

The Upsurge of Poverty: Obstacle to the Achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in Nigeria.

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Abstract

The paper highlights the upsurge of poverty and the challenges of achieving the Millennium Development Goals in Nigeria. A purview of the secondary data reveals that a significant proportion of Nigeria's population is poor. This is a shocking paradox especially when viewed against its enormous wealth. Situating the discourse within the positive feedback and the culture of poverty framework, the paper maintains that poverty breeds poverty in Nigeria and this metamorphosed in a force of culture which is transmitted from one generation to another. This culture is further reinforced and sustained by bad governance, corruption, unemployment and impotent poverty reduction programmes. Given the rising poverty profile, the Nigerian government keyed into the Millennium Development Goals-a new global partnership to eradicate extreme poverty and its correlates by 2015. It is disheartening to note that, with several years of implementing the Millennium Development Goals in Nigeria, poverty still persists. This no doubt, poses a threat to the realization of the Millennium Development Goals. The paper recommends, among others, the formulation and implementation of policies that can overcome the institutional constraints that militate against actualization of the Millennium Development Goals of eradicating poverty in Nigeria within the targeted time frame.

Keywords: Nigeria, Poverty, Development goals, Corruption, Bad governance.

1. Introduction

Nigeria is endowed with abundant human and natural resources. Despite its substantial oil wealth, it remains one of the poorest nations in the world. There is generally a dismal performance of the Nigerian economy for quite some decades now. The task of achieving economic growth and development is rather daunting. With this economic predicament, Nigeria is sucked into the vortex of interlocking vicious circle of unprecedented poverty. Majority of the people in Nigeria now lack sufficient resources necessary to maintain a minimally adequate standard of living.

Disturbed by the scourge of poverty, Nigerian governments over the years have been making several efforts in trying to eradicate the menace. Some of the programmes with poverty eradication thrust are Agricultural Development Projects (ADP), River Basin Development Authority, Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Green Revolution (GR), Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), Family Support Programme (FSP), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), National Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) (Oladeji & Abiola 1998, Ewhrudjakpor 2005, Omonzejie 2007). While Nigeria is still battling with poverty eradication, a new global partnership known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was introduced to tackle the global development challenges.

The Millennium Development Goals MDGs is predicated upon the nucleus provided by the United Nations conferences of September 2000. It is not only a synthetic and integrated package, it also represents a bold attempt to tackle the global development stagnation via a set of tangible quantifiable targets that are central to the actualization of sustainable development. At the core of the Millennium Development Goals is the recognition of the relationship between sustainable poverty reduction and sustainable development (MDGs 2005).

Poverty reduction is one and first among a set of eight strategic development goals globally packaged to fast track sustainable development in all scales especially developing nations of the world. The onerous task of

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accomplishing the goals especially that of poverty reduction has captured the attention and agitated the interest of Nigeria. This growing interest and concern is envisaged, considering the global consciousness to address extreme poverty with its correlates of hunger, disease, inadequate shelter, high child and maternal mortality, high illiteracy level, among others. The paper therefore highlights the rising poverty profile and the challenges of achieving the Millennium Development Goals in Nigeria.

2. Poverty - a Conceptual Analysis

Poverty is a generic concept which scholars lack a consensus on the definition. This is because poverty affects various aspects of an individual including physical, morality, knowledge, and character, among others. Ayanwu (1997) lends credence to the above. He maintains that a concise definition of poverty is elusive because different criteria are used in conceptualizing it. Galbraith (1969) defines poverty as a condition in which when the incomes of a people, even adequate for survival, fall radically behind that of the community and as such the people live outside the grades or categories which the community regards as acceptable. In a similar vein, Sen (1987) sees poverty as the lack of certain capabilities that make it difficult for them to participate with dignity. Poverty is also seen as the inability of an individual to cater adequately for the basic needs of food, clothing and shelter. The inability encompasses social and economic obligations; lack of gainful employment, assets, self esteem, etc (CBN 1999). These social and economic incapacities make it difficult for the poor to attain a minimum standard of living.

