

# **Increase of Extreme Poverty and Hunger in the context of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Nigeria: Explanations and Framework for improvement**

Nweke, Eugene N  
Department of Political Science  
Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki-Nigeria  
ndufield@yahoo.com

## **Abstract**

This article questions the failing capacity of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to halve extreme poverty and hunger by the year 2015 in Nigeria. In this regards, it attributes the increase in the number of Nigerian living in extreme poverty and hunger to state capitalism and class politics in the programme implementation. For this reason and as the report of harmonized Nigeria Living Standard survey (HNLSS,2010) shows, there is increase of 69% of Nigerians (112 million persons) in the estimated population of 163 million Nigerians living in poverty despite the efforts of MDGs. This against the background of the 54.4% representing 68 million in the estimated population of 123million Nigerians living in poverty according to harmonized Nigeria Living Standard survey report (2004). Considering these, an alternative framework for addressing the challenges of eradicating extreme poverty; the protective-empowerment framework is introduced and recommended as a guide for implementation of pro-policy in Nigeria and developing Nations.

## **Introduction**

For the past 30 years of the 20th century, poverty is seen as a relatively minor and residual preoccupation, for policy makers. Nevertheless, in 1995, the World Social Summit held in Copenhagen identified extreme poverty as a major threat to sustainable human livelihood. As an effort to address the challenge, a new consensus to tackle eight major threats to human life in the world was agreed and regarded as United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by September 2000. Among the eight goals is the declaration to half extreme Poverty and hunger by the end of 2015. This goal is the first among the eight MDGs declared by 189 member states of United Nations at its General Assembly.

Consequent upon this declaration, the UN resolution pledged to reduce by half the number of the people living on less than one (1\$) USD per day by year 2015. (United Nations [UN], 2000, 2001). This decision is germane and supported by report of a global pool by Gallup International. The global pool covering 68 countries and conducted in May and July 2005 by Gallup International indicates that extreme poverty was considered 'the main problem facing the world' by 26 percent of the world's citizens, far ahead of issues such as terrorism (12%), unemployment (9%), or war and conflicts (8%). Poverty was the top concern on all continents, and in 60 of the 68 countries surveyed (Léger Marketing, 2006).

The declaration of Eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) raised awareness and shaped the direction and target of the United Nations development framework. Besides the declaration, "we still have a long way to go in empowering women and girls, promoting sustainable development, and protecting the most vulnerable from the devastating effects of multiple crises, be there conflicts, natural disasters or volatility in prices for food and energy" (MDGs Report, 2011). This concurs with the report of harmonized Nigeria Living Standard survey (HNLSS,2010) which shows that 69% of Nigerians (112 million persons) in the estimated population of 163 million Nigerians are living in poverty. The data shows that poverty is on the rise in Nigeria amidst MDGs efforts considering the harmonized Nigeria Living Standard survey report (2004) that 54.4% representing 68 million in the estimated population of 123million Nigerians were living in poverty. In the consideration of these facts, it is worrisome to note that the MDGs concern of halving extreme poverty is at present unattainable in Nigeria. This challenge therefore questions the MDGs poverty governance framework and in recognition offers explanations and alternative framework for eradication of extreme poverty in Nigeria.

## **Explaining increase in Extreme Poverty and Hunger in Nigeria**

Although we have barely three years to 2015, attaining goal one of MDGs is questionable and glaringly unachievable in Nigeria. This fear stems from the fact that more Nigerians are increasingly located in poverty line as shown in the

2010 National Bureau of Statistics Report on harmonized standard of living survey. By this development, it is justifiable to question the failing capacity of MDGs to halve extreme poverty and hunger in Nigeria by 2015.

