Beyond Growth: Rethinking Job Creation Strategies for Poverty Reduction in Nigeria: A Transmission Mechanism Perspective

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Abstract
Nigeria's experience poses a development puzzle: Real Gross Domestic ProductRGDP) expanded more than fourfold between 1986 and 2023, yet the poverty headcount remained above half of the population for most of the period. This paper argues that growth-centric policy thinking is insufficient, and that job creation should be reconceived as a strategy for poverty reduction rather than a by-product of aggregate expansion. Adopting a transmission-mechanism perspective, it traces the channels through which fiscal effort and job creation are expected to flow into poverty reduction and growth, and uses an Autoregressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) model on annual data (1986–2023) to test which links are empirically live. The bounds test confirms a long-run equilibrium among the variables. The estimates reveal a selective transmission: the participation and unemployment channels transmit strongly (labour-force participation raises RGDP and unemployment lowers it, both significant in the short and long run); poverty exerts a significant drag consistent with a poverty trap; but the inequality and human-capital (literacy) channels do not transmit significantly within the period; and the fiscal channel, though positive, exhibits short-run crowding-out and a slow speed of adjustment (about 9.8% per annum), indicating structural leakages. The paper concludes that breaking Nigeria's growth–poverty disconnect requires reorienting job creation toward labour-intensive, pro-poor strategies, repairing the dormant distribution and human-capital channels, and improving the efficiency of fiscal reinvestment.

Keywords: transmission mechanism; pro-poor growth; job creation; poverty reduction; ARDL; Nigeria

JEL classification: E24; I32; O40; H53; C22

1. Introduction

For most of the post-1986 period, Nigerian economic policy has been organised around the pursuit of aggregate growth, on the implicit assumption that a rising tide would lift the poor along with everyone else. The record casts doubt on that assumption. Real Gross Domestic Product (RGDP) rose from about ₦17.2 trillion in 1986 to roughly ₦77.9 trillion in 2023, an expansion of more than fourfold, yet the national poverty headcount averaged almost 54% over the same window and remained above half of the population through long stretches of rapid output growth (NBS, 2023; World Bank, 2022). By the late 2010s Nigeria had become home to one of the largest absolute populations living in extreme poverty in the world. Growth, in short, has not reliably converted into poverty reduction. Despite modest economic growth of 3.5% in H1 2024 and 3.9% in H1 2025, Nigeria continues to grapple with high poverty levels with 63% of Nigerians are under multidimensional poverty, thus suggesting a disconnect between aggregate growth and inclusive development.

This disconnect is the point of departure for the present paper. Rather than asking only whether growth reduces poverty, the paper asks a more structural question: through which channels is job creation supposed to transmit into poverty reduction and growth, and which of those channels actually function in Nigeria? A transmission-mechanism perspective is well suited to this question because it opens the black box between policy and outcome, decomposing the path from fiscal effort, through the labour market and the distribution of income, to long-run output and welfare. This framing repositions job creation from a residual of growth to a deliberate instrument of poverty reduction, and it allows the empirical analysis to identify precisely where the chain is intact and where it is broken.

The objective of the paper is therefore to re-examine job-creation strategies for poverty reduction in Nigeria through the lens of their transmission channels, and to test the strength of those channels empirically over 1986–2023. The contribution is twofold. Conceptually, it advances a structured transmission framework linking government expenditure to first-, second- and third-round effects with explicit feedback loops. Empirically, it supplies channel-level evidence on which links transmit, using an ARDL model that accommodates the mixed order of integration typical of Nigerian macro-data. The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. Section 2 develops the conceptual and theoretical framework and reviews the evidence on the growth–poverty disconnect. Section 3 describes the data and method. Section 4 reads the results as evidence on the channels. Section 5 reconsiders strategy and concludes.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Clarification

Concept of Job Creation

Job creation refers to the process of generating new employment opportunities, either through the creation of new businesses, expansion of existing ones, or government initiatives (Acs, 2006). According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), job creation is a key driver of economic growth and poverty reduction.

Concept of Poverty

Poverty is defined as a state of deprivation, where individuals or groups lack access to basic necessities like food, shelter, clothing, healthcare, and education (Sen, 1999). According to Ravallion (2017), poverty is a multidimensional concept that encompasses not only income but also access to services and opportunities.

