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Evaluation of Government Social Welfare Programmes on Vulnerable Households in Orhionmwon Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria

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Abstract
This study evaluated the impact of government social welfare programmes on vulnerable households in Orhionmwon Local Government Area, Edo State. Specifically, this study investigates the extent of social welfare provision, the role of local administrative structures, and strategies for improving social welfare programmes for vulnerable households. A convergent mixed-methods research design was employed, utilising a structured 4-point Likert scale questionnaire administered to 384 heads of vulnerable households, complemented by qualitative insights from 20 focus group discussions involving community leaders, government officials, beneficiaries, and NGO proprietors. Systems Theory was adopted to explain the interconnectedness of administrative structures and beneficiary outcomes. Findings reveal a significant failure in last-mile delivery, with a grand mean of 2.05, indicating that current welfare provision is insufficient, sporadic, and consumption-based rather than transformative. The findings further identify local administrative structures as barriers rather than facilitators; a high mean of 3.30 confirms that bureaucratic bottlenecks, political gatekeeping, and elite capture of beneficiary lists systematically marginalise the most indigent households in the program. Consequently, these programmes function as performative political tools rather than sustainable safety nets. The study recommends the legislative institutionalisation of welfare rights, the adoption of biometric-driven beneficiary identification systems, and a strategic shift from social assistance to "productive inclusion" by integrating vocational training with micro-credit schemes. This research contributes a localised blueprint for shifting social welfare from patronage-based palliatives to a digitised, accountability-driven framework for poverty alleviation in vulnerable households.

Keywords: Social welfare, vulnerable households, poverty alleviation, social investment.

Introduction

The conceptualisation of social welfare programs in the 21st century has evolved from a philanthropic charity model to a fundamental human rights framework. In most developing countries, social welfare programs are not merely safety nets but are critical instruments for social

stability and economic redistribution (Devereux, 2018). The foregoing shows that government-administered social welfare programs play a central role in buffering vulnerable households from shocks, reducing extreme poverty, and enabling easy access to basic services and amenities. The underlying purpose of social welfare programs has been to promote social cohesion by addressing the root causes of poverty and inequality in society. Barrientos (2018) argues that welfare programmes serve as powerful tools for redistributing resources and providing a minimum standard of living for all citizens. Over the years, this policy has shifted from short-term relief to integrated programmes that combine cash transfers, social insurance, and labour-market interventions targeting households facing disturbing vulnerability (Ibrahim, 2022).

In Nigeria, the government has introduced several welfare initiatives to address the needs of vulnerable populations. Notable examples include the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP), which houses initiatives such as N-Power (youth employment), Conditional Cash Transfer

(CCT), National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP), and Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP). According to Ibrahim (2022), these interventions have contributed to reducing poverty and improving household resilience, although implementation challenges remain significant, particularly at the local government level. However, the effectiveness of these programs often depends on the design of the interventions, the adequacy of funding, and the presence of strong institutional frameworks to oversee implementation and monitoring (Ogujiuba, 2021).

Adeniran (2023), when beneficiaries are actively involved in the design and implementation of programmes, there is a higher chance of meeting local needs and ensuring accountability. However, in many Nigerian communities, social welfare interventions are often top-down, with limited input from the intended beneficiaries, leading to inefficiencies and a limited impact (Akanbi, 2023). However, the effectiveness of these programs depends heavily on local administrative capacity and state-level policies. According to Andrea and Martin (2024), the decentralised approach sometimes succeeds in reaching vulnerable households excluded from national programmes but suffers from inconsistent funding and weak political commitment.