On the strength of this therefore, let us understand the concept of poverty and extreme poverty as a prelude to explaining increase in extreme poverty and hunger in Nigeria. Poverty is usually conceived in absolute or in relative terms; but more importantly it is essentially an existential issue that touches on the conditions of life that a section of poverty experiences, as they meet the challenges of life.(Bilton et al,1987). In addition poverty is measured in terms of food, dollar and subjective context. In the words of Gasu (2011:221), those who view poverty from absolute terms are usually concerned with certain minimum subsistence requirements that an individual needs for a healthy living in a given social setting; and within a specific temporal frame. This absolute term is also regarded as extreme poverty and treated as Goal 1 by MDG declaration. As such extreme poverty is described as a destitute condition in which people lack the opportunities to develop capabilities required to live a basic human life, thereby causing exclusion from society and development process. This inability to attain a minimum standard of living explains the crisis of food, clothing and shelter among most Nigerians as the indicators of extreme poverty. Also associated with extreme poverty are low levels of ; life expectancy, education, political participation and access to health care and increase in infant mortality. As such, a poor person is that who cannot access basic human needs required for survival and who is voiceless and powerless resulting from inability to participate or excluded from public decisions that could improve his standard of living.

On this premise, the condition of extreme poverty in Nigeria, as the UNDP (2003) estimate puts is that the percentage of the poor in Nigeria is between 66 and 70 percent; on the estimate incidence increase of 10 percent every three years. This entails that the number people entering into poverty is on the increase. (World Bank, 1990). In the same vein and in line with increase in poverty, Kirk Liegh (2007) reports that, Nigeria is now considered one of the 20 poorest countries in the world.

Upon this situation we ask, what accounts for increasing extreme poverty and hunger amidst the implementation of MDGs in Nigeria? The answer to this hinges on several conventional factors including lack of ownership, ineffective governance and lack of integrity of purpose and process in pro-poor governance. For the purpose of this study, these challenges are grouped into two ; state capitalism and nature of development politics of Nigerian state.

### **The factor of state Capitalism in the implementation of MDGs**

Leaning on Ake (1981), it is acknowledged that the poverty situation in Nigeria is because it has been operating state capitalism in her policy process. He further notes that “the ruling class is the social class which by virtue of its control of the means of production is able to command a preponderance of social, political and economic goods and power” (Ake 1981). In similar explanation, Beckman (1982) notes that state-capitalism promotes capitalist accumulation and capitalist class formation..... the state itself is a major owner or in partnership with foreign and domestic private capital. In the words of Obasi (2005), the capitalist class itself seeks state power for surplus appropriation. The foundation to this as Mbaku (1999) notes is the institutional arrangements adopted at independence that enhanced the ability of those who had captured the elevated structures of colonial hegemony to misuse the position entrusted to them.

The culture of state capitalism and capitalist accumulation greatly rub-off on MDGs.It is observed that this culture induces the managers of the programme to turn its implementation into a means for political patronage. This practice although empowers and protects the rich, and by this virtue makes the vulnerable and impoverished to get trapped in extreme poverty. On the specific the MDGs Report (2011) notes that, “the proportion of people going hungry has plateaued at 16 per cent, despite reductions in poverty” (MDGs, Report, 2011).The contradiction of the report speaks more on the poor governance in MDGs as hunger and poverty cannot be segmented. As such hunger can only get reduced when poverty is reduced.

To this extent, integrity of process in the implementation of MDGs in Nigeria is questioned but attributes the explanation to antics of actors of sate capitalism .In view of this, the incidence of lack of quality food and suboptimal feeding practices, repeated attacks of infectious diseases, lack of good health services and governance crisis have culminated to raise doubt in halving poverty in 2015. All these account for the disconnect between poverty reduction and the persistence of hunger and as well renewed attention to the mechanisms governing access to food in the developing world. For this reason, we argue that crisis of poverty reduction within the MDGs framework is a product of derailment in implementation, target and service delivery. The next explanation reflects on the nature of development politics of Nigerian state.

### **Development politics of Nigerian state**

The politics of MDGs governance is a reflection of the nature development politics in Nigeria. 'Politics' like poverty is a highly contested notion and as such perceived variously. Politics on one understanding is a kind of activity associated with the process of government, and in modern setting also linked with the 'public' sphere. On another understanding it is about 'power' relations and struggles, not necessarily confined to the process of government or restricted to the public domain. As a process of government, it has the power to determine individuals or groups that benefit from state resources either by protecting or by empowerment.

