

Easing the “Disease” of Poverty in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examines the issue of poverty in Nigeria, its causes, previous attempts made by past and present administrations aimed at taming the monster coupled with the way forward for the country.

Poverty itself is as old as the whole world. One of the Holy Scriptures even stated that the poor shall never seize in your midst.

Poverty is a devil it stirs a lot of misgiving. This is because it has a very devastating influence on its victims. It reduces the social and psychological prestige of its victims. Poverty is a condition of being poor. The quest to eradicate poverty has been identified as the most critical challenge facing development in the world today. Women and children are disproportionately affected by poverty.

Poverty has been a serious challenge to governments in Nigeria. Its effect, which includes lack and deprivation in the basic necessities of life, is worrisome. Poverty humiliates and dehumanizes its victim. Nigeria is Africa’s most populous nation. It is also one of the poorest countries in the world. Rapid progress in reducing poverty in Nigeria is dependent upon improved access to basic services, particularly health and education. If Nigeria fails to reduce poverty quickly enough, it is unlikely that the Millennium Development Goals will be achieved in Africa or globally.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are targeted at eradicating extreme hunger and poverty in the 189 member countries of the United Nations (UN). Nigeria as a member of the United Nation keyed into the implementation of the framework of the goals by formulating the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), NEEDS as a policy is targeted at eradicating poverty and bringing about sustainable development. This is done through the establishment of Agencies like the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP). However, the scourge of poverty is still felt by the majority of the citizens of the country who do not have access to primary health care, water and food.

Unemployment, corruption, non-diversification of the economy, income inequality, laziness, and a poor education system can be considered to be some of the key factors contributing to poverty in Nigeria.

Poverty prevention is more dependent on education than on any other factor, as an escape from poverty. Education is the primary means by which people can lift themselves out of poverty, yet the amount spent on education targeting low-income children falls far short of the need.

Keywords: Poverty and its causes; Alleviation programmes; Job Creation and Economic empowerment

INTRODUCTION

Poverty is a devil It stirs a lot of misgiving. This is because it has a very devastating influence on its victims. It reduces the social and psychological prestige of its victims. Poverty is a condition of being poor.

It is a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and clothe a family, not having a school or clinic to go to; not having the land on which to grow one’s food

or a job to earn one’s living, not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It means susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living on marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water or

sanitation.(A United Nations statement, says:).Poverty is more than just a lack of material things (CFA, 2005). It manifests itself in the deprivation of lives that people lead (UNDP, 1997).

Human Poverty is more than income poverty. it is the denial of choices and opportunities for living a tolerable life. (United Nations, 1997). Poverty amid plenty is the world’s greatest challenge.

Poor people live without fundamental freedoms of action and choice that the better off take for granted (Sen., 1999). They often lack adequate food and shelter, education and health, deprivations that keep them from leading the kind of life that every one values. They also face extreme vulnerability to ill health, economic dislocation, and natural disasters. And they are often exposed to ill treatment by institutions of the state and society and are powerless to influence key decisions affecting their lives. These are all dimensions of poverty (World bank, 2001).

Indeed, of the world’s 6 billion people, 2.8 billion live on less than \$2 a day, and 1.2 billion live on less than \$1 a day. In rich countries less than 1 child in 100 does not reach its fifth birthday, while in the poorest countries as many as a fifth of children do not. And while in rich countries fewer than 5 percent of all children under five are malnourished, in poor countries as many as 50 percent are. According to the 2000 World Development Report (WDR), “poverty is pronounced deprivation in wellbeing”.

The European Commission's definition, adopted in 1984, is similar in tone: 'The poor shall be taken to mean persons, families and groups of persons whose resources (material, cultural and social) are so limited as to exclude them from the minimum acceptable way of life in the Member State in which they live.'

The quest to eradicate poverty has been identified as the most critical challenge facing development in the world today; particularly for countries in the developing world. This is the number one Millennium Development Goal (MDG). Poor countries and poor communities particularly women and children are disproportionately affected (DFID, 2006).

In Nigeria, widespread and severe poverty is a reality. It is a reality that depicts a lack of food, clothes, education and other basic amenities. Severely poor people lack the most basic necessities of life to a degree that it can be wondered how they manage to survive.

