in the official documents on the same subject of social protection. It is still much about social inclusion, social safety nets, and social investment programmes than a single concept of social protection which subsumes all these other categories. It may be explained that it is too early to attain this synthesis as the NSPP has just been adopted. But it is already late not to recognise the emergent problem.

There is a tendency to think that the apparent multiple actors, seemingly divergent actions and actions not consistent with the framework of SP approach witnessed since the adoption of the NSPP suggest conflict or disharmony within the SP community in Nigeria. The evidence suggests otherwise. What the current diversion indicates is the slow pace or conservative impulse in shifting from the pre-NSPP era practices to embrace the new imperatives of NSPP and the persisting institutional idiosyncratic nuances of the sponsors of the pilot SP initiatives. Some of the diversions pointed out include the continued existence of NASSCO in the Vice President's Office, the organisation of a National Summit on SP by the Federal Ministry of Finance and the yet

to be officially admitted into Government's communications, SP as the umbrella or omnibus concept covering all related issues. These are issues of transition arrangement which must be deliberately addressed. Indeed, as expressed at SPECS, 2016, poverty is multi-dimensional and requires similar response, and that the existing social safety net programmes in the country should be seen as strong entry point for the establishment of a proper social protection system for all Nigerians. Hence, the call for the strengthening, coordination and harmonisation of practice within the community of SP. This has become imperative given the role of SP in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (FMF, 2016: 5 and 48). This paper identifies the policy measures and areas that require immediate harmonisation. Happily, the history of SP in Nigeria had witnessed harmonisation before (Ukpong, 2017A). The data are drawn from the same pool which have facilitated publications of results from the same study. This is one more outcome of the study (see for example Ukpong, 2017A and 2017B; 2016; and 2013; Ikoh and Ukpong, 2017).

### **History and Relevance of Social Protection in Nigeria**

Elsewhere, the history of social protection in Nigeria has been recently elaborated (Ukpong, 2017A). We paraphrase the historical facts presented there in another context here to show the lingering need for a transformative harmonisation in the SP framework in Nigeria. The present demand for harmonisation presents a second wave in the process. The first phase was the colonial era where the concern was providing social security mainly for the expatriates employed in the colonial public sector. This was seen as extension of the home social security system in Britain. Series of provisions, including pension schemes were introduced. Most importantly, 'in response to the demands for reforms, the Federal Government of Nigeria enacted into law the Pension Reform Act, 2004 (PRA, 2004) which established the standardized defined contribution (DC) Pension Scheme for the public and private sectors and harmonised for the fit time, social security provisions in both sectors' (Ukpong, 2017A:40).

The first wave of harmonisation brought together the public and private sectors' domains in SP but it did not integrate the core domain interests of both. Despite the harmonisation, the old challenge earlier identified, persisted. Government, both at the Federal and State levels, was yet to comprehensively address within a policy framework, the consideration for social protection or social security as was largely conceived then. The measures in the schemes, including PRA, 2004, were inadequate to deal with the growing risks in the country (Ukpong, 2017A:40). Two broad issues needed to be addressed, at harmonization and coordination scales. The conceptualization of the task or functions of making provision for risks and threats had to be reframed from the perspective of social security versus social protection and treated as an integrated domain. The second was the need to move away from the ad hoc, insular and limited scope of provisions for SP which carried short term political aggrandizement ('empowerment' buzz) to a permanent, coordinated policy framework structure. This marked the second phase or generation of SP evolution in Nigeria. This witnessed the era of initiatives led by the Government and international development partners at introducing new and pilot SP schemes like cash transfers, school feeding at the three levels of governments and ultimately, developing a formal policy to guide and coordinate SP in Nigeria. This phase ended with the development and adoption of NSPP during which process an important national understanding and consensus was reached that social security and social protection are not contradictory to one another but that the former is subsumed in the broader framework of SP.

