Millennium Development Goals in Nigeria; Issues and Prospects: an Historical Paradox

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Abstract

The paper seeks to explore the recognition of importance of education to the development of a nation, as a means of poverty eradication which is regarded as the most important goal of human development. Ironically, in the time past in Nigeria, education delivery has suffered major setbacks ranging from inadequate frameworks policy, project duplication, gross inefficiency and corruption. In view of this and many others, the United Nations, comprising of Nigeria and other 188 members, in year 2000, in a meeting widely referred to as Millennium Summit in the United States of America, came up with the idea of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) especially for developing countries, for the purpose of poverty eradication, hunger reduction and education promotion for all (Mohammed, (2006). It is a shocking paradox that a significant proportion of Nigeria population is poor despite its enormous wealth as Adejuwon and Tijani (2012) argued. Therefore, this paper, through historical exploration, examines those issues that arose since the commencement of MDGs as it concerns Nigeria as well as prospects of achieving a remarkable impact within timeframe. The paper concludes that governments at all levels need to be sincere in the implementation of MDGs if the of illiteracy, poverty and hunger are to be eradicated by year 2015 as the year set out to achieve goals of the Millennium Development.

Keywords: Education, Human Development, Millennium Development Goals, Poverty Eradication.
I. INTRODUCTION

The aim of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is to bring about a world where hunger, bad leadership, corruption and all other forms of social vices are eliminated (Akpotor, 2009). Apart from providing concrete and numerical benchmarks for tackling extreme poverty in its many dimensions, MDGs is also to provide a world where all the essential needs of man are provided. As Mohammed (2006) noted; the ratification of the MDGs by the United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000 in New York by 189 Heads of States and Governments, became effectively the world’s most vital development challenges, offering the international communities, the chances to have a joint position and integrated vision on the best ways to address and equally solve multidimensional problems facing mankind and to promote sustainable development, especially for developing and less developed countries.

The initial MDGs objectives amongst others include; reduction of child mortality by two thirds, reversal of the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, a 50% reduction in poverty and hunger, promotion of gender equality, establishment of universal primary education. In September 2005, United Nations Summit met and reviewed the progress towards the goals and set the development agenda for the next decade. In light of this, the Declaration’s eight MDGs are to address the issues below:

- Poverty and hunger eradication that by 2015; there should be an increase in the amount of food for those who suffer from hunger;
- Reduction of two-third child mortality by 2015;
- Improvement of maternal health and reduction by three-forth the proportion of women dying in childbirth by 2015;
- Achievement of Universal Primary (Basic) Education by 2015;
- Ensuring environmental sustainability to reduce by half the proportion of people without access to clean drinking water as well as basic sanitation;
- Promotion of gender equality and women empowerment in order to overcome gender disparities in both Primary and Secondary education enrolment and achieve equity at all levels by 2015;
- Global partnership development to recognize the importance of
the collaboration between the ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ in order to eradicate poverty and extreme hunger; and

- Combating of HIV/ AIDS, malaria and other diseases by 2015.

Therefore, following the Millennium Declaration in year 2000, Nigeria commenced the systematic implementation of several policies and programmes to help her attain different targets set for the MDGs by year 2015. Unfortunately, the current progress towards the attainment of these goals is approximately at a ‘snail’s pace’ (Amaghionyeodiwe and Adediran, 2012).

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE MDGs IN NIGERIA

The battle against poverty has been a central plank of development planning since independence in Nigeria. About fifteen ministries, fourteen specialised agencies and nineteenth donor agencies as well as various non-governmental organisations have been involved decades in this crusade, yet about 70% of Nigerians still live in poverty (Oshewolo, 2011) despite the fact that Nigeria is endowed with abundance of human and natural resources. It has substantial oil wealth, yet she ranked amongst the world’s poorest nations, simply because of lack of sufficient resources necessary to maintain a minimally adequate standard of living (Omadjohwoe, 2011). Poverty is multidimensional, and extends from low level of income and consumption to poor health and lack of education to other ‘non-material’ dimensions of well-being.

Against this backdrop, World Bank (2010) defines poverty as a condition of life degraded by diseases, deprivation and squalor. Nwaobi (2003) asserts that Nigeria presents a paradox in the context of poverty situation. Thus, failure of combating this endemic problem of poverty has been largely apportioned on corruption, infrastructural decay, poor governance and government accountability (Okonjo Iweala, Soludo and Muhtar, 2003). In addition, Gore (2002) explains the concept of ‘all-pervasive’ poverty where the majority of the population lives below income levels which are quite insufficient to meet their basic needs.

As argued by Ovwasa (2000), it is evidently clear that Nigeria is a poor nation hosting the third largest number of poor people after China and India despite being the sixth largest exporter of oil. Along this line, in the survey of poverty profile; it has been established that
about 50% of Nigeria’s rural population that accounts for about 70% of the total population lives in poverty and that more than 50% of this mentioned poverty is among women (Onimode, 1996 and Odion, 2009). Given this persistent poverty problem, Kakwani and Pernia (2000) submits that various governments in Nigeria have tried to implement some poverty reducing policies and programmes aimed at improving welfare of human being.