Concept of Poverty Reduction

Poverty reduction refers to the policies, programs, and interventions aimed at reducing the proportion of people living in poverty, improving their well-being, and enhancing their access to resources and opportunities. According to the World Bank, poverty reduction is a key objective of development policy, and it involves improving the living standards of the poor through sustainable economic growth, social services, and social protection (World Bank, 2001). The United Nations also emphasizes the importance of poverty reduction in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 1: "End poverty in all its forms everywhere" (United Nations, 2015). Poverty reduction strategies often involve a combination of economic growth, investment in human capital, social protection, and targeted interventions to address specific needs of the poor.

2.2 The transmission mechanism

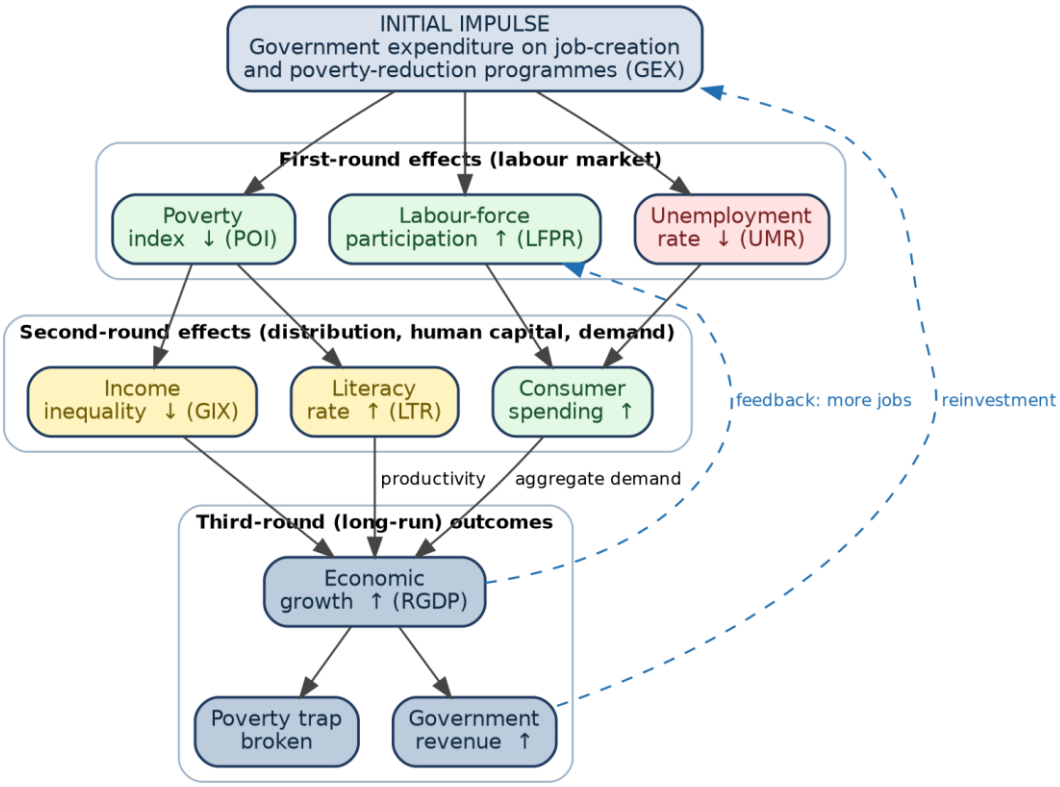

Figure 1. *Transmission mechanism for job creation, poverty reduction and economic growth.*

The framework adopted here conceives job creation and poverty reduction as a sequence of rounds set in motion by a fiscal impulse and propagated through the labour market, the distribution of income and human capital, before reaching long-run output. The structure is depicted in Figure 1

The initial impulse is government expenditure on job-creation and poverty-reduction programmes, including training initiatives, infrastructure projects and social safety nets. The first-round effects are felt in the labour market: job creation lowers the unemployment rate, draws discouraged workers back so that the labour-force participation rate rises, and lifts households above the poverty line, lowering the poverty index. The second-round effects operate through distribution, human capital and demand: as employment and incomes spread, income inequality narrows, families invest more in schooling so literacy improves, and higher incomes raise consumer spending and hence aggregate demand. The third-round, long-run effects are an expansion of RGDP, a rise in government revenue as the tax base widens, and the breaking of the poverty trap. Two feedback loops close the system: faster growth generates further employment, reinforcing the first round, and higher revenue can be reinvested in the programmes that began the cycle. The framework thus makes explicit that the welfare pay-off of growth depends not on the size of the impulse alone but on whether each link in the chain transmits.

