

Eradicating Extreme Poverty in Nigeria: An Appraisal of Millennium Development Goal One (MDG 1).

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria is blessed with an abundance of human and natural resources and has the fastest growing economy in Africa, yet, it is listed among the poorest countries in the world. This is an irony that has baffled not only Nigerians but the international community as indicators of poverty like hunger, child malnutrition, homelessness, diseases and high mortality rates are obviously evident in Nigerian societies, particularly in the rural areas. For more than three decades, Nigeria has struggled to eradicate extreme poverty. The country has embarked on numerous development policies and programs (of international and national origin) in an effort to achieve this goal. One of such is the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) a 15 years development plan which was adopted by world leaders in the year 2000 to be achieved by year 2015. It is against this premise that this theoretical research which employs the primary method of data collection reviews the extent of poverty in Nigeria and evaluates the efforts of MDGs in the eradication of extreme poverty in Nigeria. Focus will be on the former aspect of the first Millennium Development Goals which is the eradication of extreme poverty. From this review, it is revealed that the poverty line has barely declined as poverty still lingers in more than half the populace of Nigeria. The paper therefore recommends that government should insist on the successful completion of previous development program before inaugurating new ones.

Keywords: poverty, development, poverty prevalence, policies and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

INTRODUCTION

A major challenge for all third world countries like Nigeria remains the elimination of poverty; a condition characterized by insufficient resources and income and in its extreme form; lack of basic human needs such as nutritious food, clothing, housing, clean water and health services. Poverty could also be viewed as “a situation where there is a deficiency in physical necessities, assets and income. In every day practice, the words

“deprivation” and “ill being” has often been referred to as poverty. Poor people perceive deprivation in many ways: as a lack of income and wealth, social inferiority, physical weakness, disability and sickness, vulnerability, physical and social isolation, powerlessness and humiliation (Chamber, 1997).

Though the proportion of people living in extreme poverty in developing regions have declined from 46 per cent to 27 per cent; (United Nations Summit, 2010); the decline in Nigeria is not too significant as the poverty rate stands at 62.60% and a substantial number of Nigerians are still living below one US dollar per day (Nigeria 2013 MDGs report, 2013).

In an attempt to eradicate poverty, past and present governments in Nigeria have embarked on constituting and implementing series of development policies and programmes. In the year 2000 at the Nation’s international summit, the international committee agreed to meet a series of eight time bound goals tagged as the “Millenium Development Goals (MDGs)” which were set to be achieved before a deadline of 2015. As a signatory to the MDGs, three presidents: Obasanjo, Yar’adua and Jonathan who ruled the country from 2000-2014 took this responsibility seriously as they inaugurated policies and programmes that would result to the realization of the MDGs before the deadline of 2015. Obasanjo (1999-2007) launched the National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS); a federal strategy complimented by equivalent approaches at the state and local levels. Late president Yar’adua (2007-2010) launched the 7 point agenda for food security and poverty eradication and President Goodluck Jonathan (2010-2015) launched the transformation agenda; a five year development plan focused on non-inflationary growth, employment generation and poverty alleviation.

All these efforts have not succeeded in liberating more than half of the Nigerian population from a life of poverty. This paper is therefore going to focus on the first aspect of the Millenium Development Goal one which is: To eradicate extreme poverty. To achieve this goal, the international community set a target which is to reduce by half the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day. (Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) Nigeria Information kit, 2008).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this paper is rooted in the work of famous German political philosopher-Karl Marx. In his theory-conflict theory of society; Marx opined that labour produces wealth and a bulk of the wealth produced goes to the owner of the production known as the bourgeoisies. Marx further asserted that workers (Proletariats) rely on the bourgeoisies for wages: wages that are often far below the value of wealth produced. Without the proletariats, there will be no production; therefore, the bourgeoisies and the proletariats must remain unequal to ensure that production is stable and cost effective. This therefore creates conflict between the two groups thus causing change. He argued that prior to this system of production; there was no conflict when forces of production and the production of labour were communally owned. However, with the emergence of private property, a fundamental contradiction of human society was created with a minority being in control and enjoying from the labours of the majority. He referred to this system as capitalism and equated it to modern societies (Igbo, 2003). Marxist further contends that capitalism, social and political factors based on class division cause poverty.