There are several effects and deficiencies associated with poverty in Nigeria. One of the main effects of poverty is poor health, as is reflected in Nigeria's high infant mortality and low life expectancy. Poor people in Nigeria face several health issues as they lack basic health amenities and competent medical practitioners. Most children do not have the opportunity of being immunized and this leads to certain physical defects in some of the children. Their health has become low priority and as they have little or no choices, they live with whatever they are provided with, whether healthy or not.

The Bretton Woods Institutions (BWIs: the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) launched the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) Initiative in 1999 to improve the planning, implementation, and monitoring of public actions geared toward reducing poverty. The Initiative centers on promoting a PRS process in each country that is expected to be country driven, results-focused, long-term, comprehensive, and partnership-oriented.

THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Absolute poverty is characterized as 'severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information' and is related to 'access to social services' as well as income (UN, 1995: para. 19). It is distinguished from, but is also part of, a much broader notion of 'overall poverty' that refers to 'the total number of people living in poverty in a country' (Langmore, 2000: 36).

Nolan and Whelan define poverty in terms of the inability to participate in society (which is broader than more 'absolute' definitions confined to subsistence needs), but emphasize that what is distinctive is the 'inability to participate owing to lack of resources' (1996: 188). This confines their definition 'to those areas of life where consumption or participation are determined primarily by command over financial resources' (1996: 193; Veit-Wilson, 1998, 2004).

By implication they exclude non-material elements found in broad UN definitions, for example: 'lack of participation in decision-making', 'a violation of human dignity', 'powerlessness' and 'susceptibility to violence' (cited in Langmore, 2000: 37).

Similarly, they exclude some of the non-material aspects emphasized by people in poverty themselves, such as lack of voice, respect and self-esteem, isolation and humiliation (UKCAP, 1997; Galloway, 2002).

As Stein Ringen puts it, 'in the first case, poverty is defined indirectly through the determinants of way of life, in the second case, directly by way of life' (1987: 146).

Ringen's own definition is not unusual in combining the two: 'a low standard of living, meaning deprivation in way of life because of insufficient resources to avoid such deprivation' (1987: 146). Put simply, someone is "poor" when they have both a low standard of living and a low income' (Gordon et al., 2000b: 91).

Atkinson, Stephen Jenkins suggests that a feminist concept of poverty can be described in terms of an 'individual right to a minimum degree of potential economic independence' (1991: 464,

The work of Amartya Sen offers an alternative perspective on the role of low income in the definition of poverty. 'poverty as a denial of choices and opportunities for living a tolerable life' (UNDP, 1997: 2; Vizard, 2001). The human poverty and development indices published in the annual UNDP Human Development Report reflect Sen's approach.

Sen uses two key terms to express this idea: 'functionings' and 'capabilities'.

'Functionings' refer to what a person actually manages to do or be; they range from elementary nourishment to more sophisticated levels such as participation in the life of the community and the achievement of self-respect.

'Capabilities' denote what a person *can* do or be, that is, the range of choices that are open to her. Critical here is the freedom people enjoy 'to choose between different ways of living that they can have reason to value' (Sen, 1990: 114).

Money, Sen argues, is just a means to an end and the goods and services or 'commodities' it buys are simply particular ways of achieving functionings (1985a, 1992, 1999). The role of money in achieving functionings depends on the extent to which goods and services are commodified (i.e. are exchanged for money),

so will vary between societies.

Kankwenda (2003.3) defines poverty as: A multidimensional phenomena influenced by a wide range of factors, these include poor people lack of access to income earning and productive activities and to essential social services.

The Copenhagen Declaration of 1995 seems to shed more light on what really constitutes poverty when it assets: Poverty has various manifestations, including lack of Income and productive resources sufficient to ensure sustainable livelihood; hunger and malnutrition, ill health; limited or lack of access to education and other basic services, increase morbidity and mortality from illness, homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environments, social discriminations and exclusion. It is also characterized by a lack of participation in decision and in civil, social and cultural life (Edoh 2003:68).

To Adejo (2006), poverty can be manifested in poverty of history, poverty of intellect and poverty of ideology.