Before government efforts were backed up by the adoption of MDGs in order to alleviate and promote sustainable development by the year 2015 as expressed by (Eze, 2009), different interventionist programme have been established by successive governments in Nigeria which have been categorized into two distinct timeframes or eras reference to literature on development, notably, the Pre-Structural Adjustment Programme (Pre-SAP), Structural Adjustment Programme/Post –Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) eras (Oshewolo, 2011). The policies of the Pre-SAP and SAP eras obviously failed to eradicate poverty in Nigeria as argued by Oshewolo because poverty situation in Nigeria was on steady increase, attributed to lack of targeting mechanisms for the poor.

Historically, President Obasanjo Olusegun’s regime in the fourth republic in 1999 launched the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) in order to bail the poor out of doldrums of poverty by creating 200,000 direct jobs to unemployed youths (Obadan, 2001). Thereafter, was again the introduction of National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) in year 2001 following the ineffectiveness of Poverty Alleviation Programme (Omotola, 2008), and NAPEP has been structured to integrate four other sectoral schemes which include, Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES), Rural Infrastructural Development Scheme (RIDS), Social Welfare Service Scheme (SOWESS), and National Resources Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS). It is instructive to note that in year 2004, formation of the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) which was described as a medium term strategy was equally duplicated by all the 36 states of the federation under the rubric of State Economic Empowerment Programme Scheme (SEEPS) simply to give encouragement to Nigerians in order to contribute and be actively involved in all aspects of development so as to eradicate poverty (Adejuwon and Tijani, 2012).

Similarly, the administration of late President Umar Musa
Yar’adua which began in year 2007 had seven point agenda of development which invariably turned out to be the policy thrust of his administration. Principally amongst others in the agenda was to improve the well-being of Nigerians as a whole, in addition, to make the country become one of the biggest economies in the world by the year 2020. Further afield, his agenda was to address the issue of transportation, power, telecommunication, food, security, as well as national gas distribution. Significantly, poverty alleviation and wealth creation was the seventh key area of his administration. Though his programmes seemed laudable, but they did not give room for effective implementation and proper monitoring as Oshewolo (2010) pointed out.

III. ISSUES ON MDGs IN NIGERIA

To a very large extent, all the various poverty alleviation initiatives in Nigeria since independence have yielded very little positive result. Ranging from Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Free and Compulsory Primary Education (FCPE), Green Revolution, Agricultural Development Project (ADP), Low Cost Housing, Rural Electrification Scheme (RES), National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA), River Basin Development Authority (RBDA), Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme (ACGS), Rural Banking Programme (RBP), Strategic Grains Reserves Programme (SGRP), Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Better Life for Rural Women Programme (BLRWP), People’s Bank of Nigeria (PBN), Community Bank Programme (CBP), Family Support Programme (FSP), and Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) (Garba, 2006 and Eze, 2009).

It is noteworthy that despite these anti-poverty measures, poverty has been on the increase in Nigeria, which really depicts the ineffectiveness of the strategies and programmes. Notable issue is the problem of management and governance, joined with lack of accountability and transparency; as well as lack of mechanisms for the sustainability of most programmes (Obadan, 2001). Another worrisome issue against the realization of MDGs within time frame in Nigeria is the issue of poor leadership and insincerity in governance, policy inconsistency as well as lack of adequate data base (Anger, 2010). In view of this, accurate and timely statistical figures including a gender disaggregated data must be put in place for effective economic
development to take place.

It is on record that many workers were laid off in Nigeria as a result of the rationalization exercise adopted during the Structural Adjustment Programme years. Not only this, SAP which was introduced during the tenure of General Ibrahim Babangida in 1986 worsened the incidence of poverty in the country. SAP initially was designed to last for two years from July 1986 to January 1988 with the sole aim of reviving the economy and put it on a path of sustainable development growth. However, a decade after, as argued by Aliyu (2010), poverty incidence in Nigeria was estimated to be about 66% in a total population of about 110 million. The situation of Nigerian workers especially in wage administration necessitated most of the corrupt practices in the country’s public service. Majority of the Nigerian workers lives in penury due to insufficient income to cover minimum standards of food, shelter, water, medical care amongst others.

Significantly, Igbuzor (2006) opined that Nigeria is among 20 countries in the world with widest gap between the rich and the poor. The total income earned by the richest 20% of the population is 55.7% while the total income earned by the poorest 20% is 44% (Earth Trends, 2013). Along this line also, Oshewolo (2010) submits that life expectancy at birth in Nigeria in 2006 for male and female stood at 46 and 47 years respectively. He added further that, between the year 2000 and 2007, 27.2% of children under five were malnourished, a situation described as a ‘bewildering paradox’ when compared to the figures of 3.7% between the same periods in Brazil, another emerging economy.