Reviewing Marx's ideas, a similar situation can be observed in Nigeria where a bulk of the economy of the country's rest in the hands of a few who exploit all available resources to accumulate capital, creating projects which will be utilized in establishing structures to enhance their interest. This is unlike the case in developed countries where the bourgeoisies redistribute their wealth by building industries, supporting public corporations and instituting charity foundations.

Another aspect which Marxist emphasized as discussed in Davis and Miguel (2014) is that capitalist societies ensure that the cost of labour is kept artificially lower than the value of work done and attached to this condition is an added threat of unemployment. Given a situation like this, workers can hardly save and are therefore delved deeper into a life of debt and poverty. Generally, wages in Nigeria are excessively too low for sustenance. The minimum wage for government workers per month is currently N18, 000 (approx USD 100). The disparity is not too difference for those employed in the private sectors. Where workers particularly in the private sectors opt for an increment in wages, they do so at the expense of their jobs.

STANDARDS FOR MEASURING POVERTY

The scourge of Poverty goes beyond mere measurement of household expenditure or welfare as poverty has many faces. It could imply poor access to basic amenities, illiteracy or ignorance, insecurity, poor infrastructures, environmental issues social and political exclusion. Giddens (2001) argues that universal standards of deprivation should not be the basis for measuring poverty because basic necessities in one society may not be basic necessities in another society. For example, in more developed countries, owing household gadgets like washing machines, dish washers, room heaters, etc are considered basic necessities for a healthy life while in developing countries; such items are not predominant among the majority and therefore would not be suitable to use them as standards of measuring poverty. He further explained that using only one criterion to measure poverty can pose as a major problem as human needs vary from society to society given the fact that some societies have a higher living standard compared to others.

There are four main measures of poverty: Relative measure (which is based on a lack of minimum income to maintain household expenditures), objective/absolute measure (an extreme form of poverty characterized by severe deprivation of basic needs like food energy intake), Dollar per day (based on individuals who live on less than one US dollar a day) and Subjective measure (a self assess poverty measure where one's actual income does not tally with their expectations). An analytical attempts made in measuring poverty in Nigeria revealed that 69% of Nigerians were living in relative poverty, 60.2% in absolute poverty, 56.6% on one dollar a day and 92.5% in subjective poverty (Nigeria Poverty Profile, 2012).

The international recognized measure of poverty is \$1 a day. This idea was developed by economist in the late 1980s'. A group of economist at the World Bank in Washington DC realized that quite a number of developing countries cut their poverty lines at an income of about \$370 a year which reflected the basic amount that a person needed to live on. Dividing this amount by the number of days in the year gave an amount slightly above \$1 a day. This now became an international standard for measuring poverty. This concept was criticized by scholars, statisticians and development agencies. The World Bank

therefore adopted \$1.25 dollars a day as a standard measure. In 2012, the African Development bank adopted \$2 per day as the poverty line for the continent (Thisday Live, 2013).

PAST ATTEMPTS TOWARDS THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY IN NIGERIA

Prior the inauguration of the MDGs, past governments in Nigeria attempted through several policies, programmes and institutions to eradicate poverty. In 1972, Gen. Yakubu Gowon established the National Accelerated Food production Programme (NAFPP) and the Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB). In 1976, Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo introduced Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) and in 1979, Alh. Shehu Shagari established the Green Revolution Programme with the aim of curtailing food importation by encouraging home grown food through farming. On the other Hand, Gen Ibrahim Babangida who was notable for establishing most of the development programmes in the history of Nigeria came up with People's bank, the directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructures (DFRFRI) and the Nigerian Agricultural, Land and Development authority (NALDA) all in 1986 amongst many others. The regime of the president Sani Abacha also came up with a programme- Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) (Agbi, 2009).

