



# Graduation and Social Protection in Nigeria: A Critical Analysis of the COPE CCT Programme

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# Graduation and Social Protection in Nigeria: A Critical Analysis of the COPE CCT Programme<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

Various social protection policies and programmes, including but not limited to conditional cash transfers (CCTS), have been implemented all over the world in the past two decades. However, as programmes requiring vulnerable and poor households to make specific investments in the health and education needs of their children, CCTs are increasing gaining grounds as major social protection programmes in many developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. This follows their acclaimed successes in Mexico and Brazil where they were first implemented extensively in the late 1990s and early 2000s. This paper critically analyzes Nigeria's 'In Care of the People' (COPE) CCT programme, with special reference to its 'graduation' strategy. The paper argues that the extent to which graduation can take place in COPE depends largely on immediate changes to certain debilitating internal and external factors that militate against 'sustainable' graduation from the programme. These factors range from problems in the design and implementation of the programme to structural constraints. The paper nevertheless offers some recommendations that can facilitate the necessary changes.

**Keywords:** COPE, social protection, CCTs, participants, graduation.

## Introduction

I think these [conditional cash transfer] programs are as close as you can come to a magic bullet in development. They [a]re creating an incentive for families to invest in their own children's futures. Every decade or so, we see something that can really make a difference, and this is one of those things. –

Nancy Birdsall, President of the Center for Global Development,  
Washington (quoted in New York Times, 3 January 2004)

Giving money directly to poor people works surprisingly well. But it cannot deal with the deeper causes of poverty. –

Koga Kenya (The Economist, 26 October 2013).

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Despite being described as ‘physically pernicious’, ‘politically abominable’, ‘economically superfluous’, and ‘morally atrocious’ (Freeland 2007, 75), conditional cash transfer (CCT) programmes continue to spread across countries and cities around the globe. From a single programme in Latin America in 1997, there are now over 100 CCT programmes in many African, Asian and Latin American countries. Although often implemented alongside other social protection programmes such as unconditional cash or food transfers, social pensions, and disability benefits amongst a plethora of other programmes, CCTs have become preferred social protection programmes in many developing countries. The global proliferation of CCTs is partly due to the often-acknowledged contributions of Brazil’s *Bolsa Familia* and Mexico’s *Oportunidades* CCT programmes to the development of human capital, especially relating to improvements in the health and education outcomes of children in extremely poor households. The spread of CCTs is also connected to their ability to ‘pay recipients in exchange for an action that brings private behaviour closer to the social optimum’ (de Janvry and Sadoulet 2004, 75).

Consequently, many state and non-state actors comprising governments, non-governmental organizations, private individuals and companies, bilateral and multilateral organizations, development partners and other members of the donor community encourage the adoption of CCTs in developing countries where vulnerabilities to various kinds of risks prevent the human capital development of households in education and health. However, regardless of their popularity and global spread, critical questions relating to the ‘graduation’ of poor households benefiting from CCT programmes remain largely under-investigated. As such, ‘graduation’, defined as ‘the process of reducing vulnerability so that people can move off the social protection provision into more productive and resilient livelihoods’ (Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux 2013, 911), has become a major consideration in the design and implementation of many social protection programmes such as CCTs.

Based on data obtained during fieldwork in Nigeria between May and October 2013, this paper critically analyzes the ‘graduation’ aspects of Nigeria’s ‘In Care of the People’ (COPE) CCT programme

launched in 2007 to reduce vulnerabilities and intergenerational poverty amongst extremely poor households. The paper reports findings from the programmes implementation in three communities that participated in the programme in city of Ibadan, Oyo state, Nigeria between 2008 and 2009. Data was collected using a mixed methodological approach involving one-on-one interviews with participants and non-participants of COPE, officials of state and non-state actors involved in the programme, academic experts, representatives of international organizations and non-governmental organizations, household surveys in the three communities, and archival research. The analysis contained in the paper addresses the question, *what are the factors that enable (or constrain) graduation in COPE?*

To this end, the paper argues that several internal and external factors militate against the chances of COPE participants to ‘sustainably’ graduate from the programme. Internal factors include problems inherent in the design and implementation of the programme such as the one-year participation period for selected participants as well as the low income and assets transfers participants are expected to utilize to sustain themselves after graduating from the programme. External factors relate to supply-side structural constraints stemming from the absence of an enabling socio-economic environment in Nigeria like poor education and health infrastructure. Hence, the paper maintains achieving the programme’s primary objectives of reducing vulnerabilities and intergenerational poverty within poor and vulnerable households in Nigeria has not materialised in light of empirical evidence reported in the paper.

Notwithstanding the existence of these factors, the paper concludes that there is still ‘hope’ for COPE to improve its graduation strategy and at least modestly achieve one of its objective in reducing vulnerabilities in poor households. The paper discusses this ‘hope’ and recommends necessary changes to the programme’s design as possible solutions to some of internal and external factors identified in the paper. The paper proceeds as follows. First, a brief overview of vulnerabilities and social protection in Nigeria comes after this introduction. This is done in order to contextualize the subsequent analysis in

the paper. Second, the objectives and graduation strategy of COPE are examined. Third, the livelihood experience of participants after 'graduation' is analyzed. The paper then concludes with some closing remarks on the way forward for COPE's graduation strategy.

### **Vulnerabilities and Social Protection in Nigeria: A brief overview**

The concept of 'social protection', simply defined here as programmes and policies designed to address vulnerabilities and risks of extremely poor households/families, individuals, and communities,<sup>3</sup> has (re)gained currency in Nigeria in the past 10 years. This is because the present efforts to address the vulnerabilities and risks encountered by groups of people often identified as vulnerable and at risks (orphaned and vulnerable children, the aged, widows, the disabled and blind),<sup>4</sup> have historically received some form of state and non-state support as part of various social welfare administration strategies commenced during the colonial era.<sup>5</sup>

However, since independence, Nigeria has grown in population, and unfortunately, the level of vulnerabilities and poverty has risen as well. More so, the gains achieved in the social welfare sector from 1960 to 1980 were rolled back during the years of economic reforms introduced under the

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<sup>3</sup>For some definitions of social protection, see for example, Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler 2004, Standing 2007, Brunori and O'Reilly 2010, Barrientos and Hulme, 2008 and Nino-Zarazua et al., 2012.

<sup>4</sup>This list now includes people living with HIV/AIDs in Nigeria. However, unlike some of the groups listed in the text above that began receiving social welfare support/interventions during colonial rule, HIV/AIDS patients only began receiving some support during the past 10 to 15 years when the pandemic had become an issue for urgent government intervention in the country.

<sup>5</sup>Under colonial rule, the initial attempt to introduce social welfare for people in British West African colonies like Nigeria was made in 1924 when the Colonial Development Fund was established (see Jarrett 1991, 144). However, no major action was taken to either define or identify vulnerable groups until the 1940s when the problem of increasing numbers of young children considered 'juvenile delinquents' caught the attention of the colonial rulers in Nigeria (see Jarrett, 1991, 145; Akeredolu-Ale 1982; Fourchard 2006, 115; Decker 2010, 56; George 2011, 837). A Social Welfare Officer was subsequently appointed in 1941 to oversee the issue and the Colonial Welfare Service was established around the same time. The responsibilities of caring for vulnerable groups was transferred to the Nigerian authorities upon independence in 1960 and the country has gradually developed systems of support for vulnerable children, widows, the aged and disabled. All these efforts, from independence to date, have unfortunately not kept pace with the rising levels of poverty, inequality and vulnerabilities in the country, thus necessitating the new but gradual wave in social protection programmes. These in themselves remain small in their scale and coverage of the affected numbers of people in the vulnerable groups who need assistance.

structural adjustment programmes and policies in the 1980s and 1990s. During this period poverty increased and very little 'social safety nets' existed to save the extremely poor. The decades of military rule which coincided with the structural adjustment era worsened the living conditions of many Nigerians, even as absolute poverty increased from 28.1 percent in 1980 to 54.4 percent in 2004 (Olaniyan and Bankole 2005, 14) and as at 2011 was estimated to be 61 percent (National Bureau of Statistics 2012).