There exist two types of poverty namely: absolute and relative. Absolute poverty, also referred to as subsistence poverty, is grounded in the idea of subsistence-the basic condition that must be met in order to sustain a physically healthy existence. People who lack these fundamental requirements (sufficient food, shelter and clothing) of existence are said to live in poverty. The concept of absolute poverty enjoys universal applicability. It is held that standards for human subsistence are more or less the same for all people of an equivalent age and physique, regardless of where they live (Addison, Hulme and Kanbur, 2008).

The universal applicability of the concept of absolute poverty is not universally acceptable. It is dismissed on the ground that a definition of poverty must relate to the standards of a particular society at a particular time (Fields, 1997). This inevitably draws us to the concept of relative poverty. Relative poverty on the other hand, is a type of poverty that exists when people, though may be able to afford the basic necessities of life, are still unable to maintain an average standard of living (World Bank 1996). It should be noted that the concept of relative poverty presents its own complexities. This is because as societies develop, understanding of relative poverty must also change. As societies become more affluent, standards for relative poverty are gradually adjusted upwards (Townsend, 1979).

Apart from the typology of absolute and relative poverty, it is also categorized along five dimensions of deprivation (Oladummi, 1994):

- Personal and physical deprivation: This has to do with deprivation that is experienced in nutrition, health, literacy, disability and lack of self confidence.
- Economic deprivation: This category of deprivation comprises the lack of access to property, income, money, etc. The most vital and common manifestations of poverty is denial of access to basic necessities of existence.
- Social deprivation: It is a kind of deprivation that involves the barrier to full participation in social, political and economic life. A person who is deprived in personal and economic spheres of life may be deprived of their fundamental human rights.
- Cultural deprivation: This deprivation occurs when people are found lacking in values, beliefs, knowledge and information. As a result of this deprivation, victims are not able to take advantage of economic and political opportunities.
- Political deprivation: It involves the lack of political voice. Those who are deprived politically suffer marginalization and are subjected to coercion through physical or economic threats.

3. Overview of Nigeria's Poverty Profile

As noted above, poverty has many dimensions of deprivation that range from physical, economic, cultural to political deprivations. The causes of this deprivation are situated within economic, situational and political factors. A combination of these deprivations is used to determine the poverty profile of a given society. In order to have a better appreciation of the poverty situation, the data on incidence of poverty by sector and zones (National Bureau of Statistics 2005) is represented in table 1:1. The table shows the poverty profile in Nigeria for a period of 24 years (1980-2004).

Table 1.1: Incidence of Poverty by Sector and Zones, 2004

		1980	1985	1992	1996	2004
National	Total poor	28.1	46.3	42.7	65.6	54.4
	Core poor	6.2	12.1	12.9	29.3	22.0
Urban	Total poor	17.2	37.8	37.5	58.2	43.2
	Core poor	6.5	14.8	15.8	31.6	27.1
Rural	Total poor	28.3	51.4	66.0	69.3	63.3
	Core poor	6.5	14.8	15.8	31.6	27.1
South South	Total poor	13.2	45.7	40.8	58.2	35.1
	Core poor	3.3	9.3	13.0	23.4	17.0
South East	Total poor	12.9	30.4	41.0	53.5	26.7
	Core poor	2.4	9.0	15.7	18.2	7.8
South West	Total poor	13.4	38.6	43.1	60.0	43.0
	Core poor	2.1	9.0	15.7	27.5	18.9
North Central	Total poor	32.2	50.8	46.0	64.7	67.0
	Core poor	5.7	16.4	14.8	28.0	29.8
North East	Total poor	35.6	54.9	54.0	70.1	71.2
	Core poor	11.8	16.4	18.5	34.4	27.9
North West	Total poor	37.7	52.1	36.5	77.2	71.2
	Core poor	8.3	14.2	9.0	37.3	26.8
Population in Poverty (million)		17.7	34.7	39.2	67.1	68.7

Source: *National Bureau of Statistics (2005)*

In looking at the incidence of poverty by sectors and zones, it is observed that within a period of 16 years (between 1980 and 1996), the total poor head count rose from 27.2 percent to 65.6 percent representing an average increase of 8.83 percent. It should be noted however, that between 1996 and 2004, there was a decline by annual average of 2.1 percent. In spite of this fluctuation, the fact remains that over 50 percent of the total population is officially poor.