The evolution of SP in Nigeria is now at its third wave or phase. The best description of the essence of this phase is given in the communiqué of SPECS, 2016 which recommended action to 'Establish a Community of Practice (CofP) on social protection and encourage the strengthening and harmonization of donor coordination under the leadership of Government' (FMF, 2016:3). This is the challenge of SP in Nigeria at the moment – creating the social protection community that sees itself as a community. Sociologically speaking and with particular reference to professional domain as in this SP context, a sense of community implies, among other things, the possession of a common identity, common language which is understood only partially by outsiders and a distinctive culture (Ukpong, 2009:41-42). The series of agitations and fears and mooted apprehensions expressed and observed during the (re)validation exercise of NSPP are real issues that must be addressed during this third wave to create an internally cohesive community. These concerns have been highlighted in an earlier study on SP in Nigeria (Ukpong, 2017A). They were obviously raised again at SPECS, 2016 as seen in its proceedings (FMF, 2016).

There is no doubt that serendipitously, the series of engagement and interactions between and within the various stakeholders during the second wave, in the process of crafting SP policies at the Federal and State levels have secured increased understanding of the role and relevance of SP in Nigeria. At the various fora to discuss the policy framework of SP in Nigeria, it was possible to recognise and identify regular faces, institutions, ideas and lines of debates, which were not the outcomes of any deliberate efforts but which had



nonetheless began to crystallize. The enhanced relevance of SP in Nigeria today that has emerged from the series of interactions are summarized thus:

- Engender a broader framework than social welfare and social security and bring together multiple agencies and partners to provide services to the poor and vulnerable;
- Direct delivery of the benefits of development to individuals and household which can be counted or measured;
- Strengthen investment in citizen-state relationship and promote gender equitable development;
- Lead to the implementation under coordinated framework and for the first time in the history of Nigeria, fully articulated social protection programmes in the areas of education and health services, social welfare and child protection, social housing, livelihood and employment, social insurance schemes, social assistance, micro and small enterprise development, gender equality and women empowerment and traditional family and community support; and
- Engender wide support from the international development community, NGOs and local stakeholders and beneficiaries.

### **The Promoted Perspectives of Social Protection**

Phase two of the evolution of SP in Nigeria has been characterised by the increasing commitment of many institutional stakeholders, especially governments and international development partners to the spread and consolidation of SP in Nigeria. The key stakeholders and focus of activities in the realm of institutionalization of SP are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1: Major Sponsors of Social Protection Frameworks and Approach Issues**

S/N	Sponsor	Activity	Lead Institution/Technical Agency	Date	Framework/Approach	Idiosyncratic Focus of Sponsor
1.	UNICEF	Baseline/Diagnostic Study of SP in Nigeria	National Planning Commission/ODI	2011 - 2012	Life Cycle/Transformative Approach (PPPT)	-
2.	World Bank	Draft National Policy on Social Protection	National Planning Commission/SP Committee	2004 - 2005	Life Cycle/Social Safety Net Tripod	Social Safety Net
3.	ILO	Draft National Social Security Policy	Federal Ministry of Labour/National Working Committee on Social Security (NSITF)	2009	Social Protection Floor (UN-SPF)	Social Security
4.	UNICEF	National Social Protection Policy (NSPP)	Federal Ministry of Budget & National Planning/NISER	2012 - 2017	Life Cycle/Transformative (PPPT)	Child Protection
5.	SCI/AAN (DFID)	Draft Jigawa State Social Protection Policy	Ministry of Economic Planning/NISER/TWG	2016 - 2017	Life Cycle/Transformative (PPPT)	Child Poverty and Nutrition
6.	SCI/AAN (DFID)	Draft Zamfara State Social Protection Policy	Ministry of Economic Planning/NISER/TWG	2016 - 2017	Life Cycle/Transformative (PPPT)	Child Poverty and Nutrition
7.	UNICEF	Development of States Specific SP Policies (At various stages)	Coordinated mainly by Ministry of Economic Planning & Budget/ (NISER, Osun State)			
8.	UN	Development of SP Policy and System	Nigeria-UNDAF III/UNICEF	2013 -		System Development
9.	APC/Buhari Administration	Inauguration of Social Investment/SIP	Office of the Vice President/NASSCO	2016	Life Cycle/Social Welfare	Social Safety Net