Statement of the Problem

Government social welfare programmes are intended to protect vulnerable households from shocks and to promote minimum standards of living. Yet, in many contexts, the anticipated benefits fail to reach the poorest or to produce sustainable improvements in wellbeing. This general problem appears to be reflected in the Orhionmwon Local Government Area's implementation landscape, where national initiatives such as the Conditional Cash Transfer and other National Social Investment Programme components have been rolled out unevenly (Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, 2020). At the crux of the problem is the gap between policy design and local delivery. In other words, the last-mile delivery to vulnerable households remains problematic.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2021), government social welfare programs look plausible on paper but often suffer from weak beneficiary identification, payment delay, exclusion due to politicised distribution channels, and an inadequate database. This lend credence to Taiwo and Agwu (2019) that vulnerable households in precarious situations in Edo State receive late or inadequate support and remain exposed to extreme poverty, food insecurity, asset depletion, and inadequate health care. The foregoing also applies to the Orhionmwon Local Government Area, where these implementation shortcomings translate into lived reality in vulnerable households, such as female-headed households, child-headed households, including disabled persons, older adults, and informal worker-headed households, among others. Furthermore, without a systematic evaluation of the extent of these services and the efficiency of local administrative oversight, the impact of government social welfare programs for vulnerable households in the Orhionmwon LGA risks being performative rather than transformative. Against this backdrop, this study evaluated the impact of these social welfare programs and recommended sustainable, grassroots-driven strategies for improvement.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to evaluate the impact of government social welfare programs on vulnerable households in the Orhionmwon Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria. The specific objectives were as follows:

1. To assess the extent of government social welfare programmes provided to vulnerable households in the Orhionmwon Local Government Area.

2. To examine the role of local administrative structures in the implementation and monitoring of government social welfare programmes in the Orhionmwon Local Government Area.
3. To recommend strategies to enhance the effectiveness of government social welfare programmes for vulnerable households in Edo State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study and ensure a systematic exploration of the core issues surrounding the topic:

1. What is the extent of government social welfare programs provided to vulnerable households in the Orhionmwon Local Government Area?
2. What role do local administrative structures play in the implementation and monitoring of government social welfare programs in the Orhionmwon Local Government Area?
3. What are the recommended strategies to enhance the effectiveness of government social welfare programmes for vulnerable households in Edo State?

Review of Literature

Conceptual Review of Social Welfare Programmes

Social welfare programmes are organised interventions and services provided by governments, non-governmental organisations, and international agencies to enhance the well-being of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups (Andrea & Martin, 2024). These programmes are primarily aimed at alleviating poverty, reducing inequalities, and offering a safety net for those unable to meet basic needs due to socioeconomic, physical, or environmental challenges. Rooted in principles of social justice, human rights, and collective responsibility, welfare initiatives reflect society's obligation to support its most vulnerable members and ensure dignified living conditions for all. As Midgley (2019) notes, welfare programmes extend beyond financial aid to include access to healthcare, education, housing, food security, employment, and legal protection.

A central theoretical foundation of social welfare is the human needs theory, which posits that individuals require essentials such as food, shelter, health, and security to participate fully in society (Alkire, 2017). This supports Adesina's (2022) view that social welfare interventions are critical in addressing multidimensional poverty and integrating marginalised populations into mainstream development. In Nigeria, social welfare programmes have become vital tools for reducing household poverty and vulnerability, with the National Social Protection Policy (2017) underscoring the need to expand such services for sustainable human development. Social welfare is typically categorised into contributory and non-contributory schemes: the former include pension funds and social insurance, while the latter, such as conditional cash transfers and health subsidies, are government-funded and target the poor (Andrea & Martin, 2024). The World Bank (2023) highlights the significance of non-contributory social assistance in fragile economies, particularly where informal employment predominates.

Types of Government Social Welfare Programmes in Nigeria

Government social welfare programmes in Nigeria encompass a range of interventions targeting poverty, unemployment, inequality, and social exclusion among vulnerable groups. Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programmes, such as those under the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP), have reduced short-term poverty, improved school enrolment, and enhanced healthcare access for extremely poor households, though delays, targeting inaccuracies, and political interference have limited their overall effectiveness (Adesina, 2022; Afolabi, 2021). School feeding

initiatives, including the Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP), aim to improve child nutrition and school attendance, but face challenges such as inconsistent funding, irregular food supply, and mismanagement, which can undermine impact (Olayemi, 2023; Ibrahim, 2022; Akanbi, 2023).