The general trend of the poverty profile is that the population of people in poverty has been on the increase. In other words, as population increases, the number of people trapped in poverty also increases. The number that stood at 17.7 in 1980 increased to 68.7 in 2004. (See Table 1:1). The geographical dimension of poverty shows that the urban poor rose from 17.2 percent in 1980 to 58.2 percent in 1996. In a period of 16 years out of the 24 years under review, the core poor in urban areas rose from 3.0 percent in 1980 to 25.2 percent in 1996 but declined to 43.2 percent in 2004.

The rural areas recorded a corresponding figure of 6.5 percent in 1980 and increased to 31.6 percent in 1996 and declined to 27.1 percent in 2004. In comparative terms, the decline in the core poor is higher in urban areas than in the rural areas. Whereas the decline in urban area was 38 percent, it was only 14 percent in the rural area. This decline is far lower than the national average of 25 percent. It should be noted also that poverty has been consistently above the national average in the three northern geo-political zones with the north east zone recording the highest. Also whereas, other geo-political zones recorded a decline at some time within the 16 years, it was a consistent increase of the core poor in the North central zone (see table 1.1). The poverty situation is confirmed by surveys carried out across regions and states in 2007 and beyond (UNDP 2009).

The high poverty profile in Nigeria is better appreciated with a fair knowledge of the key correlates of poverty. Three correlates of education, occupation of head of households and household size from 1998-2004 is presented in table 1:2.

Table 1.2: Dimensions of Poverty Incidence in Nigeria 1998-2004

Dimensions of Poverty Incidence: Education						
	1980	1985	1992	1996	2004	Contribution to Poverty in 2004
No Schooling	30.2	51.3	46.4	72.6	68.7	47.6
Primary	21.3	40.6	43.3	54.4	48.7	4.9
Secondary	7.5	27.2	30.3	52.0	44.3	30.1
Post Secondary	24.3	24.2	25.8	49.2	26.3	4.3
All Nigeria	27.2	46.3	42.7	65.6	54.4	100
Dimensions of Poverty Incidence: Occupation of Household Heads						
Poverty Head Count						
	1980	1985	1992	1996	2004	
Professional & Technical	17.3	35.6	35.7	51.8	34.2	
Administration	45.0	25.3	22.3	33.5	45.3	
Clerical & Related Jobs	10.0	29.1	34.4	50.1	39.2	
Sales Workers	15.0	36.6	33.5	56.7	44.2	
Service Industry	21.3	38.0	38.2	71.4	43.0	
Agricultural & Forestry	31.5	53.5	47.9	71.0	67.0	
Production & Transport	23.2	46.6	40.8	65.8	42.5	
Manufacturing & Processing	12.4	31.7	33.2	49.4	44.2	
Others	1.5	36.8	42.8	61.2	49.1	
Students & Apprentices	15.6	40.5	41.8	52.4	41.6	
Total	27.2	46.3	42.7	65.6	54.4	
Dimensions of Poverty Incidence: Household Size						
Poverty Head Count						
No. of Persons	1980	1985	1992	1996	2004	Contribution to poverty in 2004
1	0.2	9.7	2.9	13.1	12.6	0.6
2-4	8.8	19.3	19.5	51.5	39.3	19.4
5-9	30.0	50.5	45.4	74.8	57.9	58.9
10-20	51.0	71.3	66.1	88.5	73.3	20.5
20+	80.9	74.9	93.3	93.6	90.7	0.6
All Nigeria	27.2	46.3	42.7	65.6	54.4	100.