Another issue worthy of attention is the issue of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflow into Nigeria which is quite low. AFRODAD (2005) as espoused by Oshewolo (2011) reveals that between year 2000 and 2003, the ratio of FDI to GDP averaged a mere 2.3%; these inflows into Nigeria are rather low in comparism with high inflows into Asian countries. Therefore, Nigeria is far behind the minimum investment rate of about 30% of GDP required to reach a growth of 7.8% per annum and achieve the MDGs by 2015. To all intents and purposes, Nigerian economy remains largely undiversified, more so that the oil sector, which attracts most of FDI, generates nearly 95% of total export earnings and obviously constitutes the mainstay of economy in Nigeria. Therefore, in order for poverty to be eradicated, it requires transformation of the economy towards the path of
sustainable industrialization anchoring on jobs creation and social inequality eradication.

Simply put, over the years, there seems to have been a deliberate and continuing curtailment of public expenditure on social services especially on education and health. It is on record that UNESCO has set the benchmark for those developing countries (Nigeria inclusive) to allocate 25% of their national budget on education, whereas, Nigeria’s budgets allocate between 10% and 12% only. In the health sector, in the last decade, less than 10% was allocated, whereas World Health Organisation (WHO) recommended that 15% of national budget be allocated. More worrisome is the fact that, the actual amount released from the budget has been far less than the allocation even hampered by endemic corruption. Most often, political office holders diverts public funds meant for development into their private pocket, making them to become rich.

Another notable issue hampering Nigeria’s aspiration of achieving MDGs by 2015 centered on poor nature of governance in Nigeria; which invariably affected the culture of the inter sectorial partnership. It must be averred that, state dominance in development activities does not automatically sum up to good governance. Previous policies on poverty reduction in the country have been dominantly designed and implemented by the state. Where inputs from other sectors were allowed, such were not properly coordinated for effective impacts on the poor population (Oshewolo, 2010). Be that as it may, far apart from the daunting issues of poverty alleviation, suffice to mention that, there are prospects of achieving the MDGs in Nigeria.

**IV. PROSPECTS OF MDGs IN NIGERIA**

Following the escalating nature of poverty in Nigeria, poverty alleviation initiative should be, on the first hand, well articulated and made to be a short term, targeted at the poor basically. Amaghionyeodiwe and Adediran (2012) contend that, if poverty alleviation programme is re-structured and re-designed and made to be centered on the ‘basic needs’ approach, it would, on the other hand, bring about a permanent reduction of poverty. Improvement in education, health and nutrition directly address the consequences of being poor, thus, investing in human capital, especially in education, shelter and social services increases the productivity of the poor
and at the same time, attacks some of the most important aspects of poverty.

Furthermore, all various levels of government must make reaching the poor a priority. When the Federal Government relinquishes most of its responsibility in the social sector to the state and local governments, they would be autonomous to evolve poverty alleviation programmes/ projects that will meet all needs of the populace. In addition, collaboration between the private sector, civil society and even the donor community will promote better harmonization and implementation of pro-poor policies. Significantly, participation and involvement of the relevant stakeholders will promote collective ownership of the development plan as against previous practices and strategies dominated largely by the state.

Similarly, activities of the various anti-corruption agencies such as Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Code of Conduct Bureau and Due Process Office need to be more strengthened in order to tackle and address effectively the culture of corruption in the official and public sector. Values orientation among the populace needs not be jettisoned. States need to intensify effort in producing goods locally through the application of indigenous technology and industrial impact; by so doing enormous employment opportunities would be generated to alleviate poverty. It is of good note to allow periodic and consistent reporting of the MDGs in the country for the promotion of accountability and transparency (Odion, 2009). By and large, there is urgent need for government to initiate long term strategic plans that will address unemployment, taking into consideration the educational curriculum and the needs of the labour market in addition to strengthening the human and financial capacity of poverty alleviation institutions in the country.

V. CONCLUSION

Following the trend of discourse, it should be noted in this study that, since independence, successive governments in the country had put in place diverse policies of addressing the scourge of poverty in Nigeria. Undoubtedly, these policies did not yield such expected results due to lack of required political will as well as concerted effort. Invariably, this affects Nigeria's steady progress in MDGs achievement. The Nigerian situation and current happenings indicates that there are
still glaring constraints of infrastructural inadequacies, corruption, and high rate of unemployment amongst others. Just of recent, about 20 Nigerians died due to stampede during the recruitment exercise into the Nigerian Immigration Service. More than 500,000 applied for advertised job or vacancies of only 2,500. Invariably, this ugly incident depicts high rate of unemployment in the country. Therefore, government must create enabling environment for private sector to contribute to poverty reduction with strong contributions to employment as well as higher incomes, most especially for those involved in agricultural production and trade. Also, the private sector can contribute to the development of infrastructure and the efficient social services delivery, to eradicate illiteracy on education, health, water and energy.

REFERENCES