Very little was done in the 1980s to arrest the escalating poverty levels and by the 1990s during the regime of General Sani Abacha, the late Nigerian dictator, Nigeria was placed under international sanctions in 1995 for its brutal human rights records. Development partners like the European Union Commission withdraw support for social, political and economic programmes in the country while the Commonwealth of Nations suspended Nigeria as a member. The renewed efforts to address the vulnerabilities encountered by extremely poor individuals, households and communities currently ongoing in the country therefore only began after Nigeria returned to democracy in 1999. But the return of 'social protection', hitherto understood as 'social welfare' administration in Nigeria as noted above, gained currency within the context of discussions about how to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Nigeria in the past 10 years.<sup>6</sup> Hence, governments at various levels (federal, state and local) in Nigeria, acting alone or in partnership with experienced international organizations working in the area of social protection like the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID), are making amends where necessary to focus on the

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<sup>6</sup>The return of 'social protection' to Nigeria is somehow a direct consequence of the return of social protection as an increasingly prominent paradigm in international development in the past 30 years following several economic, social, political and environmental shocks that negatively affect millions of poor people globally. As Arjan de Haan (2011, 351) notes for example that 'following the 1997 Asian financial crises, social protection became a central feature of international development debate, and the 2008 global financial crisis reinvigorated this.' Nevertheless, social protection has always been part of the development agenda in many countries all over the world. It has always been, perhaps at varying degrees, a common theme in many developed as well as developing countries (see for instance, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development 1988; Ellis et al., 2009).

vulnerabilities and risks encountered by poor populations.<sup>7</sup> As such, various state and non-state actors in Nigeria are now implementing social protection programmes, including but not limited to the COPE CCT.

At the federal level, the federal government, working through agencies like the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) and the Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on the MDGs (OSSAP-MDGs), coordinates the COPE CCT in different states of the federation. The debt relief Nigeria obtained from the Paris Club in 2005 bolstered the creation of the OSSAP-MDGs.<sup>8</sup> In addition, following the partial removal of subsidies on imported petroleum products in January 2012, the federal government launched the Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P) with the view to utilizing some of the money formerly spent on subsidies to create short-term employment opportunities for unemployed citizens through public works schemes. Some of the money is also put towards the provision of free vaccines for nursing mothers and under-five children.

At the state and local government levels, different states, often working with local governments within their jurisdiction, have equally initiated programmes to address the vulnerabilities of groups such as the aged, the disabled, children and women. Apart from taking part in COPE which is a nationwide CCT programme initiated by the federal government and implemented in partnership with states, local governments areas and communities, a state like Cross River, one of Nigeria's 36 federating states,<sup>9</sup> has

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<sup>7</sup> During fieldwork in Nigeria, it was discovered that UNICEF in collaboration with the Nigeria National Planning Commission is in the process of assisting the country develop a Social Protection Policy Framework that would eventually become a draft policy to be submitted to the National Assembly for legislation.

<sup>8</sup>The debt relief Nigeria obtained in 2005 from the Paris Club created the impetus for improved efforts to achieve the MDGs. Before that time, the main efforts were through the implementation of Nigeria's National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) programme (see National Planning Commission 2004). In order to facilitate the achievement of the MDGs, the federal government created the Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on the MDGs (OSSAP-MDGs) located in the presidency to act as the arrow head agency for coordinating national programmes aimed at achieving the goals. The OSSAP-MDGs works with governments at all levels and collaborates with international development organizations like UN agencies, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), DFID, the World Bank and other foreign governments to achieve the MDGs in Nigeria.

<sup>9</sup>Nigeria operates a three-tiered federal structure comprising a federal government, 36 states, 774 local government areas and the federal capital territory of Abuja where the federal government is based. For

developed its own version of the CCT that it calls 'Project Comfort'. Other states like Kano, Bauchi and Katsina, with the support of DFID, UNICEF and the World Bank, also have CCTs designed specifically to improve enrolment of girls in primary and secondary schools (Holmes et al., 2011, 2). Furthermore, Ekiti state and Anambra state have legislated and began the payment of social pensions to persons above sixty-five and seventy years old respectively.<sup>10</sup> More so, Jigawa state has launched the payment of disability allowance for various persons with disabilities who register for the programme in order to stop them from begging on the streets. Imo state also has a programme that pays allowances to people with disabilities.

However, as some social protection observers in Nigeria argue, despite the existence of these programmes in the country notwithstanding, the coverage of these programmes remains very low when compared to the scale of what is necessary to make significant impacts in the lives of the teeming population of vulnerable individuals in Nigeria. For instance, the COPE programme only covers 0.001 percent of the poor (Holmes et al., 2011a, 2) and the total social protection expenditure as percentage of overall federal government spending in 2009 was only 1.4 percent (Hagen-Zanker and Tavakoli 2011, 1). What is more, considering the fact that the global 'food, fuel and financial crises' of 2008/2009

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administrative convenience, the FCT, 36 states and 774 local governments are categorized into six geopolitical zones namely; the Northeast, Northwest, North central, Southeast, Southwest, and South-south geopolitical zone.

<sup>10</sup>It is important to emphasize that the establishment of social pensions in Nigeria is a recent development. Historically pensions are only paid in Nigeria to persons who were employed in the formal sector and have contributed to providence funds from where payments are drawn after retirement. Those in the informal sector and the less privilege and vulnerable do not receive any form of old age support from any government, be it federal, state or local government. The development of pensions in Nigeria since the colonial era until recently thus represent preference for providence contributory pensions, as opposed to a social pensions model developed in some other French speaking African countries like the Cote D'Ivoire (for details see, Williamson and Pampel 1991). The introduction of social pensions in Nigeria in these states therefore represents new initiatives for taking care of old and vulnerable citizens who never had formal employment and who face tremendous difficulties surviving in their old age. A third state, Osun state also has a social pension programme for elderly people identified as the 'most vulnerable' in society. However, unlike Ekiti and Anambra states, Osun state is yet to pass an enabling law to solidify the initiative. Given the high tendency in Nigeria for such pro-poor initiatives to be cancelled once the government that initiated them leaves office, an enabling law that backs the initiative is essential, even though the payment of the social pension in Osun state, like those in the two other states, is highly commendable. While Ekiti and Anambra states pay recipients 5,000 Nigerian naira (approximately US \$33) monthly, Osun state pays each recipient a sum of N10, 000 (\$66).



created more vulnerable persons across various groups in Nigeria (Gavrilovic et al., 2011; Jones 2011; Samuels et al 2011; Samuels and Blake 2011; Holmes et al., 2011b), the small scale coverage of social protection programmes in Nigeria is quite worrisome. Not to mention the growing numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs) due to the occurrence of natural disasters like the 2012 national floods and from various conflicts across the country. For example, the insurgency activities of Boko Haram - the Islamic fundamentalist group - that continues to occur mainly in the Northern parts of the country contributes significantly to the rising numbers of IDPs needing various forms of protection in the country.<sup>11</sup>

Nonetheless, the attempt to arrest the rising levels of vulnerabilities and risks encountered by poor people in Nigeria has created the imperative for governments at all levels to cooperate with both domestic and international partners to address the challenges encountered by members of these vulnerable groups. In addition, owing to the debt relief obtained from the Paris Club in 2005, the Nigeria government had to justify its utilization of saved debt relief gains of approximately \$1 billion annually by demonstrating spending on 'pro-poor investments' (State Partnership for Accountability, Responsiveness and Capability 2013). This partly necessitated the creation of the COPE CCT programme. COPE is modeled after Brazil and Mexico's *Bolsa familia* and *Oportunidades* CCT programmes respectively given their focus on reducing intergenerational poverty and building the human capital of poor households in the areas of education and health. The COPE CCT programme was launched across the federation in 2007 following similar objectives in the Latin American CCT programmes. This was done to address the escalating human capital crises in Nigeria as it relates to children's health and education, especially with respect to Nigeria's unenviable and unimpressive records of having high rates