The MDGs plan of halving poverty is a continuation of debate in development politics. . Prior to this, two contending approaches were rift in development theory. One is politics of modernization, which argues for changing role of tradition and supports strong government. The second is the Marxian inspired approach that gave rise to dependency theory. While all these failed to reduce poverty and foster development, the globalization theory emerged on the emphasizes of economic integration powered by communication revolution for accelerated development. Unfortunately, as earlier noted, besides these development debates and perception, extreme poverty and hunger, have continuously plummeted.

The apparent letdown in efforts of MDG -1 brings us to politics of halving poverty. The politics of halving poverty reflects on the government action towards eradication of extreme poverty according to principles of millennium declaration. The Harold Laswell definition of politics as *"who gets what, when and how"* guides the discussion. This definition as Nnoli (2003) puts, represents reality to a good extent especially in Africa. Politics as conceptualized, involves allocation of scarce social, economic and cultural resources to individual, groups, regions and classes.

The failing capacity of MDGs backgrounds on class politics that excludes the poor from decision-making process. The class politics progressively induces poverty by generating systematic barriers that prevent the poor from accessing key social benefits as jobs, education, housing, health care, safety, and political representation that enhance human wellness. These result from the application of discriminatory selection criteria that directly or indirectly exclude some groups of persons in benefiting from pro-poor policies. As Social Protection Committee (2001) notes that class driven politics limits opportunities of the underclass to access income and well-being. This reflects the belief that politics is part of the superstructure that is determined and conditioned by the economic base. In his regards, for example, Marx showed how the economic system of capitalism created the "reserve army of the unemployed" as a conscious strategy to keep wages low. The Marxists regard class as the most fundamental, and politically the most significant social division.

Although politics is not about allocation, the nature and manner of 'who gets what, when and how' in the context of MDGs is patterned in the development politics of Nigeria creates ethnic bifurcation and clientelism that perpetuates absolute poverty among Nigerians.

As the explanations conclude, the reinforcement of state capitalism and primordial development politics in governance of MDGs has trapped more Nigerians in extreme poverty, we explore the option to overcome extreme poverty and secure livelihood. In this consideration the *'Protection-Empowerment framework'* for uplifting the vulnerable through house hold economic strengthening is explored as an exit strategy from extreme poverty.

### **The option of Protection-Empowerment framework**

This Protection-Empowerment framework is derived from sustainable human development approach for eradication of extreme poverty. It posits that security of individuals is better guaranteed when protected from severe threats such as extreme poverty. The focus is that eradication of extreme poverty essentially lays foundation for human security. Human security ensures the safety of individuals and communities against a wider range of threats orchestrated by extreme poverty such as deadly infectious diseases, human rights violations, financial crises, violent conflict, famine or water shortage, among others.

On this note, it is given that the strategy for eradication of extreme poverty reduction considers as a major line of attack to empower through strengthening of the household of the vulnerable to overcome threats to human security. It adds that eradication of extreme Poverty efforts must reflect a design that improves human capacity through attainment of self-reliance as well as have access to basic needs of life. The efforts targeted at reducing poverty must remain people-centered with corresponding basic needs of life, such as functional education, basic health, sanitation and relevant amenities. Access to these, lay foundation for empowerment, which invariably sets the tone for individual protection against hurts of extreme poverty.

The second component of this framework is 'empowerment' of the poor and citizens. Empowerment, means enabling citizens to be full and effective participants in matters that concern their livelihood. "Empowerment is, first and

foremost, about power; changing power relations in favour of those who previously exercised little power over their own lives” (Gita Sen 1997:2). As Batliwala (1993) defines, power has two central aspects -- control over resources (physical, human, intellectual, financial, and the self), and control over ideology (beliefs, values and attitudes). If power means control, then empowerment is the process of gaining control so as to enable the poor form group solidarity for fostering force that extricate them from extreme poverty.