Employment and skills development programmes, notably N-Power, have engaged unemployed youth in sectors such as education, agriculture, and ICT, providing skills and income support (Igbatayo, 2021; Adeniran, 2023). Nevertheless, issues with limited permanent job absorption, stipend payment delays, and concerns about sustainability persist. Microcredit schemes like the Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP) have expanded access to finance, particularly for women and informal sector participants, though challenges include repayment defaults and limited reach (BudgIT, 2023; Ogujiuba, 2021). Pension schemes, supervised by the National Pension Commission, have enhanced retirement security for formal sector workers but remain inaccessible to much of the informal workforce, partly due to weak enforcement and low public trust (Midgley, 2019; Afolabi, 2021).

Healthcare welfare programmes, such as the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) and Basic Health Care Provision Fund (BHCPF), have improved access to maternal and child health services, but overall coverage remains low, especially in rural areas (Olayemi, 2023; Adesina, 2022; Ibrahim, 2022). Housing interventions through the National Housing Fund (NHF) have facilitated some housing loans, but high construction costs and weak implementation limit impact (Ogujiuba, 2021; Adeniran, 2023). Disaster and emergency relief, coordinated by the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), has provided critical support during crises, though inadequate funding, logistical challenges, and politicisation pose ongoing obstacles (Gentilini, 2022; Afolabi, 2021; Adesina, 2022).

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the system theory Propounded Ludwig von Bertalanffy in the 1960s. Bertalanffy introduced the theory to understand complex interactions within biological systems, which was later adapted to the social sciences. Systems Theory posits that individuals and groups exist within larger systems, which are composed of interrelated components (Bertalanffy, 1968). The behaviour of any single component affects and is affected by the others. Hence, understanding behavior requires a holistic view that considers the broader context, including social, economic, political, and environmental factors. However, systems are dynamic and constantly evolving, influenced by feedback loops and interactions; changes in one part of the system can lead to changes in others (Mele et al., 2010).. This principle suggests that there can be multiple ways to reach the same goal or outcome, highlighting the need for flexible approaches to solve problems.

Relating this theory to the study, it evaluates how government social welfare programs are implemented and their impact on vulnerable households. It highlights the interconnectedness of various entities, including local government structures, community leaders and beneficiaries. The identification of systemic issues, such as bureaucratic inefficiencies and political interference, reflects the dynamic nature of these systems, where the failure of one part, such as local administrative structures, adversely affects the entire provision of welfare to vulnerable households. By applying systems theory, this study advocates for a more integrated approach to social welfare delivery, encouraging collaboration among different stakeholders to address the barriers that prevent effective service provision.

Methods and Materials

This study employed a convergence research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative data to robustly analyse the challenges experienced by vulnerable households in accessing social welfare interventions in Orhionmwon Local Government Area, Edo State. The study population encompassed heads of indigent households, beneficiaries, policymakers, social welfare staff, NGOs, and community leaders, covering 11,101 households across 111 communities (World Bank Group, 2024). Stratified random sampling yielded 384 survey respondents, while 20 participants were purposively selected for focus group discussions, capturing diverse perspectives on welfare access. Data collection utilised a structured questionnaire and semi-structured focus group discussions, administered by trained assistants to ensure clarity and confidentiality. Methodological triangulation enhanced the reliability and depth of findings. Quantitative data were analysed using mean scores and standard deviations, with a mean score of 2.5 or above indicating significant impact. Thematic content analysis of qualitative data enabled the identification of key themes, providing comprehensive insights into the effectiveness and challenges of local social welfare interventions.

Presentation of Results

In alignment with your request for a comprehensive and detailed scholarly presentation, the following tables represent the data collected from 384 respondents (heads of vulnerable households) in Orhionmwon Local Government Area. The analysis utilizes a Criterion Mean of 2.50 implying that any item with a mean score (\bar{x}) \ge 2.50 is accepted (agreed), while any item with a mean score < 2.50 is rejected (disagreed).

Research Question One: What is the extent of government social welfare programmes provided to vulnerable households in Orhionmwon LGA?