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<sup>11</sup>The Nigerian National Emergency Management Authority (NEMA) recently announced that in the first three months of 2014 over three million people have been displaced due to the insurgency activities of Boko Haram. The most affected people are women and children unable to flee when the insurgents attack. See Vanguard Newspaper, 25 March, 2014, '3 million people displaced by insurgency in 3 months – NEMA', available: <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2014/03/3-million-people-displaced-insurgency-3-months-nema/#sthash.IdT8BtQs.dpuf>, accessed 1-4-2014.

of child and maternal mortality.<sup>12</sup> Different states in the Nigerian federation subsequently commenced the pilot phases of the programme at various times afterwards. The implementation of the programme in Oyo state that constitutes the basis of the discussion in this paper, took place between 2008 and 2009 in various communities across the state. The implementation of the programme in three rural communities located in one of the local governments in Ibadan is analyzed below. But it is appropriate to first provide an examination of COPE in theory before analyzing what obtains in practice. The discussion in the next section revolves around the design, objectives and graduation strategy of COPE.

### **COPE: Design, objectives and graduation strategy**

#### *Programme design*

Like many other CCT programmes aimed at human capital development with the objective of reducing intergenerational poverty, the conditions for participating households in the COPE programme according to the programme document are:

- Enrolment and retention of basic school aged children in basic Education (primary one to junior secondary).
- At least 80% school attendance.
- Attendance in training for life and vocational skills, basic health and sanitation as available in the community.
- Participation of qualified children under 5 years in all government free basic health programmes such as Vitamin A supplementation and NPI [National Polio Immunization].

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<sup>12</sup>In the 2011 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) for Nigeria prepared by the country's National Bureau of Statistics, with technical and financial support from UNICEF, child mortality in Nigeria is estimated to be 158 per 1000 live births for under-five children and 97 per 1000 for infant mortality (NBS 2013, iv). The former refers to the number of children who die before their fifth birthday while the latter refers to the number of children who die before their first birthday. These figures indicate Nigeria is not close to achieving goal four of the MDGs on reducing child mortality. Similarly, Nigeria has a high maternal mortality rate of 630 per 100, 000 births (UNDP 2013, 158).

- Acceptance by participants of the conditions for the monthly savings arrangements of the programme (National Poverty Eradication Programme, NAPEP 2007, 6).

The programme document lists the target groups as:

- poor female-headed households;
- poor aged headed households with children of school age;
- physically challenged persons headed households with children of basic school age; and
- Households headed by special groups (victims of VVFs [Vesicle Vagina Fistula], PLWHAs [People Living with HIV and AIDS], and other vulnerable groups, with children of basic school age (NAPEP 2007, 5).

#### *Objectives and implementation strategy*

The two objectives of COPE are ‘to reduce vulnerability of the core poor in the society against existing socioeconomic risks’ and ‘to reduce intergenerational poverty’ (NAPEP 2007, 5). The programme commenced in 2007/2008 with 12 pilot states representing 2 states each from Nigeria’s 6 geopolitical zones and has since been scaled up to include more states in subsequent phases.<sup>13</sup> Each participating household receives a Basic Income Guarantee (BIG) ranging from N1,500 Nigerian Naira per eligible child (approximately US \$10)<sup>14</sup> to a maximum of N5,000 (US \$33) for 4 children and above monthly (NAPEP 2007, 7). An additional N7, 000 is put aside every month on behalf of every participating household and a total of N84, 000 (US \$560) is given to the household as investment fund after 12 months when participants are required to exit the programme (NAPEP 2007, 8). This investment fund is known as the Poverty Reduction Accelerator Investment (PRAI).

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<sup>13</sup>The programme has been expanded to the 36 states of the federation. However, not all the states have provided counterparts funding in order to access the federal government’s fund as required by the OSSAP-MDGs office that manages the save money from Nigeria’s debt relief from where money for COPE’s operation is taken. It is therefore unclear as to how many states are currently implementing the programme and/or which phase of the programme many states are presenting implementing.

<sup>14</sup>This calculation uses an exchange rate of 150 Nigerian naira to 1 US dollar. The exchange rate around the time the programme was launched in 2007 was between 145 to 155 naira to a dollar.

According to the programme document, in order to ensure the sustainability of the programme, COPE requires strong community involvement and participation, as well as ownership, especially in relation to the selection process. The programme design also allows community involvement through ‘the establishment of state and community committees to oversee the implementation of the programme’ (NAPEP 2007). The following committees are to be established in each participating state and selected communities within the local government areas respectively: State Social Assistance Committee (SSAC) and the Community Social Assistance committee (CSAC). As part of efforts to encourage ownership of the programme at the state level and local government levels where participating communities and households are located, there is a requirement that participating states and local governments provide matching funds. This is to match the funds provided by the federal government through OSSAP-MDG and NAPEP who are in charge of implementing the programme on behalf of the federal government.<sup>15</sup> The programme design also requires that the ‘provision of life skills training to ensure independence of participants on exit from the scheme’ during the course of the year before the end of the programme (NAPEP 2007).

The targeting approach used by COPE combines geographic and state targeting approaches. In the pilot stage, two states each from Nigeria’s six geopolitical zones. These states are Nassarawa and Niger (North central zone), Borno and Yobe (Northeast zone), Jigawa and Kebbi (Northwest zone), Ebonyi and Enugu (Southeast zone), Bayelsa and Cross River (South-south zone), and Oyo and Ogun (Southwest zone). These states were chosen based on geographic targeting criteria from states having

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<sup>15</sup>It is crucial to note that in the first phase of COPE, not all the states were able to provide counterpart funding that could have allowed a doubling of the number of participants. Yet, and perhaps because this was the first phase of the programme, the programme was implemented in some states that did not provide counterpart funds. Oyo state is one of the states that did not provide counterpart funds, and as one government official interviewed in Ibadan explained, it was only the federal government’s funds that NAPEP utilized to implement COPE in the state. A major implication of the lack of counterpart funding in Oyo was that the programme could only reach 500, instead of 1000, households. Nonetheless, the programme was implemented by NAPEP in Oyo in partnership with the state and local government officials and community members in line with the design of the programme.

the lowest Human Capacity Development Index (HCDI).<sup>16</sup> Based on the state targeting, COPE employs a community selection process in which the community selects the participants. The State Social Assistance Committee (SAC) in each state, using approved guidelines developed in consultation with selected local governments and with technical support from NAPEP, is expected to select the communities that would participate in the programme. Each state is required to set up its own guidelines in collaboration with the implementing agency, NAPEP.

At the community level, selection is to be done by the community's social assistance committee. This committee will be comprised of leaders that are selected from within the village or community including the community/village Head, 'the leading pastor and/or Imam, a School Principal/Headmaster and the Community Development leader' with technical assistance from NAPEP (NAPEP 2007, 11). The COPE document also makes provision for the monitoring and evaluation of the programme. According to the programme document, monitoring and evaluation will be done to 'keep track' with the implementation of the programme by NAPEP and OSSAP-MDG will employ its own strategy 'to monitor NAPEP's compliance with guidelines and the utilization of funds' (NAPEP 2007). The programme anticipated reaching 12, 500 households in the 12 states and the FCT, Abuja, at the end of the first (pilot) phase with the plan of positively affecting the lives of 62, 500 individuals on the calculation of 5 persons per household (NAPEP 2007).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>According to NAPEP(2007), the HCDI criteria is 'constructed largely from indicators using the girl child school enrolment ration and adult literacy in English and measures the potential capacity for human contribution to economic development in a country, state or community.'