The analysis of Table 1 shows four features that have given SP in Nigeria a hopeful and robust outlook. First, the promoters or sponsors represent two dominant interests – government and international development organisations working in partnership with the government. Second, almost all the stakeholders subtly subscribe to the same conceptual framework and approach but nonetheless keep their basic idiosyncratic vulnerability focus. This seems to be the issue that generates fears of conflicting operations in SP practice in Nigeria. This is also the area that is considered to require open government intervention for harmonization. The use of life cycle approach and Devereux and Sabates – Wheeler’s transformative framework have, without any official imposition, become normative guide to the analysis and programming of SP in Nigeria. And even when this is not stated as such, the adopted framework is almost similar (Hagen-Zanker and Holmes, 2012). For example, World Bank’s social safety nets tripod system is a cousin to the transformative framework where its three core elements have replica in the latter’s four component provisions of protection, prevention, promotion and

transformation (PPPT). The World Bank's three elements are resilience (prevention), equity (protection) and opportunity (promotion). These three elements sit on a base called 'enabling government reform' being the equivalent of transformation provision (Kamurase, 2016). The informing SP approach and guiding framework are largely uniform and complementary.

Three, each major sponsor presents and seeks to demonstrate the viability of its promoted development vista. This is done by initiating SP programmes on pilot scale with the aim of creating success story of it for subsequent ease of scaling up. In doing this, the institutional nuances of the sponsors are stamped on the programme and while the programme lasts, there is always the disproportionate rallying and mobilisation of institutional resources to drive up recognition of the nuances. For example, the SPECS, 2016 sponsored by World Bank had six out of the 17 technical presentations from the World Bank itself (FMF, 2016). No doubt, the perspective of crating demonstration effects offers a lot of benefits to a fledging SP country like Nigeria. As asserted by the World Bank Country Director, Nigeria (Benmessaud, 2016) and supported by UNICEF, Nigeria (FMF, 2016:5), the existing SP initiative/pilot programmes are important starting and direct entry points to build a robust national SP system as well as represent opportunities for consolidation and future investment by international development partners in SP in Nigeria. There are many existing such pilot SP programmes in Nigeria at the Federal, State and Local Government levels. Some of them, from the World Bank staple include the Community and Social Development Project (CSDP), Youth Employment and Social Support Operation (YESSO), Growth and Employment Project (GEM). The ruling political party in Nigeria, the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the Buhari Administration have offered additional vista that can be considered an entry point to SP system through the National Social Safety Net Programme (NASSP). This is the platform on which the current Social Investment Programmes, with components like N-Power, Home Grown School Feeding, Cash Transfers, etc run from the Office of the Vice President of Nigeria.

Four, and finally, the existing pilot SP programmes and projects provide ample opportunities for cooperation among different stakeholders. This has been demonstrated both vertically and longitudinally. What is required is the activation of a strong institutional mechanism for coordination and the engendering of a sense of community among the SP stockholders. For example, the first of the two components of World Bank's initiative, State Employment and Expenditure for Results (SEEFOR) – for the Niger Delta Region – improved investment climate, is funded by DFID. The Child Development Grant Programme (CDGP) funded by DFID in two northern Nigerian states of Jigawa and Zamfara is executed by Save the Children International (SCI) and Action Against Hunger (AAH). The YESSO and Home Grown School Feeding (HGSEF) are implemented in collaboration between the Federal and State Governments (N-SIP, 2017). Above all, deliberate efforts are constantly being made to accommodate the different perspectives of sponsors and stakeholders while projecting a common overarching goal of SP. With the UN system in Nigeria, other agencies queue behind UNICEF on the issue of SP (UN, 2013). The SPECS, 2016 interchangeably used SP and Social Safety Nets (SSN) to accommodate at that initial engagement, the perspectives of all stakeholders while pressing for harmonisation subsequently.

### **The Convergence in the National Social Protection Policy**

Extensive assessments of the structure and provisions of the recently adopted National Social Protection Policy (NSPP) for Nigeria have been made elsewhere (Ukpong, 2016; 2017A and 2017B). NSPP is an umbrella policy framework with provisions to cover all conventional core sectors and emerging issues currently canvassed for by the pilot SP programmes and projects in the country. In addition, some new development areas like emergency, fragile and crisis contexts of SP were anticipated and provided for. The unexpected internally displaced persons (IDP) shock in the North East Nigeria, for example, has policy measurers to address it (FMBNP, 2017B).