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2005)

The heads of household with a post secondary school in 2004 was 26.3 as against 68.7 without any form of formal schooling. The implication of this in terms of contribution to poverty is that whereas head of household with post secondary education contributes 4:3 to poverty, those without formal schooling contribute 47.6 to poverty (see table 1:2).

The occupational distribution of the heads of household shows that over the years, the occupation of the heads of household has been predominantly farming. Apart from 1980 and 1996 when heads of household recorded highest 45.0 and 71.4 percents in administration and service industry respectively, those in agriculture dominated other years under analysis. The reason for this, among others, is that agriculture is the main employer of labour. The National Living Standard Survey of 2004 shows that heads of household whose main occupation is agriculture have the highest likelihood of being poor.

In terms of household size, a very high proportion of the population is characterized by large family size. The factor responsible for this is that majority of the people live in rural areas where children are perceived as assets. Secondly, the extended family and elaborate kinship ties are a major characteristic of the Nigerian family structure. A household with four children and above has poverty incidence that exceeds the national average. Households of nine children and above constitute over 70 percent of poor households and over 90 percent of poor households have a size of 20 and above.

The above disturbing statistics on the upsurge of poverty is further corroborated by the figures of the Harmonised Nigeria Living Standard Survey (HNLSS, 2010). A distribution of the population into *extremely*

poor, moderately poor and non-poor in Table 1.3, the proportion of the core poor increased from 6.2 percent in 1980 to 29.3 percent in 1996 and then came down to 22.0 percent in 2004. For the moderately poor, the picture was quite different as the proportion recorded increased between 1980 and 1985 from 21.0 percent and 34.2 percent respectively. It went down between 1996 and 2004, from 36.3 percent to 32.4 percent. On the other hand, the proportion of non-poor was much higher in the country in 1980 (72.8 percent) compared to 1992 (57.3 percent) and 1996 (34.4 percent). Although it rose to 43.3 percent in 2004, it dropped to 31 percent in 2010. What can be deduced from the above is that poverty has been on the increase despite the seemingly concerted efforts aimed at eradicating poverty by the various regimes in Nigeria.

Table 1.3: 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

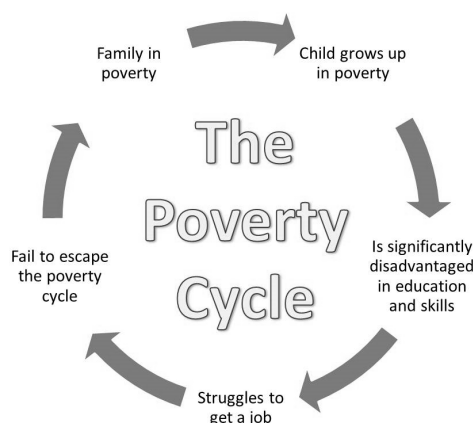
Source: NBS, *Harmonised Nigeria Living Standard Survey, (2010)*

4. The Culture of Poverty and the Dilemma of Achieving MDGs: A Theoretical Reflection

The poverty profile in Nigeria over the years has consistently assumed an evolutionary trajectory. This trend indicates that a significant number of people in Nigeria are living below the poverty line (Ikhariale 2007). In spite of seemingly concerted efforts by subsequent governments to reduce poverty, Nigerians are getting poorer by the day (Okumadewa 1997, World Bank 2000, Obadan 2001, Ewhrudjakpor 2005, Maduagwu 2007).