<sup>17</sup>Unfortunately, the lack of accessible databank or register documenting the actual number of people who have so far participated and 'graduated' from the programme makes it difficult to determine how many households and individuals have benefited from the programme. At best, a collation of data from the state level would be the closest one could get to ascertain the number of participants to date. But it was discovered during the course of fieldwork in 2013 that not all who enrolled as participants 'graduated' because of factors ranging from deaths to non-compliance with conditions of the programme. While this should be expected in any programme of this nature, the lack of specific information on the actual number of participants who were removed by officials, dropped out voluntary for any reason, or died during the period of their participation in the programme, further

### *Graduation strategy*

A major targeting criterion in COPE is that households should have at least a child or have children of school age in order to be eligible for participation in the programme. In other words, children can be regarded as the primary participants or beneficiaries of the programme, while household heads are the secondary participants/beneficiaries. The latter could be men or women (even though there is a strong preference for women) who are widows or widowers, disabled, or living with HIV/AIDS. The monthly BIG component of the income transfer, that is the minimum \$10 or maximum \$33 depending on the number of participating child/children per household, is paid to the household head directly to ensure the upkeep of the child or children as the case may be during their year long participation in the programme.

The main graduation strategy in COPE relates to the PRAI component of the income transfer given to the household head or any designated member of the household on behalf of the entire household. The amount is a total of \$560 to be invested in starting a business or trade or any other investment that would generate enough income to sustain the household after they 'exit' from the programme. The household head is usually the person that collects the money and s/he is expected to invest in a business. In situations where the household head is not in a position to fulfil this condition, may be due to disability, sickness or any other reason, a household member of working age can be nominated to receive the money on behalf of the household. In any case, vocational training in a desired trade chosen by the PRAI recipient is offered to either the household head or the designated member if such person requires training or does not already possess such training. At the end of the programme, the PRAI is used to purchase some necessary equipment to establish a trade for the person upon graduation of the household from the programme. However, the major reason for the PRAI is to ensure

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makes it difficult to ascertain the actual number of participants who have so far completed the programme nationwide.

that after participants exit the programme they can continually sustain themselves with income generated from the trade or business that was invested in. It is this income generating business that the designers of COPE expect to further reduce vulnerabilities and intergenerational poverty of the household after graduation from the programme. How this operates in practice is analyzed below through the experience of three communities that participated in COPE from 2008 to 2009 in Ibadan, Oyo state, Nigeria.

### **Life after graduation from COPE: Prospects and Challenges**

According to Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux (2013, 911), 'graduation' refers to 'the process of reducing vulnerability so that people can move off the social protection provision into more productive and resilient livelihoods'. Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux (2013) distinguish between two types of graduation: 'threshold' graduation and 'sustainable' graduation. The former in their words refers to 'an administrative benchmark that signals the point at which a beneficiary is no longer eligible for the programme' and the latter refers to 'a state in which livelihoods have been fundamentally transformed through social protection interventions' (Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux 2013, 912). Similar to Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux's conceptualization of what constitutes sustainable graduation from a social protection programme, Rincon and Gasnier (2012) explain sustainable graduation entails 'reaching a certain level of human, social, physical, and productive assets that allow households to become self-sufficient and build the necessary capacity to cope with shocks without falling back into extreme poverty'.

If Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux's conceptualization of 'sustainable' graduation is combined with Rincon and Gasnier's elucidation of the same concept, 'sustainable' graduation is certainly a more advanced form of graduation to attain than 'threshold' graduation. Hence, applying this understanding to the graduation strategy of Nigeria's COPE CCT programme as explained as outlined in the previous

section clearly indicates the programme sets a ‘threshold’ for graduation within a one-year period while anticipating that the PRAI income transfer of \$560 dollars to households will ensure ‘sustainable’ graduation from the programme. As explained above, the PRAI is expected to be invested in an income generating business or trade. For instance, participants who are trained in a hairdressing trade would utilize part of the PRAI to purchase hairdressing machines, hair dryers and other equipment needed for such a trade. Likewise, someone who is trained to be a tailor would purchase sewing and knitting machines in addition to other needed materials that can be purchased with the PRAI. In other words, some assets are to be acquired within the limits of what the PRAI can cover.

The graduation strategy of COPE however contains certain factors militating against sustainable graduation from the programme. These are identified here as internal factors arising from the design and implementation of the programme, and external factors emanating from structural constraints due to lack of an enabling socioeconomic environment in Nigeria. Together, these factors dim the prospects of participants to achieve sustainable graduation from the programme and at the same time pose fundamental challenges to participants’ livelihoods after attaining the ‘threshold’ graduation at the end of the one-year period. These factors therefore prevent the achievement of the objectives of the programme, as it does not appear participants’ vulnerabilities can be meaningfully reduced within the context of the programmes graduation strategy. More so, the cycle of intergeneration poverty poor households are exposed to cannot be effectively reduced due to these factors. The implications of these factors specifically for the sustainable graduation of children as primary participants and adults as secondary participants are analyzed below in relation to the development of human capital in education, health and income/employment generation.



### *Internal factors militating against COPE's graduation strategy*

That children now represent a distinct class of extremely poor and vulnerable group in many developing countries is no longer in doubt (Barrientos and Dejong 2006; Roelen and Sabates-Wheeler 2012). Nor is it entirely a settled issue that CCTs, as opposed to unconditional cash transfers, are better at reducing the vulnerabilities faced by children worldwide considering evidence supporting CCTs and unconditional transfers continue to emerge (Barrientos 2007; Kenya 2012). Yet evidence supporting 'graduation', albeit in its sustainable variant as defined above, is just beginning to emerge and so far remain few in many countries (Browne 2013; Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux 2013).

The problem of inadequate evidence supporting sustainable graduation according to Sabates-Wheeler and Devereux (2013) is partly attributable to the different understanding and definitions of graduation in various social protection programmes. Citing the differences in the conceptualization of graduation in social protection programmes like Ethiopia's 'Productive Safety Net Programme' (PSNP), Bangladesh's 'Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction' (CFPR) programme, and Rwanda's 'Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme' (VUP), Sabates Wheeler and Devereux (2013) compare the variations in different countries' approach to the concept of graduation. What this highlights is well captured in one of the World Bank's 'Safety Net How To' documents on 'graduation' that recognizes 'graduation strategies are very context specific, as they depend on technical and administrative capacity as well as on the possibilities of social and economic progress within the specific country conditions'.<sup>18</sup> These context specific conditions are crucial for understanding graduation from CCTs, or any other social protection programme for that matter, in Nigeria.

Given its focus on the human capital development of children as stipulated in the conditions requiring regular attendance in school and participation in all government sponsored free health and

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<sup>18</sup>See, The World Bank, 'Safety Net How to: Graduation', available at, <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/SAFETYNETSANDTRANSFERS/Resources/281945-1291746977764/7-graduation.pdf>, accessed 9/03/2014.

medical services, it would have been expected that the programme should last longer than the one-year threshold. In comparison to CCTs like Mexico's *Oportunidades* that COPE is partly modeled after, the one-year participation period significantly undermines any potential or substantial impact that the programme can have on children's educational development. In Mexico, participating children are enlisted in the programme according to their appropriate level of educational development and are supported until they graduate, this can be up to 6 to 8 years. The one-year participation threshold of COPE is major challenged the programme considering Nigeria operates a 6-3-3-4 education system that requires students to spend 6 years in primary school, 3 years in junior secondary, 3 years in senior secondary and 4 years at the university, polytechnic or college. This means even if the programme focuses exclusively on ensuring children participating in the programme receive the basic minimum education at the primary and junior secondary schools levels, it would require at least 9 years for children to complete the two stages.

However, some may argue the lack of adequate resources may hinder programme administrators from enlisting each participant for nine years or the imperative of preventing the 'dependency syndrome' from setting in makes the one-year restriction justifiable.<sup>19</sup> While either or both of these arguments may be the case, the programme's restriction of participation to one year for each child is grossly inadequate. This is especially because neither the child or children nor their household receive(s) any other form of support afterwards to ensure the conditions that can force children to drop out of school are effectively addressed within the one year of their participation. The one-year participation threshold therefore raises the question of what exactly the one-year participation period is intended to achieve.