In any case the deprived are usually the poor. These are people of insufficient income, inadequate food intake, lack basic healthcare, lack shelter and safe drinking water, poor environmental cleanliness, lack access to basic education and skills, ignorant of fundamental human rights, and access to information. These however constituted the challenge and focus of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs

DEFINING POVERTY

The way we choose to conceptualize poverty will influence the goals we establish in addressing it.

Thus it is important to start this resource with a brief exploration of the various ways poverty is understood. The following table provides a summary of those definitions.

Condition of Poverty	Definition	Poverty Reduction Goal
Absolute Poverty	Lack of resources to meet the physical needs for survival.	Meet basic needs.
Relative Poverty	Lack of resources to achieve a standard of living that allows people to play roles, participate in relationships, and live a life that is deemed normative by the society to which they belong.	Equity/parity with others.
Poverty as Dependence	Lack of critical mass of assets needed to meet one's needs on a sustainable basis.	Self-sufficiency
Poverty as Exclusion	Processes of deprivation and marginalization that isolate people from the social and economic activities of society.	Inclusion
Poverty as Capabilities Deprivation	Lack of resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, economic, political and social rights.	Human development

SOURCE: A Compendium of Poverty Reduction Strategies and Frameworks , Canada

DIMENSIONS OF POVERTY

From this perspective, it has at least five clusters of meanings.

The first is *INCOME-POVERTY* or its common proxy (because less unreliable to measure) consumption-poverty.

This needs no elaboration. When many, especially economists, use the word poverty they are referring to these measures. Poverty is what can be and has been measured, and measurement and comparisons provide endless scope for debate.

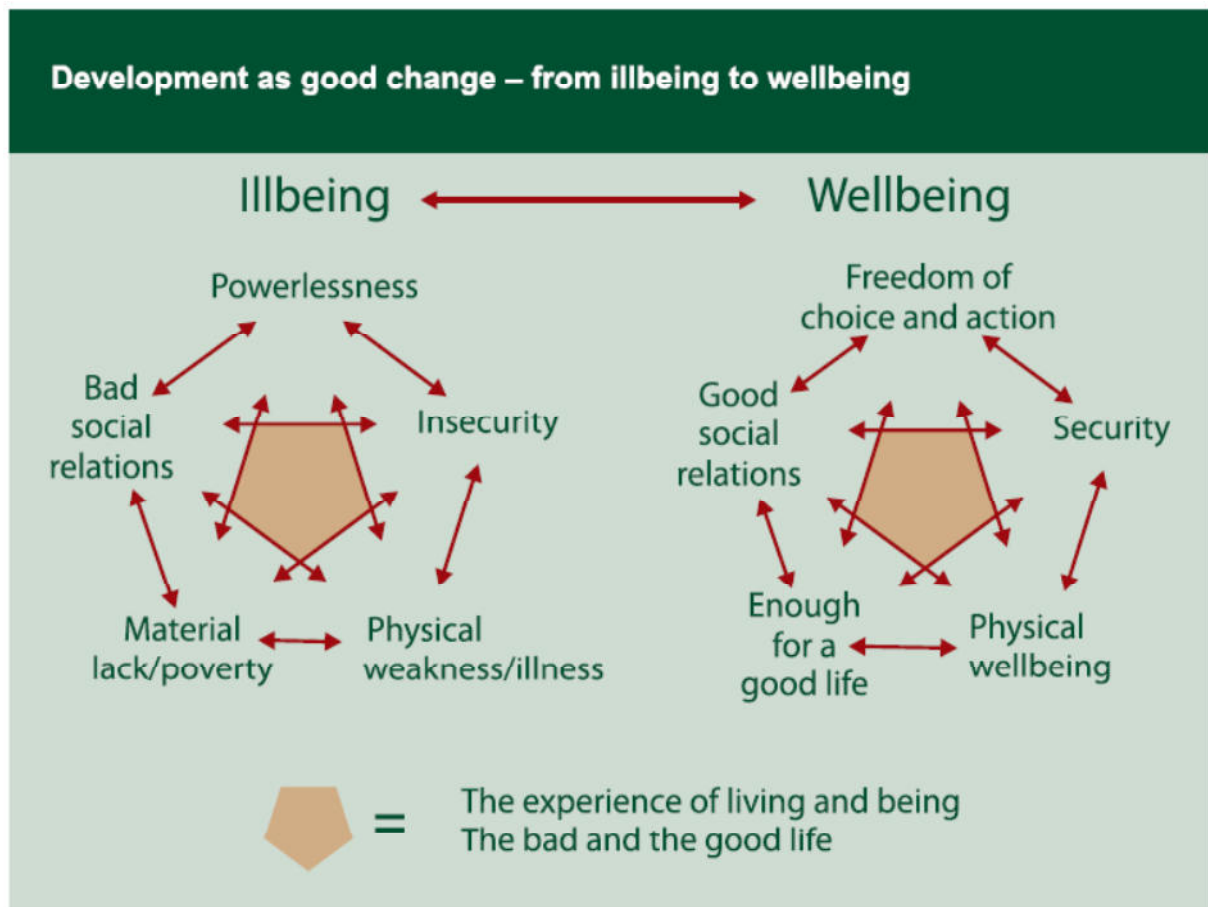
The second cluster of meanings is *MATERIAL LACK OR WANT*. Besides income, this includes lack of or little wealth and lack