Consequent upon this postulation, this framework, asserts that although protection is exercised through a top-down approach while empowerment requires a bottom-up approach, the two are mutually reinforcing. Equally, this framework notes, that, while people protected can exercise many choices, people empowered can make better choices and bring about improvements in the system of sustainable livelihood. Together, the protection-empowerment framework is fundamental to the implementation of extreme poverty reduction strategy and for attainment of the MDG 1 if adopted.

Associated with this framework include mostly human security scholars such as; Mahbub ul Haq(1994).Gita Sen(1997) Amartya Sen(1999), Akire(2002)Jack Cilers(2004) Sadako Ogata(2005). Their argument revolves on the premise that poor people and communities can effectively contribute to development if their human capital is developed and sustained.. United Nation Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA, 1988) and Awopogba (2002) corroborate this view, that human capital is the knowledge, skills, attitudes, physical and managerial efforts required to manipulate capital, technology, land and material to produce goods and services for human consumption. Therefore, overcoming of threats that trigger extreme poverty in the life of humankind hinges on how they are protected from stunts that trigger poverty and giving the poor desired training and support enhances their potential to thrive. The next concern is how to apply the Protective –Empowerment framework to halve extreme poverty.

#### **Application of Protective –Empowerment approach to halving extreme poverty**

The centrality of this postulation is that individuals and communities should be equipped to overcome a wide range of deprivations through formulation and implementation of public policies that enable people to act in achieving sustainable livelihood. Focusing on the ability of the people differentiates this from other approaches that centre on humanitarian or tokenism. Therefore the framework allows for empowerment Support that development economic capabilities of the extreme poor to overcome so as to provide education, health care and other social safety nets for their households.

Another significance of this framework is its contribution towards empowering of the vulnerable to participate discussion of policy issues and the development of local leadership. Essentially, the framework builds capacity to promote ‘mutual understanding’ ‘joint effort’ and ‘inescapable interdependence’ (American Association of Professors in Brinbaum, 2003:3). The emphasis is on ‘cooperative networking’ where all stakeholders; State(governments), private sector, civil society groups, and the vulnerable group(the poor) should be part of formulating and executing decision. The empowerment of people in this regard should move forward in an environment of freedom of the press, freedom of information and freedom of conscience and belief, and be accompanied by policies of inclusion.

To sustain the gains of the framework, the empowerment process must alter both people's self-perception and their control over their lives and their material environments.

Empowered persons develop their potential and become participants in decision-making processes that affect their lives. (Commission on Human Security (CHS, 2003). The MDGs office should functions fully at the grassroots to allow the rural dwellers to enable the participation of the end users to participate in decision making process. Therefore, if the efforts of MDG-1, that is, half extreme poverty and hunger strategy must mean anything to the poor, focus has to shift to “protective-empowerment”. The essence of adopting Protective-empowerment is acknowledged by Egwuatu (2002) as he notes that, the development paradigm conceives poverty eradication as a mechanism of sustainable economic growth and capital that improves production and productivity through collective endeavours and group synergies. The poor, like others have to be perceived as actors in development. They are not just beneficiaries of development processes but also the owners of development and partners in development.

The framework of ‘protective-empowerment’ is germane to understanding the connection between MDGs and human security in Nigeria. This is because traditional anti-poverty programmes are known to suffer from considerable leakage and inefficiency precisely because poor people are powerless to hold bureaucrats, officials or politicians accountable for the funds that are being spent in the name of the poor. As we have seen, this wastage provides a strong instrumental argument for the empowerment approach. It is however maintained that through the principle of “protective -empowerment” that human security can be guaranteed when the poor people are empowered to fight their own battles against poverty through inclusiveness in pro-poor policy process.