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<sup>19</sup>In recent years, debates have increased over the affordability of social protection programmes in many developing countries especially around discussions of targeting participants as opposed to universal coverage. Some observers believe universal coverage is possible and affordable while others maintain it would be extremely costly to establish universal coverage for vulnerable groups considering the fact that many developing countries already depend on donors heavily to finance existing programmes.

As noted above, the education system in Nigeria at the primary and junior secondary levels require more than a year to complete. Even if the one-year period is used to support children transiting from primary to junior secondary or junior to senior secondary school as a way of encouraging some continuity in children's education, it is highly debatable as to what will happen after such transition occurs.<sup>20</sup> In the case of primary to junior secondary for instance, it would still require three years for children to complete the junior secondary level. The same amount of years would be required in the case of transition from junior to the senior secondary level. More so, no monitoring and impact evaluation report has been conducted to ascertain the impact of the programme on improvements in the performance of children who have participated in the programme. The research done in Ibadan reveals that monitoring of attendance for instance is simply done by the headmistress, headmaster or head teacher as the case may be, and this does not include submitting evidence of students' performance in class. The verification of attendance is done to ascertain whether the household complies with that requirement in order to receive the monthly payment.<sup>21</sup>

As explained by some participants during interviews in 2013, the responsibility of ensuring the child continues to attend school is entirely on the household and even though some have being able to keep their children in school, others have had to withdraw them from time to time owing to amongst many other reasons, lack of money to pay auxiliary fees. This is despite claims of most governments in

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<sup>20</sup>UNICEF and DFID's CCTs programmes in some Northern states seek to encourage transition of girls from primary to secondary school and the programmes have a participation period of two years targeting girls in the last two years of primary school with the objective of reducing the dropout rates after primary school. COPE can be modeled along this line as well in states where the problem of high dropout rates exists.

<sup>21</sup>There is no evidence that NAPEP conducted any monitoring and evaluation of the programme. However, as stipulated in the programme document, the OSSAP-MDG uses its own mechanism to verify how funds related to the achievement of the MDGs are utilized by organizations like NAPEP. In this particular case, a consultant was simply contracted to verify if the programme took place in the local government. In an interview with the consultant, all he was mandated to do is visit the local government secretariat to confirm if the programme occurred or not, a task he completed and afterwards submitted a report to the OSSAP-MDG. Interview with OSSAP-MDG consultant in Ibadan, 4-6-2013.

Nigeria that education is free.<sup>22</sup> The ‘free education’ in many places only applies to the waivers of tuition; the provision of desks, uniforms, textbooks and other writing materials is the responsibility of parents and guardians. For instance, according to one local government education official at the local government where the three communities involved in this study reported are located, local education officials sometimes supply notebooks, not textbooks, to schoolchildren. Nevertheless, she added this is not a regular practice as it only occurs whenever the state and/or local government politicians are celebrating one event or the other.<sup>23</sup> Essentially, the one-year schooling period for children is not enough to encourage school attendance in a way that meaningfully contributes to the development of their educational capacity.<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, the limitation the one-year participation period of COPE imposes on children’s educational development, the health implications are equally disappointing. This is because Nigeria’s primary healthcare system has so far being unable to effectively tackle health challenges of many citizens at an early stage. The country’s health indicators, such as life expectancy, child and infant and maternal mortality ratios are disappointingly high when compared to several countries all over the world. For instance, the recurrence of cases of poliomyelitis continue to be reported in countries like Nigeria, Pakistan and Afghanistan and despite efforts in recent years, or even claims by some government officials of having eradicated the disease, polio cases are still being reported in Nigeria and

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<sup>22</sup>Nigeria launched a Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in 1999 to address the problem of illiteracy in the country but so far, the impact of this programme is yet to be felt. There have been several allegations of corruption and mismanagement of funds in the implementation of the programme and this have further undermine the credibility of the government’s commitment to providing Universal (free) education in Nigeria.

<sup>23</sup>Interview with local government education official in Ibadan, 28-7-2013.

<sup>24</sup>It should be noted that 10.5 million Nigerian children are estimated to be out of school, the highest in the world (British Council Nigeria 2012, v). Moreover, despite the enactments of the Child Rights Act in Nigeria (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2003) and the ‘domestication’ of the Act in 24 out of the 36 states of the federation, many children in Nigeria remain vulnerable to labour exploitation and human trafficking. Nigeria is not only a source, but also a transit and destination country for victims of human trafficking. Children are exploited in various forms of domestic, agricultural and industrial labour. It is estimated that 36.3 percent of Nigerian children between ages 5-14 are working, while 28.1 percent of children between ages 7-14 years combine work and school (United States Department of Labor 2010, 571). Keeping these children in school is unfortunately still not a priority for some governments in Nigeria.

victims of polio continue to suffer in the country. Many of the victims of polio in northern Nigeria where the disease is quite prevalent are amongst vulnerable groups that often end begging because of paralysis suffered due to the disease and the inability to receive adequate medical care and social protection from the government. The disease affects several thousands of children.

Since participation in routine immunization is one of the requirements for COPE participants, simply encouraging households to participate in routine immunization for one year is not enough although some participants confirmed they still participate in the routine immunization exercise whenever it is free and available.<sup>25</sup> When asked if they pay for other medical and health services at the local clinics, participants explained they sometimes pay for the services but most times they have to purchase the drugs as these are often not provided free as claimed by government officials.<sup>26</sup> More so, the only verification of compliance with the health conditionalities in COPE is the presentation of the immunization card for each child showing participation in the most recent routine immunization exercise in order to ensure the payment of the monthly transfer. Consequently, the participation in such exercises tends to drop after a year when participants exit the programme. The negative implication of this for the short, medium and long-term development of the health of young children in poor households cannot be overemphasized.

In addition, if the short one year period for participating in the COPE programme, and the lack of effective monitoring and impact evaluation of improvements in health and educational development are considered factors internal in the design and implementation of COPE affecting the 'sustainable' graduation potentials of children, the believe or anticipation of sustainable graduation from the programme for adults is equally problematic. This is because the payment of \$560 PRAI to household heads or designated household members as secondary participants is an internal factor militating

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<sup>25</sup>This was confirmed during interviews held in the three communities in Ibadan between May and October 2013.

<sup>26</sup> Interviews and household surveys conducted in the three communities reveal this issue.

against sustainable graduation of adult participants from the programme. The adults who receive the payment at a ceremony organized by the government at the end of each phase of the programme are expected to carry on the responsibility of caring for the children by ensuring they continue to attend school. However, as confirmed by participants during fieldwork, some of the equipment that was purchased with the money broke down soon after they acquired them. Some of the participants maintain this has affected their income generation and by extension the upkeep of their household generally.<sup>27</sup>

To be sure, the supposed training of household heads or their designates who require training is meant to be provided by NAPEP in collaboration with a government agency like the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) located in the state where the programme is being implemented. It was however discovered that many of the participants who received the PRAI simply claimed they already had knowledge to engage in the vocations or trades they choose, but no real verification was carried out to ascertain their claims. The result was a situation where by the PRAI was handed out without adequate verification of whether or not those who claimed to have skills in certain vocations or trade could operate some of the basic equipment needed to facilitate their trade upon graduation. Moreover, for some of those who claimed to have been former traders who would like to return to buying and selling, no evidence was presented to support their claims. While it may be understandable in the latter case to be unable to present evidence of previous trading experience owing to the difficulty of keeping records of trading in the informal sector where most of the participants work, officials could have demanded a demonstration to verify the operational skills of those who claim they have experience in vocations requiring the operation of basic equipment. This could have had the added advantage of assisting officials ascertain what kinds of (additional) training participants require.