or low quality of other assets such as shelter, clothing, furniture, personal means of transport, radios or television, and so on. This also tends to include no or poor access to services

A third cluster of meanings derives from Amartya Sen, and is expressed as *CAPABILITY DEPRIVATION*, referring to what we can or cannot do, can or cannot be.

This includes but goes beyond material lack or want to include human capabilities, for example skills and physical abilities, and also self-respect in society.

DEVELOPMENT AS A TOOL FOR COMBATING POVERTY.



Source: poverty in focus,2006, United Nations Development Programme

GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY ERADICATION

In order to address this lingering challenge, the HDR expressed optimism that the prospect of eradicating absolute poverty within the first decades of the 21st century is not only feasible; the report considers the quest to be both affordable and a moral imperative. Six areas of priority action were identified and they include:

1. “Everywhere the starting point is to empower women and men – and to ensure their participation in decisions that affect their lives and enable them to build their strengths and assets.
2. Gender equality is essential for empowering women – and for eradicating poverty. This is said to mean “focusing clearly on ending discrimination against girls in all aspects of health...starting with survival” (cited UNDP, 1997, p. 7)
3. Sustained poverty reduction requires pro-poor growth in all countries.
4. Globalisation offers great opportunities – but only if it is managed more carefully and with more concern for global equity.
5. In all these areas the state must provide an enabling environment for broad-based political support and alliances for pro-poor policies and markets.
6. Special international support is needed for special situations – to reduce the poorest countries’ debt faster, to increase their share of aid and to open agricultural markets for their exports” (UNDP, 1997, p. 19).

DEVELOPMENT AID AND POVERTY IN AFRICA

Africa is the only region in the world where the number of extreme poor has risen over the past fifteen years (UN, 2007a). It is also the only region where not even a single country (particularly for sub-Saharan nations) is on the track to meet the MDGs (UN, 2007b). At the September 2007 inaugural meeting of the MDGs African Steering Group (ASG), the UN Secretary General expressed grave concern over the status report on Africa and the MDGs target date and called for global assistance to help these countries to join the track.

Development is complex and multi-faceted and the challenge facing the governments of the world’s poorest countries is formidable. For the daunting challenge of poverty elimination to be achieved among these

nations constrained by limited resources, there must be a dynamic balance between policies and actions aimed at promoting human development, sustainable livelihoods and a better management of the natural and physical environment (DFID, 1997).

Aid has been shown to be a tool that could be instrumental in addressing the challenge facing developing nations but the reality of poverty in the 21st century is considered an indictment of the global order. At the end of the last century, the world was not only overproducing food, but also a wide variety of luxuries and amusements.

Yet 1.3 billion people continued to wallow in poverty, being denied their basic human rights and needs. This state of affairs demonstrated - not the lack of generosity on the part of the comfortably off majority – but the failure of political leadership on a grand scale (Randel et al., 2000).

Aid to sub-Saharan Africa has been falling steadily since 1994 (Randel et al., 2000). Compounding this situation is the persisting crisis of governance in some SSA countries, which is a fundamental obstacle serving to further decrease the effectiveness of the aid that they receive.

POVERTY IN NIGERIA.