NSPP contains 16 policy measures (programmes) for implementation in eight sectors. These are:

#### **Education and Health Services**

- 1) Free school meals will be provided to all pupils in public primary schools;
- 2) Scholarship, learning materials uniforms and cash transfers to children from poor households and children living with disabilities;
- 3) All children and adults living with disabilities have access to free health care, education and required special services and assistive devices;
- 4) Free health care services for pregnant women, lactating mothers, children under – 5, the aged (people over 65 years old) and people living with disabilities and
- 5) Universal access to Health Insurance Scheme (HIS) or CBHIS and or other social health insurance schemes.

**Social Welfare and Children Protection**

6) Health services, emotional support and counselling for victim of child labour, child abuse, child rape and human trafficking.

**Social Housing**

7) Decent and affordable housing for the homeless, the monetary poor and families living in overcrowded and unhealthy conditions;

**Livelihood enhancement and employment**

- 8) Unemployment insurance and non-cash unemployment benefits for job seekers;
- 9) Labour based conditional cash transfer/public works programmes for youths, persons with disabilities and the unemployed;
- 10) Provide support for sustainable livelihood through skills training, access to land, inputs for smaller farms, affirmative action for youth and women’s employment and access to micro and small enterprises and finances and
- 11) Provide affordable child care services for children under 5.

**Social Insurance Scheme**

- 12) Provide cash transfers to families and cash for work schemes which are activate at the onset of emergencies;
- 13) Contributory and non-contributory pensions available to all citizens over 65 years old.

**Social Assistance**

14) Cash and food grants for poor families, orphans, street children, and persons vulnerable to harmful traditional practice

**Traditional Family and Community Support**

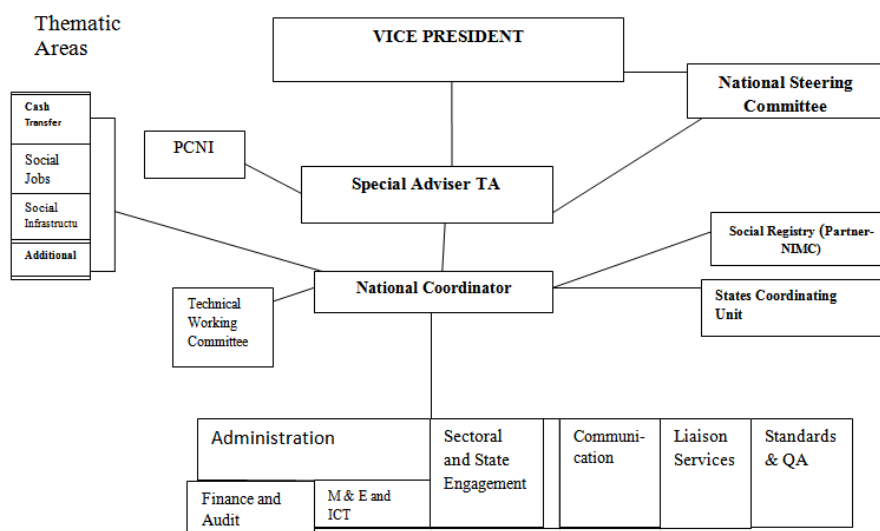
15) Support existing family and community-based mechanisms and systems for the intended beneficiaries to respond to shocks and extreme poverty.

**Legislation and Regulation**

16) A legal framework that specifically protects intended beneficiaries including children through inheritance rights, birth registration, child care services and breast feeding.

An examination of the existing pilot SP programmes being implemented by the major sponsors in Nigeria (see Table 1) shows them as falling within the 16 policy measures (PM) designed for the country. It is of interest to note that the five programmes of NASSP currently implemented by the President Buhari Administration – N-Power (job creation), HGSF, NCTP, GEEP and STEM Bursary Programme - fit into Policy Measures 9, 1, 14, 10 and 2 of NSPP respectively. There are still 11 outstanding PMs for implementation, suggesting that NSPP has room to address the challenges of the population from birth to death as conceived by the designers of the policy.

The issue of institutional coordination remains central to the quest for a SP system in Nigeria. Again, using the currently most extensive SP programme in the country for illustration, NASSP has National Social Safety Nets Coordinating Office (NASSCO), established at the highest level of government, being in the Office of the Vice President of Nigeria (FMF, 2016: vii). The designed coordination structure for NASSCO is shown in Figure 1.