The theoretical framework that sufficiently explains the rising poverty profile in Nigeria is the feedback theory also known as the vicious cycle of poverty. The theory has it that poverty breeds poverty. The breeding process occurs through time and transmits its effects in a cyclical manner with no beginning and no end to the cycle (Moynihan 1968). The main thrust of the theory is represented in figure 1 below

Fig 1: The Cyclical Nature of Poverty



Within the positive feedback perspective, poverty is seen as a system in which each unit reinforces the other and thus maintains the system as a whole in a cyclical manner. At the beginning of the cyclical process is family in poverty due to low income. This gives rise to low purchasing power and the inability to save. As a result of the above, children are born into poverty. This reflects significantly in the education and acquisition of skills. So they have to struggle very hard to get a job. This impedes their ability to escape from poverty. Children grow up to start a family in poverty and the circle continues. In this cyclical manner, poverty begets poverty.

The positive feedback system that perpetuates poverty is what the American anthropologist, Oscar Lewis refers to as the *culture of poverty*. Lewis (1966) argued that the culture of poverty is a response of the poor to their

marginal position in a class stratified and highly individualistic society. He further stressed that the culture of poverty goes beyond a mere reaction to a situation. It takes the force of culture because its features are guides to action that are internalized by the poor and constitute a design for living that is transmitted from one generation to another through socialisation. In relating the theory to the Nigeria situation, it shows that most Nigerians are already in the poverty trap. This is explicated by the poverty correlate of the occupation of household that is predominately agriculture with large household sizes. This peculiar circumstance makes it not only difficult for them to escape from poverty but they also bequeath it to their children. Thus, a culture of poverty in which people resign to fate is being perpetuated in the Nigerian society. The culture is being reinforced and sustained by bad leadership, corruption, unemployment and impotent poverty reduction strategies put in place by those in charge of governance.

It is disheartening to note that with almost thirteen years of implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and less than two years with fewer than 1000 days to the target date of 2015, the poverty profile is consistently on the increase. Unarguably, a greater proportion of the population still lives within the poverty line. This is characterized by widespread unemployment, insufficient income, inadequate food, lack of basic health care, lack of shelter, lack of safe drinking water, no access to basic education, and a host of others. This portends a fundamental challenge to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals of eradicating poverty by 2015.

The various attempts made over the years to eradicate extreme poverty have not yielded practical outcome that have alleviated poverty. Lack of commitment and continuity, policy inconsistency, corruption, pervasively weak institutional support, among others, hindered the efforts of government at reducing poverty. This evidence points to the fact that Nigeria is not prepared to and cannot win the war against poverty within the 2015 time line. In as much as the war against poverty cannot be won, the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals on the eradication of extreme poverty by 2015 remains a mirage.

5. Conclusion

The discourse sufficiently reveals that there exists an evolutionary trajectory of poverty in Nigeria. A significant proportion of the population still lives below the poverty line. The trend shows that Nigeria, over the years, has been experiencing a rising poverty profile. This unprecedented nature of poverty becomes more disturbing when viewed against the background of her enormous human and natural resources. Despite the fact that various regimes have responded through numerous interventionist programmes to eradicate poverty, no desired results have been achieved. In other words, the more Nigeria tries to tackle it, the more poverty persists.

Nigeria warmly embraced the Millennium Development Goals as another opportunity with a globally packaged impetus to tackle the problem of poverty once and for all. In spite of the interest and seemingly ambitious efforts towards the Millennium Development Goals of eradicating extreme poverty by 2015, nothing substantial has been achieved. Like past interventionist programmes, strategies aimed at eradicating poverty, Nigerian leaders are yet to create the enabling environment that will impact on the poor. This indisputably, is incompatible with the vision of the Millennium Development Goals in Nigeria.

For Nigeria to win the war against poverty and by extension achieve the Millennium Development Goals within the targeted time frame, it must take certain bold steps. Nigeria must formulate and implement policies that can curb corruption. Nigeria must, as a matter of utmost concern, ensure the pursuit of inclusive growth strategies to promote broad participation of the bloated active labour force. The returns from the inclusive growth should be reinvested in viable pro-poor projects that would enhance the productive capacities of the vulnerable segment of the population. Leaders must develop strong political will to promote transparency and accountability in governance. This no doubt will help to break the constraints that militate against the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals anchored on sustainable eradication of poverty in Nigeria.

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