However, it remains unclear how many participants, if any, received training from the relevant

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<sup>27</sup>Interview with participants, May-October 2013.

agencies as none of those who interviewed mentioned having received any training and no official of the programme confirmed that certain persons were trained. More so, for some who invested directly in buying and selling of commodities such as food items and other consumer goods, the fluctuations in prices of supplies has affected their ability to keep up with their trade and some have actually suspended their trade until they are able to raise capital to restart them. This latter category contained mostly women who hitherto had been out of their trading businesses before enlisting in the programme and was only able to continue for a short while after the programme ended. Notwithstanding the medium to long term implications of sustainable graduation from COPE discussed so far, it is important to note many of the participants expressed gratitude for having participated in the programme and wish it continued longer than it did.

Many participants mentioned the short-term amelioration of their living conditions due to the programme's intervention through the monthly BIG transfers as being timely owing to the difficulties they were experiencing at the time they were chosen to participate in the programme. As one woman explained during an interview in one of the communities, the stress been a single mother had taken a great toll on her health as she worked extra had to feed her household.<sup>28</sup> According to her, ever since her husband abandoned her with four kids to live with another wife in a different city, the only income she gets comes from doing occasional menial jobs in working on construction sites or washing clothes for people to feed the family. COPE's intervention was therefore a great relief through the BIG. Another woman in a different community who happens to be an elderly widow could not hold back tears from her eyes during an interview while narrating how the programme intervened at the right time in a financial situation she describes as been serious at that time within the household.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Interview with a participant in one of the participating communities in Ibadan, 25-5-2013.

<sup>29</sup>Interview with a participant in one of the participating communities in Ibadan, 13-5-2013.

An official also mentioned the situation of a woman who upon receiving her first BIG transfer from the programme moved aside and wept profusely. When the official why she was weeping asked her, she mentioned that as a widow with three children, life has been near impossible to live after she lost her husband few years and since wondered where the help to cater for the household would come from.<sup>30</sup> Due to these kinds of assistance offered through COPE, the programme is called ‘Bami tan se’ in Yoruba language – the predominantly spoken language in the community. ‘Bami tan se’ literally translates to ‘end my poverty’ in English. These narratives illustrate that COPE did have some short-term impact on the participants. However, the everyday reality of life before, during and after graduation requires confronting the vagaries of structural constraints that constitute external factors militating against COPE’s graduation strategy as explained below.

#### *External factors militating against COPE’s graduation strategy*

The external factors preventing sustainable graduation, in whatever limited form, from COPE revolve around structural constraints emanating from the lack of an enabling environment to facilitate graduation from the programme. Specifically, these structural constraints involve amongst others the poor state of infrastructure and the lack of adequate technical and administrative capacity to support the programme’s participants during and after their participation in the programme. Although these factors are structural constraints encountered in Nigeria in general, the lack of attention to some of these factors in the context of COPE’s design and implementation is worsens the prospects of sustainable graduation for participants. For instance, the schools where some of the children are enrolled lack basic infrastructure such as adequate class and rest rooms for pupils, forcing school authorities to operate over crowded classrooms in many places.

More so, the supply of school materials like desks and chairs is mostly done by parents and guardians, and in cases where the school authorities have to make purchases of such items due to lack

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<sup>30</sup>Interview with government official involved in COPE implementation, 27-5-2013.



of government intervention, the charges are transferred as auxiliary fees to parents. The problem of the quality of teachers is also a big challenge, and in recent times, several problems have emerged with respect to the quality of teaching. It appears that in many Nigerian states, especially in schools where teachers do not possess the requisite training and qualifications to practice their profession, the quality of education remains low. The recent case in Edo state in Nigeria where a teacher with more than twenty years of teaching experience in the education sector could not properly read out the contents of her teacher's certificate in English during a certificate verification exercise organized by the state government, highlights the technical and administrative capacity crisis in Nigeria's education sector.<sup>31</sup> Other problems in the education sector include regular strikes by workers in protest against government neglect of the education sector. This sometimes produces long strikes in the education, a phenomenon that is quite common at all educational levels in Nigeria from the primary to tertiary levels.

Consequently, expecting children participants of COPE or any non-participant child studying under dilapidated or nonexistent buildings to effectively develop their human capital is a high expectation. The situation of poor infrastructure and low technical and human capacity constitute some of the structural causes of poverty that contribute to the inability of some children to develop skills that can be used later in life to earn a living in Nigeria. More so, the lack of capacity on the part of implementing agents of the programme to effectively conduct 'before and after' examinations to ascertain improvements in children's performance(s), further complicates the situation. Some of the staff of the implementing agency were themselves not fully aware of the origins of the programme and the importance of achieving the objectives beyond the implementation of the programme. Training for most of the staff involved in implementing the programme was perfunctorily done and only a handful

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<sup>31</sup>For details, see Vanguard Newspaper, 'Verification: Edo teacher can't read own certificate' 13-8-2013, available at <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2013/08/verification-edo-teacher-cant-read-own-certificate/>, accessed 01/12/2014.

received short training on CCTs in Brazil through the sponsorship of the World Bank.<sup>32</sup> Majority of the staff only received the staff only received simple briefings relating to the operational guidelines on how to implement the programme nationwide, and in some cases were left to implement the programmes without adequate resources, financial and material.

With respect to health, similar structural constraints exist. The much talked about 'routine immunization' of children against diseases in Nigeria is actually not routine. As one prominent Nigerian health practitioner, Oyewale Tomori (2012, 1) puts it, 'one certainty in the uncertainties of Nigeria is that routine immunization has not been routine. It is not routine presently and it will take a long time before it becomes routine.' Tomori further notes 'routine immunization in Nigeria has appeared like measles spots since 1960 when Nigeria gained independence.' Tomori's assertion is based on the observed irregularities in the Nigerian immunization process for children. Children participants in COPE, like other Nigerian children, face this challenge. The consequences for normal growth and development of the health of children in this regard are not difficult to see in the poor records of Nigeria with respect to children related health indicators. Inadequate and unequipped primary healthcare centres worsen this problem. The resort to the use of quack doctors by many Nigerians is due to some of these problems in the health sector. Self-medication is also common and the use of fake, substandard and expired drugs imported illegally into the country by smugglers is prevalent in Nigeria. To ensure that the health of children in COPE is adequately taken care of, adequate attention beyond their one-year participation in the programme will be important for the long-term development of their human capital in the area of health. Adult participants also face structural problems in this regard.

Women, mostly widows and the aged constitute a large proportion of participants in the three communities where the research reported in this paper was conducted, and by virtue of the programme's design, fulfilling the health related conditions of the programme such as ensuring routine

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<sup>32</sup>Interview with government staff in Abuja, Nigeria, 29-7-2013.

immunization of children under their care, is one of the responsibilities assigned to households heads. Yet, the health status of the women and the aged themselves require attention in order for them to stay alive. It was confirmed in the three communities during interviews that some of the participants in COPE died not so long after the programme ended due to one sickness or the other. This is not to suggest that their participation in COPE had anything to do with their death, either directly or indirectly. In fact, in the opinion of one resident in one of the communities, some of the participants of the programme in the community who are alive might have died had it not been for the intervention they received through the monthly income transfers from COPE.<sup>33</sup> What is at issue however is the fact that the structural constraint posed by poor healthcare provision at various levels of the health system – primary, secondary and tertiary – in Nigeria affects the access people participating in COPE can have as members of vulnerable groups. This reality was confirmed by a female medical doctor in an interview at a state and local government run clinic located close to one of the communities. The clinic is dedicated to providing women with young children and the aged primary healthcare as outpatients.