**Fig.1: NASSCO – Institutional & Organisational Diagram**

Source: Uwais,( 2016:6)

NSSP makes elaborate provisions for coordination and integration within institutional framework. First, the role delineation for major stakeholders are specified. The Federal Government is required to discharge the following functions:

- 1) Provide leadership in all aspects of implanting the policy;
- 2) Enact legislations and provide enabling environment;
- 3) Review Social Protection Policy;
- 4) Ensure timely and adequate discharge of financial obligations;
- 5) Seek international cooperation and collaboration towards the success of the Policy; and
- 6) Enhance the capacities of states and local governments for effective implementation of the Policy.

A distinct body is assigned the responsibility of providing this coordination. Called the National Social Protection Council, it is to be set up by an Act of the National Assembly. It is a semi-autonomous body to be domiciled in the Ministry of Budget and National Planning (MBNP) to coordinate the NSSP. The Council shall be composed of:

- 1) The Vice President as the Chairman,
- 2) The Minister for Budget and National Planning as the Head of Secretariat and Ministry of Labour and Employment as member,
- 3) Honourable Ministers of relevant Ministries,
- 4) Representative of organised private sector
- 5) Representative of Civil Society Organisations,
- 6) Representative of Nigeria Governors' Forum and ALGON,
- 7) Representatives of the OSSAP/SDGs Office,
- 8) Social Adviser to the President on Social Investment,
- 9) Representative of NISER and,
- 10) NIMC

The Council shall have the following functions:

- 1) Present timely annual report to the President and the National Assembly on the status of social protection policy implementation in the country;
- 2) Ensure periodic review of the NSPP;
- 3) Develop regulations on accountability measure and mechanisms;
- 4) Provide linkages with other government oversight mechanisms and institutions;
- 5) Ensure that sector actors prioritize social protection programmes in the annual budgets;
- 6) Undertake/facilitate fund raising for social protection activities and capacity building;
- 7) Conduct overall monitoring, evaluation and review of the Policy;
- 8) Coordinate development partners' contribution to social protection in Nigeria in line with the national strategy
- 9) Promote effective inter-governmental collaboration in Social Protection programmes
- 10) Initiate and oversee studies, assessments and evaluations to gather evidence; and
- 11) Work with the media on advocacy and mobilization activities.

The coordination arrangements in NSPP are certainly more detailed and clearer than what is provided for in NASSP platform though both are not at variance. Pressing for a SP system means opting for comprehensive measure and not a return to ad hoc, limited perspective.

### **Issues and Measures for Harmonization**

The fundamentals of SP harmonization in Nigeria have been isolated and introduced in the proceeding sections of the paper. They can only be treated within the introductory level at this stage because there are limited available data to permit further analysis. The evidence of their existence were amply shown at the (re)validation sessions and SPECS, 2016 summit. This final section of the paper briefly pulls together the identified elements of harmonization. Harmonization is not unknown in Nigeria. In 2001 when the nation was mortified by the deluge of open criticism of the non-usability of official statistics published by the then Federal Office of Statistics (FOS) and the resort to independent data generation efforts, a national harmonization exercise supported by ILO led to agreements on national definitions and measurement (FOS, 2001). The reforms that followed gave birth to the proactive National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) Nigeria has today. The confidence in historical antecedent can act as motivation for venturing into other areas of harmonization as SP here.



In the context of this study and applicable in similar SP practice elsewhere, harmonization simply means building a system. Accordingly, a SP system implies 'instead of many fragmented programs, interventions work in a harmonize way, sharing operational tools and platforms and provide support in a complementary manner through the life-cycle'(Jones, 2016). Harmonization is to produce a system with internal coherence, a sense of community and internal cohesion within the community. As already shown, there is no fundamental difference in the framework adopted by major SP stakeholders in Nigeria. The life-cycle approach and the transformative framework apply seamlessly across the SP terrain in Nigeria. The sway reported is basically a conceptual than ideological difference, reflecting, acceptably, the idiosyncratic nuances in the vulnerability focus of the sponsoring SP stakeholders. Harmonization can be directed at clarifying the grey areas. As already noted, SP is weighed down by vague conceptualization, being a fairly new field of enterprise in Nigeria.