Nigeria presents a paradox. The country is rich but the people are poor (World Bank, 1996).

Nigeria is one of the biggest and poorest countries in Africa and has immense development needs (UNDG, 2006). The majority of the population lives in the rural areas. Following years of political and economic stagnation, Nigeria embarked on a comprehensive reform programme during the second term of the democratic administration (Okonjo-Iweala and Osafo-Kwaako, 2007). Poverty has earned recognition in the extent of its ravaging society and the affairs of humanity at the international, national and local levels, the need exists now for urgent actions towards its eradication and control.

Indeed, poverty is a snare. It is dehumanising. It must be eradicated.” (Obadan,1996). The causes of this state of poverty in the country may be traced to the under-listed, among other factors:

Corruption

- Bad governance
- Debt overhang
- Unemployment
- Low productivity
- Burgeoning population growth
- Globalisation
- Unfocused government policies
- Lack of effective skills training

THE NATURE AND INCIDENCE OF POVERTY IN NIGERIA

Poverty is very real in Nigeria, over the last ten years; the quality of life of the average Nigerian citizen has progressively nose-dived. It is so endemic that people have started seeing it as part of their lot in life. In fact, scores of research studies have exposed the dimensions and the extent of poverty in Nigeria. For example Obadan and Odusola (2001), reveal how sharply the per capita income of Nigerians slipped from a high of over 1,280 dollars in 1980 to a low dollar in 1995. This and other studies generally paint a grim picture of a nation trapped in a vortex of abject and abnormal poverty and declining productivity. Available statistics indicate how precarious life has become for the average Nigerian over the years in the face of suffocating levels of poverty.

The Nigerian situation becomes more pathetic when compared with other less endowed developing countries in Africa and other parts of the third world.

Findings by Kayode and Odusola (2000), show, for example, that Nigeria’s per capita income of \$240 in 1990 was well below the average of over \$500 for sub-Saharan Africa.

The figure for Nigeria was well below those for Botswana (\$3210), Cote d’Ivoire (\$6600), Egypt (\$1,080), South Africa (\$3,500), Mauritius (\$3,710) (Obadan and Odusola (2008),

In Edoh (2003:69), affirm that Nigeria is even rated in terms of percentage of population earning less than one dollar per day for randomly selected years.

The extent of poverty in the nation becomes even more alarming when a critical look is taken at the general income of the workers in the public service. The situation the Nigerian workers have found themselves in wage administration has necessitated most of the corrupt practices in the country’s public service. The severity of poverty in Nigeria is equally glaring when other indicators of services and development are considered.

The Vision 2010 Committee Report reveals that:

1. 50% of Nigerians live below the poverty line.
2. Only about 40% have access to safe drinking water;
3. About 85% of the urban population lives in single houses with more than 7 occupants on the average.
4. Only about 62% of Nigerians have access to primary health care.

5. Most Nigerians take less than one-third of the minimum required protein and vitamins (Report 2010 Committee; Edoh 2003:71).

The majority of Nigeria's population lives in poverty with insufficient income to cover minimum standards of food, water, shelter, medical care and schooling. Given the Nation's rich endowment with natural resources, its poverty profile presents a sombre picture of a rich nation in decline (OXFAM, 2003)

POVERTY STATISTICS IN NIGERIA.

These include the following:

i. Relative poverty is defined by reference to the living standards of majority in a given society. In 2004, Nigeria's relative poverty measurement stood at 54.4%, but increased to 69% (or 112,518,507 Nigerians) in 2010.

The North-West and North-East geo-political zones recorded the highest poverty rates in the country with 77.7% and 76.3% respectively in 2010, while the South-West geo-political zone recorded the lowest at 59.1%. Among States, Sokoto had the highest poverty rate at 86.4% while Niger had the lowest at 43.6% in the year under review.

ii. Absolute Poverty is defined in terms of the minimal requirements necessary to afford minimal standards of food, clothing, healthcare and shelter. Using this measure, 54.7% of Nigerians were living in poverty in 2004 but this increased to 60.9% (or 99,284,512 Nigerians) in 2010. Among the geo-political zones, the North-West and North-East recorded the highest rates at 70% and 69% respectively, while the South-West had the least at 49.8%. At the State level, Sokoto had the highest at 81.2% while Niger had the least at 33.8% during the review period.