Table 1: analyzed data on the Extent of social welfare programs provided

S/N	*Item Statement*	*SA (4)*	*A (3)*	*D (2)*	*SD (1)*	*Total (f)*	*Mean (bar{x})*	*Decision*
1	There are Wide ranges of diverse social welfare packages available to residents in Orhionmwon LGA	30 (7.8%)	77 (20.1%)	166 (43.2%)	111 (28.9%)	384 (100%)	2.07	Rejected
2	Information regarding government social welfare	38 (9.9%)	81 (21.1%)	148 (38.5%)	117 (30.5%)	384 (100%)	2.10	Rejected

	programme is accessible to all vulnerable households in the .LGA							
3	The frequency of welfare distribution to vulnerable households is consistent enough to provide meaningful economic	25 (6.5%)	83 (21.6%)	157 (40.9%)	119 (31.0%)	384 (100%)	2.04	Rejected
4	The current selection process of beneficiaries successfully identifies the most indigent households in the LGA.	39 (10.2%)	81 (21.1%)	151 (39.3%)	113 (29.4%)	384 (100%)	2.12	Rejected
5	The quantity/amount of	34 (8.9%)	40 (10.4%)	168 (43.8%)	142 (37.0%)	384 (100%)	1.91	Rejected
	Weighted Average / Mean	33 (8.7%)	72 (18.9%)	158 (41.1%)	120 (31.3%)	384 (100%)	2.05	Rejected

Source: Field survey, 2025

Table 1: analyzed data on the Extent of Social Welfare Programmes provided to vulnerable households shows a weighted average of 278 (72.4%) respondents that fell within the Disagree and Strongly Disagree categories expressed dissatisfaction with the extent of welfare provision.. The highest area of concern was the adequacy of resources (Item 5), where 80.8% of the sample respondents disagreed that the palliatives meet their basic survival needs. The grand mean of 2.05 further confirms the extent of social welfare Programmes provided to vulnerable households as

significantly insufficient. The quantitative data was complemented by qualitative data collected through the study's **focus** group discussion interview; the informant's responses were highlighted below:

"Mostly we see small bags of rice and beans during festive periods or elections. A few of us got the ₦25,000 cash transfer once, but it is not everyone. The health aid is just on paper; It comes maybe once in six months. How can that small money sustains a family of six for months with the way prices are in the market". ***(Focus Group Discussion, Group 2 Beneficiary, 2025).***

*"The frequency depends on the release of funds from the State and Federal levels. We admit the 'dosage' of aid is low compared to the inflation rate.***" (Focus Group Discussion, Group1 Government Staff, 2025).**

The statistical dissatisfaction with "adequacy" is explained by the qualitative findings that the aid provided is "consumption-based" and insufficient to combat the current inflationary pressure on vulnerable households in Orhionmwon LGA.

Research Question 2: What roles do local administrative structures play in implementation and monitoring?

Table 2: Data on the roles of local administrative

S/N	*Item Statement*	*SA (4)*	*A (3)*	*D (2)*	*SD (1)*	*Total (f)*	*Mean (\bar{x})*	*Decision*
6	Local Government officials in Orhionmwon LGA play Active roles in the distribution of social packages.	36 (9.4%)	82 (21.4%)	163 (42.4%)	103 (26.8%)	384 (100%)	2.13	Rejected
7	There are well established monitoring committees that oversee transparency of social welfare program implementation in various communities in LGA	36 (9.4%)	77 (20.1%)	153 (39.8%)	118 (30.7%)	384 (100%)	2.08	Rejected

8	The local administrative structure provides a functional platform for vulnerable households to report irregularities or exclusion from welfare beneficiaries.	41 (10.7%)	41 (10.7%)	151 (39.3%)	151 (39.3%)	384 (100%)	1.93	Rejected
9	Local administrative structures effectively collaborate with community leaders to validate the status of beneficiaries.	41 (10.7%)	74 (19.3%)	178 (46.4%)	91 (23.7%)	384 (100%)	2.17	Rejected
10	Administrative bureaucracy at the local government level creates significant delays in the delivery social welfare programmes*	194 (50.5%)	133 (34.6%)	37 (9.6%)	20 (5.2%)	384 (100%)	3.30	Accepted
	Weighted Average / Mean	70 (18.1%)	81 (21.2%)	136 (35.5%)	97 (25.2%)	384 (100%)	2.32	Rejected