2.3 Theoretical grounding

Three theoretical perspectives anchor the framework. The Pro-poor growth debate has its roots in the pro-distribution arguments by Chenery and Ahluwhalia in the 1970s. Hence, Chenery and Ahluwhalia's (1974) model of redistribution with growth can be regarded as the inception of the whole debate on pro-poor growth. Pro-poor growth is categorized in terms of relative or absolute pro-poor growth. Relative pro-poor growth occurs when economic growth benefits the poor proportionally more than the non-poor. The theory of pro-poor growth is central: it holds that the growth–poverty relationship is conditional, depending on whether expansion raises the incomes of the poor faster than the average, so that the composition and inclusiveness of growth, not merely its rate, determine its welfare effect.

The theory of Vicious Circle of Poverty that was propounded by Nurkse in 1953. The Vicious Circle of Poverty is a concept in economic theory that describes a self-reinforcing mechanism where poverty creates conditions that lead to more poverty, creating a cycle that is difficult to break. This concept highlights the interconnectedness of various factors that contribute to the persistence of poverty in certain regions or communities (Diriba, 2013). The vicious-circle-of-poverty thesisexplains why poverty persists in the absence of an effective transmission: low income depresses saving and investment, which depresses productivity and income again, trapping households unless an external impulse, such as employment-creating public expenditure, breaks the loop.

Keynesian Theory of Unemployment was developed by British economist, John Maynard Keynes in 1930. The Keynesian theory of employment supplies the demand-side logic of the first and second rounds, whereby employment-driven income gains raise consumption and aggregate demand and thereby output (Keynes, 1936). The classical and Solow perspectives enter at the margins, the former cautioning that wage and institutional rigidities can block the labour-market channel, the latter locating long-run output in capital accumulation and productivity, to which human capital and participation contribute.

2.4 The growth–poverty disconnect in the literature

The empirical literature on Nigeria and comparable economies is consistent with a leaky transmission. Some studies such as (Ijiaiya, Bello & Ajayi (2021), Osahon & Osarobo (2020), Awe, Ahmed & Oyelayo (2025) amongst others. find a positive growth–poverty-reduction link, including Ofori (2023) for Ghana and Oyegoke and Wasiu (2018) for Nigeria. Yet others report that the link is weak, indirect or absent: Nnam and Inyang (2022) find only an indirect long-run relationship, while Chinaza and Ikeafe (2022) find no causal relationship between growth and poverty in Nigeria, and Tikristini, Chukwuemeka and Olalekan (2022) question whether two decades of growth meaningfully reduced poverty. On the distribution channel, Onwuka (2021), Ekpeyong (2023) and Nwosa and Ehinomen (2023) document that inequality conditions the poverty–growth relationship. On the labour-market channel, Babalola, Saka and Adenuga (2013) and Nnachi and Ugochukwu (2023) confirm the adverse growth effect of unemployment, and Olotu, Salami and Akeremale (2015) the favourable effect of participation. Awe, Ahmed& Oyelayo (2025) proposed Agricultural productivity, economic growth and poverty reduction in Nigeria using a trend analysis approach to that agriculture remains central to Nigeria's growth-poverty nexus. Onwuka, E.M et al (2025) posits that entrepreneurship is the direct driver of jod and growth, through Small and medium scale enterprises. The unresolved status of the growth–poverty link, against well-established labour-market effects, motivates a channel-level test rather than a single bilateral regression.