iii. The-Dollar-per-day measure refers to the proportion of those living on less than US\$1 per day poverty line. Applying this approach, 51.6% of Nigerians were living below US\$1 per day in 2004, but this increased to 61.2% in 2010. Although the World Bank standard is now US\$1.25, the old reference of US\$1 was the standard used in Nigeria at the time that the survey was conducted. The North-West geo-political zone recorded the highest percentage at 70.4%, while the South-West geo-political zone had the least at 50.1%. Sokoto had the highest rate among States at 81.9%, while Niger had the least at 33.9%.

iv. Subjective Poverty is based on self-assessment and "sentiments" from respondents. In this regard, 75.5% of Nigerians considered themselves to be poor in 2004, and in 2010 the number went up to 93.9%. FCT recorded the most number of people who considered themselves to be poor at 97.9%. Kaduna recorded the least number of people who considered themselves poor at 90.5%.

v. 2011 Poverty level estimates: For completeness and to guide policy, NBS has also forecast the poverty rate for 2011 using various economic models. It is important to stress at this point that these estimates are constrained by the assumption that the status quo in 2010 was maintained in 2011. Accordingly, it ignores the potential positive impact various poverty alleviation strategies implemented since 2011 may have had on reversing the poverty trend.

Thus, using the relative, absolute and dollar-per-day poverty measures, NBS estimates that poverty may have further risen slightly to about 71.5%, 61.9% and 62.8% respectively in 2011.

vi. Income inequality: The survey suggests rising income inequality in the country as measured by the Gini-coefficient. By this measure, income inequality rose from 0.429 in 2004 to 0.447 in 2010, indicating greater income inequality during the period.

vii. Consumption Expenditure Distribution: Lastly, analysis of consumption expenditure distribution indicates that the top 10% income earners was responsible for about 43% of total consumption expenditure, the top 20% was responsible for about 59% of total consumption expenditure while the top 40% was responsible for about 80% of total consumption expenditure in the year under review.

Table 1: Relative poverty: Non-poor, Moderate poor and the Extremely poor (%), 1980-2010

Year	Non-poor	Moderately poor	Extremely poor
1980	72.8	21.0	6.2
1985	53.7	34.2	12.1
1992	57.3	28.9	13.9
1996	34.4	36.3	29.3
2004	43.3	32.4	22.0
2010	31.0	30.3	38.7

Source: NBS, Harmonized Nigeria Living Standard Survey, 2010

Table 1 Relative Poverty Headcount from 1980-2010

Year	Poverty Incidence (%)	Estimated Population (Million)	Population in poverty (Million)
1980	27.2	65	17.1
1985	46.3	75	34.7
1992	42.7	91.5	39.2
1996	65.6	102.3	67.1
2004	54.4	126.3	68.7
2010	69.0	163	112.47

Source: National Bureau of Statistics. HNLSS 2010

Table 3: Incidence of Poverty by Zones using different poverty measures (%)

Zone	Food Poor	Absolute Poor	Relative Poor	Dollar Per Day
North Central	38.6	59.5	67.5	59.7
North East	51.5	69.0	76.3	69.1
North West	51.8	70.0	77.7	70.4
South East	41.0	58.7	67.0	59.2
South-South	35.5	55.9	63.8	56.1
South west	25.4	49.8	59.1	50.1

2011 POVERTY FORECAST IN NIGERIA IN PERCENTAGE

	2004 (%)	2010 (%)	2011 (%)
Estimated Population (million)	126.3	163	168
Relative Poverty	54.4	69	71.5
Absolute Poverty	54.7	60.9	61.9
Dollar Per Day	62.8	61.2	62.8

WHY ARE NIGERIANS POOR

Why are Nigerians poor despite these laudable poverty reduction programmes and resources at the disposal of government, Edoh (2003:71) identifies the following as some of the causes of poverty in Nigeria:

1. Corruption and embezzlement
2. Poor Leadership
3. Lack of comprehensive National Poverty Alleviation
4. Lack of sound agricultural policy and protracted neglect of the sector.
4. Lack of basic infrastructures
5. Rapid population growth
5. Excessive internal and external debt burden.