In 1999, the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) which was later changed to Poverty Eradication Programme (PEP) was launched. While PEP was still being implemented, the Federal government embarked on the Poverty Reduction Strategy Process (PRSP) which was initiated by the world bank. This programme was later abandoned for the National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS) which became the first development strategy for the achievements of the millennium development goals (Centre for Democracy and Governance-CDD, 2013). So many Development Programmes all geared toward poverty eradication and economic development, funded with billions of Naira yet, very little or no progress recorded. Some of these programmes rather made some Nigerian richer.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES OF MDGS IN THE ERADICATION OF EXTREME POVERTY

A number of indicators and human development indices have shown results that poverty is still very much prevalent in Nigeria. The harmonized Nigerian living standard survey 2010 indicated that 62.60% of Nigerians (over 100 million people) still live in absolute poverty. In 1992, poverty prevalence was 42.70%. Base on this figures, the MDGs adopted 21.40% as the target for reducing the number of Nigerians living below 1 US Dollar per day. This goal has not been met though poverty prevalence fluctuated as it rose to 65.60% in 1996, but declined to 51.55% in 2004. In 2010, relative poverty rose to 69.0%, absolute poverty declined from 48.40% in 2004 to 46.0% in 2010. (Millennium Development Goals Report, 2013).

MDGs Nigeria information kit (2008); opined that government of Nigeria put in place several development policies in an effort to enhance the realization of the Millennium Development Goals. Some of these development policies include: The 2001 National poverty alleviation agency (NAPEP), 2004 Comprehensive Government poverty reduction strategy (NEEDS), 2005 application of debt relief gains towards the

achievement of the MDGs and 2007 president's 7 point agenda which addresses poverty alleviation in areas of micro-economic management monetary policy amongst others. Though the MDGs information kit admits that progress made towards achieving the target of poverty eradication has been quite slow but some achievements were recorded. Some of these achievements include: the creation of a multi-partner matching fund which disburses micro credit to the poor and the introduction of a conditional cash transfer scheme targeted at the core poor/underprivileged. Also achieved were the introduction of a village community enhancement scheme and the National Fadama project to ensure food security.

In the last three decades, the Nigerian government has formulated several development policies and embarked on several development programmes. But sustainability of these programmes has been threatened by a lack of continuity in funding and implementation of these policies and programmes especially when the development policy is long termed (like the MDGs) and elapse into the regime of a new government.

One of the challenges in the successful implementation of the MDGs is the lack of coordination of the federal state and local poverty reduction policy. Coupled with this is that the federal government continues to formulate and implement policies and programmes that do not directly involve the poor for which it was planned for. Often times, poverty reduction programmes in Nigeria do not invoke the participation of the poor; particularly the rural poor in conceptualization, implementation and evaluation of the programmes. Poverty eradication programmes and strategies in Nigeria have always been planned to include the three tiers of government: Federal, state and local but many rural poor are unaware of the existence of such programmes and rarely benefit from any. Rather than reaching out to the poor, many poverty eradication programmes have rather widened the gap between the rich and poor; enriching the already rich. Inequality in the areas of gender, wealth, group identity and location also poses as a threat to the success of poverty eradication programme in Nigeria (CDD, 2013).

The World Bank (2013) also asserts that, the recent food, fuel and economic crises have severely hampered the gains made towards achieving the first goal of the MDGs.

Agbi (2009) proposed that frequent policy changes and inconsistent implementation; inadequate funding, poor management and the problem of poor governance; lack of involvement of the beneficiaries in the formulation and implementation of programmes; corruption and greed are major factor than hinder the success of development programs and policies in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

The year 2015 marks the deadline for the achievements of the millennium development goals. This makes it the 15th year in which Nigeria has battled using the MDGs affiliated policies and strategies to eradicate poverty. Though most MDGs reports claim that tremendous but slow progress has been made with regards to poverty eradication in Nigeria but statistics from other reliable sources as discussed in the text deny these claims. It would be wrong and unfair to say this policy has failed in Nigeria but right to say the achievements made are barely noticeable especially in the rural areas where the majority of the poor reside. Tackling poverty is very significant for sustainable development in Nigeria therefore; the federal government will need to apply better

strategies towards poverty eradication. These strategies must create means for increased productivity, participation of particularly the rural poor and also be of merit to them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To enhance poverty eradication, the government should create more jobs and improve the minimum wage of particularly civil servants.
2. Government should insist on the successful completion of previous development program before inaugurating new ones.
3. There is a need for government to scale up current investments in poverty alleviating projects and programs.
4. The government must ensure that program planning and implementation should involve the participation of the rural poor and that they should be the main beneficiaries of development programs and policies.
5. Non Governmental organizations in their efforts towards poverty alleviation should extend their services to the rural areas.

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