During the interview, the medical doctor explained that due to paucity of funds, the clinic only opens few days a week and although they sometimes provide some free drugs to patients, such drugs could only last for two weeks but the next appointment given to patients is always set at two months.<sup>34</sup> She further explained the drugs are not really the essentials but basic drugs that are needed to supplement the essentials. According to her, the essential drugs are prescribed and patients are advised to purchase them on their own for use in combination with the supplements the clinic provides. Once the supplements are exhausted, patients would have to purchase them at the local chemists around the community or farther in town as the case may be until the next visit to the clinic in two months when they stand are likely to receive more supplements free. She added that as a medical doctor, she knows what kinds of drugs that women and the aged should be given, but that the clinic is unable to provide

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<sup>33</sup>Interview with non-participant in a participating community in Ibadan, 9-9-2013

<sup>34</sup>Interview with medical doctor at a clinic close to one of the participating communities in Ibadan, 6-8-2013.

those free and they are not even consulted by government on what kinds of drugs should be purchased for distribution. All they are required to do is dispense the available drugs as supplied by government authorities from time to time. This is the experience of many people in Nigeria and COPE participants as members of vulnerable groups face even harsher realities with respect to gaining accesses to good medical care. Sustainable graduation from COPE is not enhanced in such contexts.

Furthermore, the macroeconomic situation of Nigeria has not been favourable to the poor as inflation continues to reduce the real disposable income available to households for consumption. The successful operation of short and medium enterprises owing to rising costs of production is also a huge challenge for many people. For these reasons and more, the PRAI component of COPE that simply makes a one-off payment of \$560 without any additional support through at least a microfinance line of credit is inadequate. In addition, establishing a business or trade in Nigeria can be very challenging in view of the enormous infrastructural gap that needs to be filled. Often times, operators of small and medium scale enterprises require little shops/outlets or spaces to practice their trade and these outlets have to be rented most of time. In the case of the COPE participants in the three communities, part of the money they received from the PRAI component had to be used to rent a shop and only those who had some or all of the money transferred to them were able to make such a decision.

As for those who did not receive any money because the purchase of the equipment covered the entire fund of the PRAI without leaving any amount in cash for the participants to take home, they could not immediately rent an outlet to commence their trade. For instance, one of the participants who received sewing equipment explained she had not been able to rent an outlet and only performs skeletal services from home.<sup>35</sup> In addition, she explained a major equipment she would like to use for the tailoring trade could not be covered within the amount of the PRAI and she only manages the other

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<sup>35</sup>Interview with participant in one of the communities, 13-5-2013.

equipment that was purchased from the PRAI. Hence, she relies on the other equipment that does very limited work, but which was purchased since its price could be covered within the PRAI to do her trade.

What is more, the equipment distributed as assets to many of the participants upon graduation rely on electricity to function and owing to Nigeria's acute energy poverty crises, that is, the lack of access to adequate and affordable fuel and electricity, the cost of production for small-scale businesses is further increased. The lack of electricity remains a major structural constraint to development in Nigeria. Many households are not connected to the national grid and those who are connected do not enjoy any guaranteed hours of electricity supply. Consequently, those who can afford to purchase fuel powered electricity-generating sets do so and spend lots of money to maintain the 'generators' as they are usually called in Nigeria. Depending on the capacity of the electricity generating set, the costs for a small sized fuel powered generating set mostly used by small business in Nigeria could cost between \$80-\$100 and above. This already represents more than 10 percent of the PRAI fund.

An examination of some of archival documents accessed during fieldwork reveal the kinds of equipment many of the COPE participants received from the programme administrators during the ceremony held to mark the end of the programme. Conspicuously visible on the list of equipment were electricity-generating sets. During interviews however, some of the participants mentioned that due to the constant use of the 'generators' and the high costs of maintenance required to keep them functional, many of the generating sets have stopped functioning properly while some others are have been completely abandoned due to unfixable faults or lack of money to fix them. Hence, the participants mentioned they rely on the irregular electricity supplied by the responsible government agency and only work whenever electricity is available.<sup>36</sup> This has greatly affected their ability to

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<sup>36</sup>The reliance on generators explains why some observers sometimes refer to Nigeria as the 'generator state' owing to acute shortages in electricity. Interviews with participants revealed many cannot cope with the challenge of maintaining generating sets at a time fuel prices are not constant and fuel products are some unavailable for purchase at affordable prices.

continue to provide for their households without any additional support from anywhere. Some have therefore sought menial jobs outside their chosen trades.

Although the problem of lack of electricity shows a major structural constraint in Nigeria preventing participants in COPE from effectively sustaining their livelihood after graduation from the programme, other problems such as lack of access to pipe borne water, sanitation and modern sewage facilities in the three communities exists as well. These were mentioned as fundamental challenges people live with in these communities.<sup>37</sup> When asked to mention what the communities lack, water and electricity were listed as major needs in the household surveys conducted within the three communities. Analysis of the household survey indicates that community members consider these basic needs essential to their daily livelihood. In fact, one of the communities did not have any access to electricity, pipe borne water, sewage, toilet or bathroom facilities. All they rely on for water supply is a well donated by a charitable organization but whose installed hand pump had stopped working. Without any toilet facilities, the open field with overgrown grasses near the community serves as their toilet while they have their bath in improvised enclosures made of rotten roofing sheets. Unsurprisingly, some of the COPE participants and non-participants interviewed in that community lamented their living conditions and asked for intervention by government even though politicians often make promises for doing something about the situation.

Unfortunately, previous promises have not been fulfilled and politicians only visit during electoral campaigns but do not return to address the plight of the people in such communities. In fact, given that this particular community is historically a settler community within the area, one of the community members expressed fear that they may one day be evicted without notice. Challenging the decision of Nigerian authorities in cases of forced evictions of vulnerable people can be lengthy and sometimes fruitless as explained by a social rights activist who works with vulnerable people facing

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<sup>37</sup>The responses to questions in the household survey about what the communities need revealed these basic requirements.

forced evictions all over Nigeria.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, achieving sustainable graduation for all communities members, including those who participated in COPE, without adequate attention to the structural constraints experienced daily within the communities with respect to the poor state of infrastructure is a difficult endeavour.

### **Concluding remarks: Hope for COPE**

Despite the existence of internal and external factors that militate against sustainable graduation from COPE. It is important to provide some closing remarks on the way forward for the COPE programme. To begin with, it is crucial to note certain positive features in the COPE programme. First, the design and implementation of the COPE programme provides some valuable lessons for other CCT programmes, not least those in Latin America that it is modeled after. For instance, one of the major criticisms against Latin American CCTs like *Oportunidades* is the burden that many participants, especially women bear in trying to fulfil the requirements of the programme. These include having to spend several hours in community service and filling forms to demonstrate compliance with the conditions of the programme. More so, some participants in some Latin American CCT programmes often have to around schools to obtain evidence that their children have attended schools as stipulated under the conditions. According to some authors, this places enormous responsibilities on women in particular who rather than being empowered have to bear additional responsibilities in their already busy lives as round-the-clock family care givers (see for instance, Luccisano 2004 and 2006; Molyneux 2007). However, COPE overcomes this problem of making participants do all the work of verifying and proving their compliance through its in built mechanism of having the school and health representatives on the Community Social Assistance Committee set up to assist in the implementation of the programme provide the necessary information when necessary.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Interview with social rights activist in Lagos, 24-7-2013.

<sup>39</sup>The attendance register supplied by the school representative and most times the presentation of the children's immunization cards, are sufficient to prove participants' compliance with educational and health conditions

Second, COPE also scores a good point in its application of a bottom-up, rather than top-down, implementation strategy through community involvement. The CSAC is responsible for the selection of participants and the government officials only ensure and confirm that those selected meet the criteria. In the three communities studied, participants and non-participants expressed satisfaction with the selection process that was openly done within community where everyone present observes the selection process. This approach was very unique in the Nigerian context where corruption is always a 'usual suspect' and patron-client relations can easily be established whenever such social programmes are been implemented. Interesting, as one local government official explained during an interview, the procedure sometimes adopted in selecting participants for previous social programmes like public works, employment, income or asset transfer programmes involves obtaining a prepared list of potential participants from local politicians made up mostly of the latter's supporters.<sup>40</sup> The official added that the selection process in COPE was a completely different experience and the politicians did not have any influence on the process given that the selections processes were conducted in open places like community squares where everyone assembles to witness and take part in the selection process.