The incidence of poverty in the country is so devastating, consequently the government like other 189 governments of the United Nations (UN) members embarked on poverty reduction programmes through the instrumentality of the Millennium Development goals. Next, is the critical examination of the ‘wonders’ of the MDGs in Nigeria.

THE GOVERNMENTAL ACTION AGAINST POVERTY IN NIGERIA.

Table 1: SELECTED GOVERNMENT PROGRAMMES FROM 1972 TO DATE

Programmes	Year Established	Head of Government	Target Group	Nature of Intervention
National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP)	1972	General Yakubu Gowon	Peasant Farmers	To educate farmers
Nigeria Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB)	1972	Yakubu Gowon	Peasant Farmers	Agricultural Financing
Operation Feed the Nation (OFN)	1979	General Olusegun Obasanjo	Rural dwellers	Increase food production
War Against Indiscipline (WAI)/Go Back to the land	1983	General Muhamadu Buhari and Brigadier Babaunde Idiagbon	The entire society	War against indiscipline
Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI)	1986	General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida	Rural Dwellers	Feeders road rehabilitation, rural water supply and rural electrification
National Directorate of Employment	1986	General Ibrahim Badamosi	Unemployed Youths	Training, financing and guidance

(NDE)		Babangida		
Better Life Programme (BLP)	1987	General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida	Rural Women	Self help and rural development programme, skill acquisition and health care
People's Bank of Nigeria (PBN)	1989	General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida	Under-privileged in rural and urban areas	Securing loans and credit facilities
Community Banks (CB)	1990	General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida	Rural residents and micro enterprise in Urban areas	Securing loans and credit facilities
Family Support Programmes (FSP)	1994	General Sanni Abacha	Families in Rural areas	Health care and child welfare developments
Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP)	1998	General Sanni Abacha	Rural Dwellers	Credit facilities to support the establishment of cottage industries
National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS)	2004	Chief Olusegun Obasanjo	The entire society	To provide easy access to health services
National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS)	2004	Chief Olusegun Obasanjo	The poor in the society	Government reformation, growing private sector, access to health education, welfare, employment, empowerment, security and participatory governance

Arogundade, K. K. Adebisi, S. O; Ogunro, V. O(2011) and Source: Oladeji and Abiola (1998)
 Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Nigeria: A Call for Policy Harmonisation for development (FRN, 2006).

ERADICATION OF POVERTY WITHIN THE MDGS FRAMEWORK

A major strategy for the implementation of MGDs in Nigeria as earlier noted is the NEEDS. The targets are to half by 2015 the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day. The second target is half by 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger (MDG, 2006).

Findings in 2004 indicated that poverty was more acute in rural areas in Nigeria and that some geo-political zones were particularly harder hit than others by the phenomenon while unemployment kept soaring with the worst affected age bracket being 13-25 years (MDG, 2006). According to Muhammed, Nigeria's democratic experience has neither served the purpose of political emancipation nor led to economic betterment of the citizens. This is especially in the face of endemic poverty, hunger, unemployment and progressive disempowerment of a large chunk of the population. The prospect of escaping the life threatening situations and

achieving sustainable growth and development is therefore linked to the MDGs. Again its actualization in Nigeria is still challenged by poor leadership, insincerity in governance, policy inconsistency, lack of adequate data base, high levels of corruption, etc. Some growth indices are often paraded by the Nigerian government, but, there is mismatch or disconnect between it and existing realities as the country still exhibit large symptoms of underdevelopment as reflected in the socio-economic lives of Nigerians. According to Odion (2009) 70% of the over 140 million Nigerians currently live below the poverty line of one dollar per day. The rapid urbanization,

put at over 5 percent per annum, exerts severe pressure on ailing infrastructure. Nigeria is further ranked as one of the twenty five poorest nations in the world. This further intensifies youth unemployment.