2. 5 Gap addressed

Existing Nigerian studies overwhelmingly estimate bilateral relationships, growth and poverty, or growth and unemployment, and infer mechanism informally. Field. G.S (2020) and De Vries et al (2021) both articulate the full transmission through employment chain from fiscal impulse through labour market and distribution to long-run output, and fewer still test the chain's individual links within one estimable system. This paper addresses that gap by mapping the principal proxies of each round onto a single ARDL specification and interpreting the resulting short-run and long-run coefficients as evidence on which channels transmit.

3. Methodology

The study uses an ex-post-facto design and annual time-series data for 1986–2023 - This timeframe marks the post Structural Adjustment Program and The Petroleum subsidy Era in Nigerian development journey a (thirty-eight observations) drawn from the Central Bank of Nigeria Statistical Bulletin, the National Bureau of Statistics, and the World Development Indicators. The variables map onto the transmission framework as follows: government expenditure (GEX) is the fiscal impulse; the unemployment rate (UMR) and the labour-force participation rate (LFPR) capture the labour-market (first-round) channel; the poverty index (POI) captures poverty status; the Gini index (GIX) captures the distribution (second-round) channel; the literacy rate (LTR) captures the human-capital channel; and real gross domestic product (RGDP) measures the long-run (third-round) outcome.

Following the demand-driven logic of the framework, RGDP is modelled as a function of the channel variables:

$$lnRGDPt = \alpha 0 + \alpha 1UMRt + \alpha 2LFPRt + \alpha 3POIt + \alpha 4GIXt + \alpha 5LTRt + \alpha 6lnGEXt + \mu t \quad (1)$$

The model is estimated in the Autoregressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) framework of Pesaran, Shin and Smith (2001), which permits joint estimation of short-run dynamics and the long-run relationship and accommodates regressors of mixed order of integration. Stationarity is first established with the Augmented Dickey–Fuller test (Dickey & Fuller, 1979) and a correlation matrix screens for multicollinearity. The existence of a long-run relationship is tested with the ARDL bounds procedure, in which an F-statistic above the upper I(1) critical bound confirms cointegration. The short-run dynamics are recovered from the associated error-correction model, whose adjustment coefficient λ is expected to be negative and significant. Diagnostic adequacy is confirmed with the Jarque–Bera, Breusch–Godfrey, Breusch–Pagan–Godfrey, Ramsey RESET and CUSUM tests. Estimation was carried out in EViews 12. The ADF results confirm a mixed I(0)/I(1) order of integration (government expenditure is I(0); the remaining series are I(1)), the correlation matrix shows no coefficient above 0.80, and all post-estimation diagnostics are satisfied, with the CUSUM plot remaining within the 5% bounds. For brevity these auxiliary results are summarised here and reported in full in the companion empirical study; the discussion below concentrates on the channel coefficients.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 The growth–poverty divergence

Table 1 summarises the behaviour of the key series. The contrast at the heart of the paper is visible in the descriptive statistics: RGDP rose almost continuously across the period, yet the

poverty index averaged 53.96% and was actually higher in the mid-2000s, during years of strong oil-driven growth, than in the late 1980s. Government expenditure expanded by several orders of magnitude, and the labour-force participation rate drifted downward from 64.56% to the mid-50s before a partial recovery. This divergence between a rising output series and a stubborn poverty series is the empirical signature of a transmission that is not fully functioning, and it is the pattern the channel analysis seeks to explain.

Table 1: Selected descriptive statistics, 1986–2023

	RGDP	UMR	LFPR	POI	GIX	LTR	GEX
Mean	42838.94	4.85	59.20	53.96	44.17	62.51	3394.39
Minimum	17180.55	1.90	52.55	38.90	35.10	50.51	16.22
Maximum	77936.10	10.10	64.56	66.90	56.00	79.54	18773.77
Std. dev.	21348.23	2.20	2.83	6.81	5.46	8.91	4352.81

Source: *Authors' computation (2025) from CBN, NBS and WDI data. RGDP and GEX in ₦ billion; others in per cent.*

Table 2: Results of Short Run ARDL Estimation of Real Gross Domestic Product (RGDP) Model Estimation