Third, although COPE's graduation strategy suffers setbacks in-terms of prospects of medium to long-term sustainable graduation for participants, the temporary relief the programme provides for participants is undeniable as some of the narratives by participants discussed in the previous section illustrate. Moreover, the geographic and state targeting strategies used for COPE and applied in Oyo state show the communities indeed can be classified as being in need and the participants chosen appear to have also been those quite in need at least in the three communities covered in this research. This shows that a major structural problem relating to the lack of a reliable population register that

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stipulated in the COPE programme document. No community service is required in COPE but participants are encourages to attend health related training programmes whenever such are available within their communities. However, participants do not face any extra burden unlike what some scholars have identified as the case in some Latin American programmes. The payment of the monthly transfers is also made easy for participants who simply need to go and collect their monthly transfers at the end of each month in at the local government secretariat.

<sup>40</sup>Interview with local government official, 2-7-13.



could have been used to identify poor households by means and proxy testing of assets ownership was effectively overcome and the programme could proceed based on location targeting strategies.

Nevertheless, as this paper has hopefully demonstrated, with respect to the graduation strategy of COPE, fundamental defects in its design and implementation, as well as structural constraints emanating from the lack of an enabling environment, constitute internal and external factors militating against sustainable graduation from the programme. To this end, it is imperative to offer some possible solutions and recommendations to some of the identified factors militating against successful graduation from COPE. One of such recommendations is that the programme's participation period should be extended to no less than 3 years with the possibility of extensions for children and households observed to be in need of further assistance. This would allow the children and household heads or designated members to acquire the necessary basic skills and be better prepared for the challenges of life after participation in the programme. In this regard, the experience of Latin American countries such as Brazil and Mexico should be further studied and necessary lessons applied as appropriate to the Nigerian context. The no-less-than 3 years recommendation is only a suggestion and should be interpreted as an initial assessment period during which trained officials and social workers work with households to ascertain what kind of assistance individual household members require. This can be facilitated if networks of social protection programmes are integrated in a way that vulnerabilities can actually be reduced without having the overarching ambition of reducing intergeneration poverty within a very limited period. This is a more modest objective for a programme like COPE.

In other words, the possibility of graduating from CCTs into other social protection programmes should exist as practiced in Chile where the Chile Solidario programme offers various kinds of assistance to different groups of vulnerable persons based on their needs at various times (Rincon and Gasnier 2012). This means that households and individuals should be able to graduate from one social protection programme into another without exiting the social protection system prematurely as is

currently the case with COPE. The 'hope' for COPE in this regard is that some Nigerian states mentioned earlier have begun developing their own social protection programmes in response to the peculiar vulnerabilities faced by citizens in these states. These include establishing social pensions and disability benefits amongst others. Some have also begun going beyond the usual 'free' education programmes involving only tuition waivers to include the provision of textbooks and school feeding programmes. This means that at some point in the near future, a network of social protection programmes will emerge in some states and integration of various programmes will be possible. COPE can be improved and embedded as part of these networks. Strictly speaking and going by observable trends, Nigeria's federal structure shows not all states will attain social development at the same pace. However, sharing experiences and success stories between states appears to be an emerging positive development in the Nigerian federation despite enormous challenges in the development of the country.

Second, increasing the monthly transfers beyond the current \$10 per child to an amount that considers the inflation rate and prices of basic household items is another recommendation this paper makes. This would be necessary for improving the impact of COPE. This would provide additional disposable income to participating households. Some of the participants interviewed in the communities were of the view that the amount was insufficient to cater for the basic needs of the family and look after the children. An increase will be necessary in better assisting the households. Most of the households studied used the BIG transfers to purchase basic household items like bathing soaps, toothpastes, candles, cleaning items like brooms, and food items such as cups of rice and beans, and condiments for making simple stews and soups.

Third, with respect to the PRAI component, it is unclear whether this component is necessary or not as some academic and social protection experts in Nigeria believe the PRAI component of COPE treats vulnerable groups as the 'active poor' and does not fully recognize the kind of assistance they

require.<sup>41</sup> According to one social protection expert, the addition of the PRAI component was an ‘overload’ on the programme and mentioned it was added without due consideration of its implications for the household’s ability to carry on with the responsibilities of managing small businesses upon exiting from the programme.<sup>42</sup> In any case, if combinations of social protection programmes are put in place as recommended above, whether or not households can graduate into other programmes requiring their engagement in income generating activities can be determined during the initial assessment period of three years that such households utilize in working with trained officials. It is therefore recommended that the PRAI component should only be introduced once officials and participants are sufficiently established the need for such as part of the household’s graduation strategy.

Finally, even if the above recommendations are considered, the structural constraints are likely to continue and these cannot be easily resolved like the above two issues of participation period and amount paid monthly. Issues relating to creating an enabling socioeconomic environment in Nigeria require far more attention and details to succeed. State and non-state actors at all levels therefore need to increase efforts necessary to an enabling environment within the country. In this regard, some states are moving faster than others in trying to create the enabling environment for citizens. The recent rebasing of Nigeria’s Gross Domestic Product that makes it the largest economy in Africa should serve as an impetus for governments at all levels to (re)strategize and take advantage of international partnerships and any increase in foreign direct investment that can advance the standard of living of the people. This would be important in moving beyond simple references to rebased GDP figures relating to the size and growth of the economy. It should be emphasized that the rebased GDP figures have no bearings on social indicators in the country as the low literacy and life expectancy levels remain the

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<sup>41</sup>Interviews with academic experts working on social protection in Nigeria suggest observers do not support this component as part of COPE’s graduation strategy as some argue the idea is not the best in the Nigeria context. This point essentially relates to Stephen Devereux’s view that ‘not all poor people are entrepreneurs’. For details see, Stephen Devereux (2013), ‘Transformative Graduation?’ available at <http://vulnerabilityandpoverty.blogspot.ca/2013/02/transformative-graduation.html>, accessed 3-3-2014.

<sup>42</sup>Interview with social protection expert in Ibadan, 2-7-2013.

same. Moreover, Nigeria still has the highest number of out of schoolchildren in the world and maternal, child and infant mortality rates are embarrassingly high. The level of insecurity, caused partly by social inequalities and high youth unemployment, remains high as well. Creating an enabling socioeconomic environment that provides sustainable means of livelihoods to millions of poor, vulnerable and unemployed people in Nigeria is an imperative that should be pursued by all stakeholders. The rebased GDP of the country can only make sense if most Nigerians are empowered to overcome their lifelong battles against poverty and underdevelopment. Unfortunately, these battles have so far left poverty and underdevelopment the victors in the Nigerian context.

The challenges ahead of Nigeria as a country as it continually seeks to overcome poverty and underdevelopment, are no doubt enormous and perhaps very daunting. Nevertheless, they are surmountable if domestic and international state and non-state actors implement the appropriate socioeconomic policies and programmes. Moving Nigeria out of its current cesspool of poverty, underdevelopment, systemic and miasmatic corruption, and bad governance at all levels. To this end, COPE can certainly benefit from better design and implementation within enhanced environments where the basic needs of life are provided for all citizens. In closing, a reminder is necessary: although cash transfers can sometimes appear as ‘magic bullets’ in development as Nancy Birdsall, quoted in the New York Times of 3 January 2004, remarked, they cannot however deal with the ‘deeper causes of poverty’ as Koga Kenya rightly observes in an article published in *The Economist* of 26 October 2013. Paying attention to the structural factors that create poverty in the first place – be they social, economic, and/or political - is crucial for the success of any social protection programme. It is therefore highly recommended that state and non-state actors in Nigeria pay adequate attention to solving the numerous structural causes of poverty in Nigeria, Africa’s most populous nation and largest economy.

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