The Human Development Report 2007/2008 on Nigeria showed that the Human development Index for Nigeria is 0.470, which gives the country a rank of 158th out of 177 countries. Life expectancy was 46.5 percent, ranking Nigeria as 165th and adult literacy rate (% ages 15 and older) was 69.1, ranking Nigeria as 104th out of 177, the report also indicated the Human Poverty Index value of 37.3 percent for Nigeria, which ranked the country as 80th among 108 developing countries for which the index were calculated (UNDP, 2008). According to Bello

(2007) about one million Nigerian children were given out for forced and exploitative labour, of which 18 percent work in dangerous environments after school hours. Ten million Nigerian children of school age were reported to be out of school as shown by statistics on school enrolment released by UNICEF (2008). Eradicating poverty as step towards sustainable development in Nigeria via the MDGs framework continues to appear as a Herculean task.

THE WAY FORWARD FOR NIGERIA

The Government of Nigeria has expressed the commitment to build a nation in which poverty is history and to achieving this objective by actively collaborating with international development partners; guaranteeing equal access to political, social and economic opportunities for women and men; and to the development of a culture that places premium on the protection of all including children (FMWA, 2006)

Poverty in Nigeria is multi-faceted and deeply rooted. As such, an effective poverty reduction strategy in Nigeria must reflect its multidimensional nature, incorporating economic, social, cultural and political dimensions. Consequently, achieving the MDGs and hence unsustainable development through poverty reduction would require the decisive commitment of all stakeholders involved –individuals, communities, governments, non-governmental organizations and relevant international agencies.

First, the federal state and local government must ensure commitment in the areas of fund allocation for provision of social services that are beneficial to the poor; fostering efficient macro-economic and sectoral policies and the provision of an enabling environment to facilitate private sector economic framework.

Also, the government should recognize and encourage non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to be actively involved in a wide variety of activities to help provide development opportunities for grassroots communities considering the disproportionately high incidence of endemic poverty in the rural communities. Such encouragement of the NGOS should be closely accompanied by governments increased investment in human capital, a requirement necessary to equip the poor with education/training in order to enable them share in such grassroots opportunities.

Another strategy is for the government to realistically undertake a comprehensive study on the causes of poor implementation of development policies and strategies and develop a plan of action to address this critical and persistent problem.

There is also the need to develop long-term strategic plans that address unemployment, taking into consideration the educational curriculum and the needs of the labour market as well as strengthening the human and financial capacity of poverty alleviation institutions in the country.

Finally, there is the need to fully integrate the MGDs in the national development strategy and enhance monitoring thereof. There should be periodic and consistent reporting of the MDGs.

CONCLUSION

Nigeria is Africa's most populous nation and it is widely recognized that Africa's attainment of the MDG targets is predicated on Nigeria's success. Poverty is multi-dimensional and even though it is difficult to separate the various dimensions of poverty from the various causes of poverty, in the case of Nigeria, we have shown that unemployment, corruption, the non-diversification of Nigeria's economy, inequality, laziness, and a poor education system are some of the key determinants of poverty. These determinants are many times related to each other and also enforce each other. For example, unemployment, poor education and poverty can be seen as vicious cycle. Today, people who are not educated lack the opportunity of being hired for good jobs, and the poor masses today still cannot afford to go to school which makes them the poor unemployed masses tomorrow. Hence, all these factors are correlated and must all be tackled together if any progress wants to be made.

Nigeria's success is in turn dependent on her ability to effectively reduce poverty levels, especially among women who are a particularly disadvantaged group.

The Nigeria Poverty Profile 2010 Report indicate that poverty and income inequality in Nigeria have increased since 2003/2004. In addition, NBS estimates that this trend may have increased further in 2011 if the potential positive impacts of several anti-poverty and employment generation intervention programmes are not taken into account. Eliminating poverty requires better definition and measurement. We need (i) an international poverty line that defines a threshold of income (including in kind) required in different countries to surmount material and social deprivation; (ii) regular reports on the extent of poverty in every country, based on measures of both "absolute" – i.e. "extreme" – and "overall" poverty, as agreed in 1995 at the World Summit for Social Development.

Thus, antipoverty policies must be monitored and evaluated regularly and on a much larger scale by governments, by the United Nations, by the international financial institutions and by other relevant international agencies.

Civil society and the private business community could also contribute in ways that reflect their interests and capabilities; utilizing nongovernmental channels would help broaden the scope of poverty reduction.

Nongovernmental actors would also be able to play an important watchdog role in prodding the government to adopt more appropriate policies, thereby increasing public support for poverty-oriented assistance.

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