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	Prob.*
Dependent Variable = LOG(RGDP)				
DLOG(RGDP(-1))	-0.193142	0.124320	-1.553584	0.1398
D(UMR)	-0.020744	0.005617	-3.692738	0.0020
D(UMR(-1))	-0.005027	0.006323	-0.795041	0.4382
D(UMR(-2))	0.002885	0.005739	0.502649	0.6221
D(LFPR)	0.011135	0.003333	3.341154	0.0041
D(LFPR(-1))	-0.013502	0.003605	-3.745497	0.0018
D(LFPR(-2))	0.000626	0.003312	0.188957	0.8525
D(POI)	-0.008694	0.003918	-2.218831	0.0342
D(GIX)	-0.005027	0.006323	-0.795041	0.4347
D(LTR)	0.000465	0.000735	0.633139	0.5356
DLOG(GEX)	0.105169	0.023285	4.516532	0.0004
DLOG(GEX(-1))	-0.191577	0.032035	-5.980231	0.0000
DLOG(GEX(-2))	-0.179587	0.026479	-6.782292	0.0000
CointEq(-1)*	-0.097795	0.011676	-8.376100	0.0000
R^2 = 0.788319				
Adjusted R^2 = 0.687080				
Durbin-Watson stat = 2.167255				

Source: *Author's Computation (2025).*

4.2 A shared long-run equilibrium

The ARDL bounds test yields an F-statistic of 6.10, which exceeds the upper I(1) critical bound at the 1% level (3.99). The channel variables therefore share a stable long-run equilibrium: they do not drift independently but are bound together over time, which is a necessary condition for a transmission mechanism to operate and which licenses the interpretation of the long-run coefficients below.

Table 3: Results of Long Run ARDL Estimation of Real Gross Domestic Product (RGDP) Model Estimation

Dependent Variable: LOG(RGDP)				
Variable	**Coefficient**	**Std. Error**	**t-Statistic**	**Prob.***
UMR	-0.778968	0.197166	-3.950815	0.0006
LFPR	0.066357	0.010179	6.518889	0.0000
POI	-0.179587	0.044149	-4.067736	0.0009
GIX	-0.008034	0.020278	-0.396206	0.6972
LTR	0.026435	0.029769	0.888001	0.3877
LOG(GEX)	0.302680	0.127169	2.380132	0.0301

Source: *Author's Computation (2025).*

4.3 Which channels transmit?

Tables 4 and 5 present the long-run and short-run estimates, organised by channel. Read together, they reveal a selective transmission in which some links are strongly active and others are effectively dormant.

Table 4: Long-run channel estimates — dependent variable: lnRGDP

Channel / variable	Coefficient	Prob.	Status
Labour-force participation (LFPR)	0.0664	0.0000	Transmits (strong +)
Unemployment (UMR)	−0.7790	0.0006	Transmits (strong −)
Poverty (POI)	−0.1796	0.0009	Transmits (drag)
Income inequality (GIX)	−0.0080	0.6972	Dormant
Human capital / literacy (LTR)	0.0264	0.3877	Dormant
Fiscal impulse (lnGEX)	0.3027	0.0301	Transmits (+)

Source: *Authors' computation (2025).*

Table 5: Short-run channel dynamics — dependent variable: ΔlnRGDP

Channel / variable	Coefficient	Prob.	Reading
Δ Labour-force participation	0.0111	0.0041	Immediate positive
Δ LFPR(−1)	−0.0135	0.0018	Adjustment cost
Δ Unemployment	−0.0207	0.0020	Immediate negative
Δ Poverty	−0.0087	0.0342	Immediate drag
Δ Income inequality	−0.0050	0.4347	No short-run effect
Δ Literacy	0.0005	0.5356	No short-run effect
Δ Fiscal impulse (lnGEX)	0.1052	0.0004	Immediate positive
Δ lnGEX(−1)	−0.1916	0.0000	Crowding-out (lag)
Δ lnGEX(−2)	−0.1796	0.0000	Crowding-out (lag)
ECT(−1)	−0.0978	0.0000	Adjustment ≈ 9.8%/yr

Source: *Authors' computation (2025). R^2 = 0.788; Adjusted R^2 = 0.687; Durbin–Watson = 2.17.*