Source: Field survey, 2025

Table 2: The analyzed data on the roles of local administrative structures shows cumulative Weighted Average 233 (60.7%) respondents do not believe that the local administrative structures are effectively monitoring or implementing programmes. The high mean of 3.30% for Item 10 confirms that bureaucratic bottlenecks at the Local Government Area level are significant barriers

to service delivery rather than just a lack of funds. Furthermore, a grand mean of 2.32%, suggests that local administrative structures are currently ineffective in their oversight roles. The quantitative data was complemented by qualitative data collected through the study's **focus** group discussion interview; the informant's responses were highlighted below.

"The intention is fair, but the lists are often 'politicized.' When a social welfare programme comes, slots are given to certain people to distribute. We try to intervene, but the grassroots names we submit are often replaced. (***Focus Group Discussio, Group1 Community Leader, 2025).***

"It is not fair. If you don't belong to the 'right' party or know the 'big man' in the community or government, your name will never come out, no matter how poor you are." ***(Focus Group Discussio, Group 2 Beneficiary, 2025).***

"It is very stressful. You wait under the sun for hours. Some officials are rude and treat us as if they are doing us a favor with the government's money." (***Focus Group Discussion, Group 2 Beneficiary, 2025).***

The quantitative "rejection" of administrative efficiency is corroborated by qualitative reports of nepotism and political interference. The data suggests that the bureaucratic delay is not merely an accident of slow paperwork but a systemic issue of "gatekeeping," where officials control accessibility.

Research Question 3: What strategies can enhance effectiveness, coverage, and sustainability.

Table 3: Data on recommended strategies for improvement

S/N	*Item Statement*	*SA (4)*	*A (3)*	*D (2)*	*SD (1)*	*Total (f)*	*Mean (bar{x})*	*Decision*
11	The use of biometric verification as essential strategy to eliminate ghost beneficiaries and double dipping.	174 (45.3%)	136 (35.4%)	52 (13.5%)	22 (5.7%)	384 (100%)	3.20	Accepted
12	Institutionalized delivery of social welfare programs through state level legislation will ensure continuity of these programmes across different political regimes.	187 (48.7%)	147 (38.3%)	30 (7.8%)	20 (5.2%)	384 (100%)	3.30	Accepted

13	Decentralized the management of social welfare to ward level will improve the coverage and equity in the distribution process	168 (43.8%)	155 (40.4%)	40 (10.4%)	21 (5.5%)	384 (100%)	3.22	Accepted
14	Integrate vocational training and micro credit scheme in to the welfare package for vulnerable households will ensure long term economic independence for households.	188 (49.0%)	135 (35.2%)	40 (10.4%)	21 (5.5%)	384 (100%)	3.28	Accepted
15	Regular independent auditing of government social welfare records by civil society organizations will enhance public trust and accountability.	181 (47.1%)	139 (36.2%)	44 (11.5%)	20 (5.2%)	384 (100%)	3.25	Accepted
	Weighted Average / Mean	180 (46.8%)	142 (37.1%)	41 (10.7%)	21 (5.4%)	384 (100%)	3.25	Accepted

Source: Field survey, 2025

Table 3 shows analyzed data on recommended strategies for enhancement with an overwhelming weighted average of 322 (83.9%) respondents of agree and strongly agree categories supporting the suggested strategies. The grand mean of 3.25 also indicates a strong consensus among respondents that the proposed strategies are highly desirable and the most recommended strategies were the institutionalization of social welfare programs through legislation, technology-driven system and economic empowerment of vulnerable households:

"Absolutely. It creates an audit trail. Right now, manual lists allow for 'double- dipping' and ghost names. Biometrics would enforce accountability". ***(FGD Group 1 NGO Proprietor, y, 2025).***

"Small-scale poultry, soap making, or tailoring. If my wife gets a grinding machine or a small freezer for cold drinks, we won't be waiting for government rice". ***(FGD Group 2 Beneficiary, 2025).***

"Take politics out of it. Let the church, the mosque, and the traditional rulers handle the names, not the party chairmen." (FGD ***Group 2, Beneficiary, 2025).***

The high mean scores for economic empowerment, biometric and legislative strategies are corroborated by a shared consensus across all FGD categories. Both the "Supply Side" (Staff) and "Demand Side" (Beneficiaries) agree that technology (Biometrics) would remove human bias and that legislation would protect the programme from being used as a political tool.

Discussion of Findings

The evaluation of government social welfare programmes for vulnerable households in Orhionmwon Local Government Area (LGA) reveals a substantial gap between the formal design of Nigeria's social protection policies and their practical implementation at the grassroots. The evidence indicates systemic inefficiencies and political gatekeeping that undermine effective "last-mile delivery," thus preventing transformative outcomes for vulnerable groups (Afolabi, 2021; Akanbi, 2023).

The extent of social welfare provision is assessed as inadequate, with a grand mean of 2.05 reflecting limited reach and impact. This supports Ibrahim (2022), who noted that theoretically sound initiatives, such as the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP) and Conditional Cash Transfers, are hampered by logistical challenges and inconsistent funding. Respondents described the aid as sporadic and insufficient for basic needs, echoing Afolabi's (2021) observation that such programmes often function as temporary relief rather than sustainable safety nets.

Administrative bureaucracy emerged as a central barrier, with a mean score of 3.30 indicating that bureaucratic bottlenecks and political interference hinder effective delivery. This finding aligns with Akanbi (2023) and Adeniran (2023), who highlight how local elites act as gatekeepers, using welfare distribution for political patronage rather than objective support for the vulnerable. The lack of robust community-driven monitoring frameworks further exacerbates exclusion and weakens accountability.

Participants overwhelmingly advocated for structural reforms, including biometric verification, legislative institutionalisation, and the integration of vocational training and micro-credit, to shift social welfare from mere relief to empowerment (Ogujiuba, 2021). These findings underscore the need for digitisation, legal enactment of welfare rights, and economic empowerment strategies, addressing persistent exclusion, low coverage, and inadequate resource allocation in Orhionmwon LGA.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concludes that while the Nigerian government's social welfare policies are theoretically robust and aligned with international social welfare policies standards,

there exists a profound "implementation-performance gap" at the local government level. In Orhionmwon LGA, social welfare has functioned more as a sporadic palliative rather than a transformative safety net. The current top-down administrative model allows for political interference and elite capture, which systematically marginalizes the most vulnerable households such as female-headed and child-headed homes that the programmes were designed to protect. Without shifting toward a legislative and digital framework that enforces accountability, these initiatives risk remaining performative tools for political optics rather than genuine instruments for poverty alleviation and vulnerable households support.

Recommendations

The following evidence-based recommendations are proposed:

1. The Edo State House of Assembly should enact a Social Protection Law to institutionalize welfare programmes. This will ensure that these initiatives are not subject to the whims of changing political regimes but are backed by statutory funding and legal mandates.
2. Implementation of biometric beneficiary. The management of the Social Register at the local level should be fully digitized using biometric verification linked to the National Identity Number. This will eliminate "ghost beneficiaries," prevent double-dipping, and ensure that aid reaches the verified indigent.
3. Welfare packages should transition from "consumption-only" aid to "productive inclusion." This involves bundling cash transfers with mandatory vocational training and micro-credit schemes to provide vulnerable households with an exit strategy from extreme poverty.
4. Monitoring committees should be decentralized to the ward and community levels, comprising traditional rulers, religious leaders, and civil society organizations. This "bottom-up" oversight will reduce political interference and ensure that beneficiary lists reflect the lived reality of the community.

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