Harmonization also implies fundamental shifts, and integration. Conceptual shifts are as important as programmes or contents shift. The broad categories or sectors of SP in Nigeria have reasonably been outlined. NSPP has established the eight sectors and 16 policy measures domain. What is required is reaching agreement on how internally this domain can be charted. It is now understood that SP policy and programmes consist of three components – social safety nets (SSNs), social insurance and social legislation (Yusuf, 2016) and that integration means shifting from SSN into SP and delivery of services in bundles not piecemeal or in isolation. There is no official position on these understandings to guide SP and stakeholders. This is where government needs to act firmly and expressively. This boundary setting activity involves every aspect of SP, including the concept and language used by the SP community. For example, should it be spelt 'program' as found in SPECS, 2016 documents or 'programme' as the official language of Nigeria dictates? Should it be 'social register' or 'single register' as both were used at the same SPECS, 2016 to refer to the same concept?

In light of the above, the pursuit of harmonization in SP in Nigeria calls for a number of policy actions including the following four:

1) **Formal Proclamation of the Existence of NSPP:**

Nigeria has never had a SP policy before now. Therefore, the knowledge of having one should be placed in the public domain as a priority action. Communicating this fact, the content of the policy and implications in providing quality of life for the citizens should be carefully strategized. It is only an early buy-in by all the stakeholders that can guarantee the success of the policy. Proclamation statements by Government should categorically settle the issues of what SP means and the other transitional elements earlier identified.

2) **Setting and Activating Boundaries of Operation by Government:**

On its own, the adopted NSPP is lifeless and passive. It has to be activated by Government and the institutional structures set up. The boundaries and contents of operations will have to be defined within which the actions of all stakeholders are specified and constrained irrespective of their idiosyncratic nuances. The meaning of SP as contained in NSPP is referred to as National or Nigeria definition of SP and everyone is bound by it. The next most important thing to do in this realm of boundary setting is to develop the implementation framework for NSPP. This is the critical guide to procedures, operations and coordination in the face of several actors and activities in SP.

3) **Design Tools of Operation:**

This involves more than the development of tools and platforms like the Single Registry in the country and payment platforms which require the cooperation of many ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs). It includes the designs of tracking apps and concerns for data to monitor and evaluate progress. It further includes provision of resources for the implementation of programmes. SP expenditure should be identified and tracked in the government annual budgets. Although NSPP was adopted before the conclusion of the 2018 budgetary process, it is difficult to say at this moment if any MDA made specific budget provision for SP in 2018, outside of the ₦500 billion allocation to SIP.

4) **Legislate on Social Protection:**

Legislating on the adopted NSPP is forward looking. It will allow the SP community to 'look forward and avoid being trapped into discussing past results' (Kharas and Fengler, 2017). Addressing poverty through SP requires a safe and guaranteed environment for the quantum of social investment required to reverse poverty and give the citizens a life of dignity.

## **II. Conclusion**

The relevance of social protection to the attainment of high standard of human development is not in debate. Policy makers are urged to find measures that eliminate inefficiency and maximize its impact in tackling poverty. The 2017 Ibrahim Index of African Governance (released on November 20, 2017), which measures

human development from 2000 to 2016 with indicators including social safety nets (welfare), shows a slowing down of progress and deterioration in development over the past five years with Nigeria lost in the pack (Jerving, 2017). Same report is recorded elsewhere showing Nigeria as falling behind in the fight against poverty (Kharas and Fengler, 2017). MDGs were not achieved in Nigeria not for lack of fund but inability to work and deliver as a coordinated system. SDGs, with SP components, offer the country the opportunity to reverse the trend.

Achieving Sustainable Development Goal 1 (SDG1), ending extreme poverty, requires that people work together, using the framework that identifies with social inclusion and vulnerabilities. SP represents that model. Nigeria is yet to evolve SP as a system. The existing SSNs initiatives in Nigeria provide the opportunities to build SP system through harmonization. The newly adopted NSPP as an umbrella policy framework has convergence elements which can engender the emergence of SP system in Nigeria. It is important to build on what exists. The confidence of historical antecedent suggests that Government in Nigeria working with international development partners can engender harmonization by addressing four key policy issues raised here.

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