## References

- Ake, C (1981) A Political Economy of Africa. London. Longman
- Akire, S. (2003) A Conceptual Framework for Human Security. Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity, (CRISE) Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford. London
- Awopegba, P.O.(2002)Human Resources High Level Manpower and the Development of the Nigeria Growth in Comparative Perspective” Journal of African Economies, Vol. 9 (suppl. 1)
- Batliwala,,S.(1993).Empowerment of women in South Asia: concepts and Practices(second draft), Asian-South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education
- Beckman,Bjorn(1987)Public Investment and Agrarian Transformation in Nigeria. In State, Oil and Agriculture in Nigeria,edited by Micheal Watts,110- 37.University of California
- Bourgon, J.(2003) Shared governance: Combating Poverty and Exclusion The Second regional conference programme, Yaoundé-Cameroon14TH-18<sup>TH</sup> July)
- Brinbaum,R. (2003).The End of Shared Governance: Looking Ahead or looking Back  
([www.usc.edu/dept/cheap/gov/ro/undtab/98/shared](http://www.usc.edu/dept/cheap/gov/ro/undtab/98/shared) governance
- Egwuatu, B. (2002). Strategies Towards Strengthening the Poverty Eradication Programme in Nigeria in Jega and Wkili (eds).The Poverty Eradication Programme in Nigeria: problems and prospects. Benchmark Publishers limited.Kano.Nigeria
- Gasu,John(2011) Poverty Reduction in Ghana: Alternative Solution by State Alicia Puyana and Samwel Ong’wen Okuro (Eds).Strategies Against Poverty Designs from the North Alternatives from the South.Clasco ,Argetina.
- Jakkie, C. (2004). Human Security in Africa: A Conceptual Framework for Review. A Monograph for the African Human Security Initiative on-line: ([www.africanreview.org](http://www.africanreview.org)) ([www.compress.co.za](http://www.compress.co.za))
- Léger Marketing (2006) Voice of the People 2006: What the World Thinks on Today’s Global Issues. Montreal: Transcontinental
- Mahhub ul Haq (1994).New imperatives of Human Security.Rajiv Ghandi Institute For contemporary Studies (RGICS)Rajiv Ghandi Foundation ,New Delhi
- MDGs Report (2010) Nigeria Millennium Development Goals Report
- National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2005), Poverty Profile for Nigeria
- Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (2010) Nigerian Poverty Profile ([www.nigerianstat.gov.ng](http://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng))
- Nnoli, O. (2003).Introduction to Politics PARCEP.SNAAP Press Ltd Enugu.
- Ogata, S. (2005) ‘Human Security: Theory and Practice, New York: Norton
- Sen, A. (1999), Development as Freedom New York: Alfred Knopf. Inc
- UNDP (2000). Human Development Report. New York: Oxford University Press

---

UNECA (2006) PRSP as a Framework for Scaling Up Efforts to Reach the Millennium Development Goals. Background paper for the Conference of African Ministers of Finance on Theme: Financing for Development From Commitment to Action in Africa”

United Nations commission on Human Security (2003). Human Security now: Protecting and empowering people. New York.

Sen, G. (1997). Empowerment as an Approach to Poverty. Background paper to the Human Development Report 1997. Working Paper Series Number:  
<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/Organizations/healthnet/HUpapers>



This academic article was published by The International Institute for Science, Technology and Education (IISTE). The IISTE is a pioneer in the Open Access Publishing service based in the U.S. and Europe. The aim of the institute is Accelerating Global Knowledge Sharing.

More information about the publisher can be found in the IISTE's homepage:

<http://www.iiste.org>

The IISTE is currently hosting more than 30 peer-reviewed academic journals and collaborating with academic institutions around the world. **Prospective authors of IISTE journals can find the submission instruction on the following page:**

<http://www.iiste.org/Journals/>

The IISTE editorial team promises to review and publish all the qualified submissions in a fast manner. All the journals articles are available online to the readers all over the world without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. Printed version of the journals is also available upon request of readers and authors.

### **IISTE Knowledge Sharing Partners**

EBSCO, Index Copernicus, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, JournalTOCS, PKP Open Archives Harvester, Bielefeld Academic Search Engine, Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek EZB, Open J-Gate, OCLC WorldCat, Universe Digital Library, NewJour, Google Scholar