The labour-market channel is the strongest link in the chain. Labour-force participation raises RGDP both immediately and in the long run, where a percentage-point increase is associated with an approximately 6.6% rise in output, while unemployment depresses RGDP in both horizons. This is the participation-and-employment route through which job creation most reliably reaches the economy, and it agrees with Field. G.S (2020) and De Vries et al (2021) that mobilizing idle labour through employment – in this case job creation is the highest-yielding lever available to policy

The poverty channel transmits, but as a drag rather than a dividend. The poverty index is negative and significant in both horizons, indicating a self-reinforcing poverty trap in which a large poor population suppresses aggregate demand, human-capital formation and productivity, and so holds back the very growth that might relieve it. This is the empirical counterpart of the vicious-circle thesis and explains why output gains have not been self-equalising.

The distribution and human-capital channels are dormant. Income inequality and literacy carry their theoretically expected signs but are statistically insignificant in both the short and the long run. In transmission terms, the second-round links through which growth is supposed to become broad-based, narrowing inequality and raising human capital, are not firing within the sample period. The most plausible reasons are the long gestation of education before it affects productivity, a mismatch between schooling and labour-market demand, and structural inequality too entrenched to respond within the horizon. Whatever the cause, the result is that the mechanism's inclusiveness-generating links are effectively switched off, which is precisely why aggregate growth has not translated into poverty reduction.

The fiscal channel works, but leaks. Government expenditure raises RGDP contemporaneously and over the long run (with an estimated long-run elasticity of about 0.30), but its first and second lags are strongly negative, indicating short-run crowding-out when spending is sustained or poorly sequenced. Reinforcing this, the error-correction term

implies that only about 9.8% of any disequilibrium is corrected each year, so full convergence takes roughly a decade. The slow adjustment is itself evidence of structural rigidity: the impulse enters the system but dissipates slowly and imperfectly, consistent with the leakages, inefficiency and weak targeting widely documented in Nigeria's intervention programmes.

4.4 Synthesis: a partially broken mechanism

Taken together, the estimates describe a transmission mechanism that is intact in its labour-market links, burdened by a poverty trap, leaky in its fiscal link, and silent in its distribution and human-capital links. The pattern accounts for the central puzzle: growth has materialised because the fiscal and participation channels transmit, but poverty has persisted because the channels that would make growth inclusive, inequality reduction and human-capital deepening, do not. The disconnect is therefore not evidence that growth is irrelevant to poverty, but evidence that the route between them is incomplete.

5. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The analysis supports the paper's central claim: in Nigeria, growth alone is an unreliable instrument of poverty reduction because the mechanism that should connect them transmits only in part. Moving beyond a growth-centric posture therefore means designing job-creation strategy around the channels themselves, protecting those that work and repairing those that do not.

Four strategic priorities follow. First, because the participation-and-employment channel is the strongest transmitter, job creation should be deliberately tilted toward labour-intensive sectors, agriculture, agro-processing, construction and light manufacturing, that absorb large numbers of workers quickly, and toward removing the barriers that keep youth and women out of the labour force. Second, because poverty operates as a self-reinforcing drag, well-targeted and leak-proof social protection should be treated as a growth policy and not merely a welfare cost, since relieving the poverty trap unlocks demand and productivity. Third, because the distribution and human-capital channels are dormant, policy must actively switch them on: aligning education and vocational training with labour-market demand so that rising literacy yields measurable productivity, and pairing growth with explicit redistributive instruments so that gains reach the bottom of the distribution. Fourth, because the fiscal channel leaks and adjusts slowly, the efficiency, transparency and sequencing of public spending must be improved, most concretely by ensuring that savings from petroleum-subsidy reform are reinvested transparently into employment and human-capital programmes rather than dissipated, so that the SURE-P logic is executed rather than merely announced.

The paper contributes a structured transmission framework for the job-creation–poverty–growth relationship in Nigeria and channel-level empirical evidence on which of its links transmit. Its central implication is that the policy conversation should shift from the rate of growth to the architecture of transmission. Future research could estimate the dormant channels with disaggregated education-quality and sectoral-employment data and could employ nonlinear (asymmetric) ARDL methods to test whether the channels transmit differently above and below threshold levels of poverty and participation.

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