

POVERTY REDUCTION AND MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN NIGERIA

^{1*}cletus usman Idoko and ²Agenyi Emmanuel

Abstract

Poverty is one of the major economic problems that distort the progress of any economy. This is because poverty does not end with persons who are poor, but extends from one generation to another. In view this therefore, the study identified the causes of poverty in Nigeria and the strategies for tackling poverty to meet up with millennium development goals. The study also identified strategies that can thwart the efforts of millennium development goals and recommends that for millennium development to be achieved, the poor should be incorporated in to the design and implementation of policies and programmes that affect them, the encouragement of religious tolerance among all religious groups, and the participation of non-governmental organization as a watch dog to various poverty reduction programmes among others were proffered.

Key Words: poverty, poverty reduction, poverty reduction programmes, and millennium development goals.

INTRODUCTION

Poverty can be seen as universal phenomenon which varies in degree from one person to another. It affects people in various occupations and levels differently. Poverty can be defined as the inability of individuals and groups in the society to achieve a certain minimal standard of living. It is a situation where people live without fundamental freedom of actions and choices that the well to do citizens take for granted. Poverty in any society often results to inadequate food, shelter, education and healthcare, and other deprivation that lead the poor to live the kind of life everyone values.

Amen (2007) sees poverty as a situation of prolonged inability to satisfy basic human needs of life by households arising from non affordability of the resources required to purchase goods and services that will bring about the desired satisfaction. The poor are the most vulnerable to low income, low consumption, low education, and poor access to security. Also, in any society, the poor are always faced with extreme vulnerability to ill-health, economic dislocation, material disasters and ill-treatment by institutions of the state and the society at large. The poor are powerless to influence the key decisions affecting their lives (Obadan 1997). Usually, the poor are seen everywhere both in rural and urban areas and can be distinguished by their

nature of their poverty.

Poverty in Nigeria according to World Bank report (2014), include harmful economic and political systems, national conflict and violence, human rights abuses, weak government effectiveness and efficiency, weak respect for rule of law, weak control of corruption, and a host of others. Poverty has become a major challenge facing states and mankind. This is because many people continue to suffer pronounced deprivation even as others enjoy increasing prosperity. Poverty has disrupted and eroded some social and economic activities in this country (Sule 2006).

In educational sector, the children of the poor hardly smile the forward of education because of poverty and even if they are opportune to be there, they find it difficult to procure essential materials needed for effective teaching and learning. Consequently, in agricultural sector, farm implements as well as inputs such as good seeds, fertilizers and other financial incentives which are the bedrock of agricultural production are very expensive and sometime when subsidizes are completely out of reach to the farmers resulting to food shortage. However, to argument food intake, a large proportion of the population has to depend on huge importation of food crops. This practice usually drains the meager foreign reserves and put the farmers in very unhealthy competition

¹Department of Economics, Kogi State College of Education Anka, Nigeria

²Department of Educational Foundations/Management, Kogi State College of Education Anka, Nigeria.

Correspondence and Reprint Requests: cletus usman Idoko

Received: April 16 , 2015 | Accepted: April 30, 2015 | Published Online: May 28 , 2015

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Conflict of interest: None declared | Source of funding: Nil

with foreign food producers thereby widening the poverty gap (Ayodele 2002).

To address this problem, various governments over the years initiated and implemented so many poverty eradication programmes in attempts to fight hunger, rural poverty and support increased food production. Such programmes according to Ajege (2002) include; operation feed the nation, the Green Revolution, River Basin Development Authorities, Agricultural Development Projects, Strategic Grain Reserve, National Land Development Authority, Nigerian Agricultural credit Scheme, to mention but a few. Through these agencies and programmes, the government attempted to reach both small and large scale farmers in order to develop and adopt strategies for increased agricultural activities. To further strengthen its grassroots poverty eradication programme, the national eradication programme known as (NAPEP) was established. This according to Sule (2006), was set to help ensure mass participation in economic development process, empowering the poor to have a voice and therefore express their idea in the public. This programme is meant to involve communities, co operations and individuals by enhancing their capacity to become more productive. As beautiful as this programme is, one would have thought that with huge money invested in it, by now, the idea of poverty would have been a thing of the past. But the more the initiations of any idea to eradicate poverty, the more poverty erode the economy. The paper therefore intends to find out the root cause of poverty and how such will be handled to achieve the millennium development goals, (MDGS).

Causes of Poverty in Nigeria Society

All over the world, the greatest distortion to development is poverty.

Poverty has many causes all of which reinforces one another. Poverty affects continent, nations and people differently. Poverty can also be seen as the relative deprivation which people suffer when there are unable to enjoy what others enjoy in any society. Such deprivation according to NEEDS (2003), are majorly caused by the following factors:

- **Lack of basic services:** poverty is caused by lack of basic services such as education, healthcare, clean water and a host of other. The absence of these basic services negates the attitude of people towards belonging to societies where some people are opportunist and

others find it difficult to manage their basic life. In such case, poverty is rooted in any society where these basic services are absent.

- **Lack of assets:** poverty can erupt in any society or environment when people within the environment or society lack assets such as land, tools, credit and supportive networks from friends and relatives. Usually, asset acquisition is the bedrock through which the yoke of poverty can be broken. This is so because asset acquisition helps in wealth creation which in-turn reduces poverty.
- **Lack of access to employment opportunity:** One may be educated and still lack access to employment opportunity. This is a case in Nigeria where a lot of educated elites are roaming about the street looking for job to do. The frustration involved in unemployment among the educated elites according to Stephen (2006), is more serious than the illiteracy. When such ills persist for long, social vices such as armed robbery, prostitution, thuggery drug trafficking emerges.
- **Inadequate access to market:** the poor becomes poorer when they lack access to market where they can sell their goods and services (Garba 2006). This is eminent especially in most rural areas where access roads and transportation are inadequate. The rural farmers who are mostly poor find it difficult to break the yoke of poverty when goods and services produced by them is not transported to areas where they are needed. This makes by them to end up in selling their products at give away prices there by circumventing themselves into poverty.
- **Inadequate access to the means of supportive rural development in poor areas:** Usually, rural development in poor areas such as agricultural development, establishment of development centres, erosion control, poverty alleviation programmes, environmental protection and rural housing schemes enhance supportive measures to poor areas in terms of employment opportunities, radical transformation of agricultural and productive services which in turn can reduce poverty. Gbosi (2001) opines that any rural development should be fashioned in line with the needs and aspirations of the rural populace. This he advocated will go a long way to reduce poverty and restructure the living condition of the rural society in line with the MDGS.

Poverty reduction as the element in the millennium development goals (MDGS), and the key element in

Nigeria's Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) was directly and indirectly stressed to tackle the cause of poverty so identified through employment generation, wealth creation and value reorientation needed to curb or reduce poverty through different strategies and approaches to meet up with the (MDGS). Such approaches and strategies are expected to bring development to the grassroots level so as to reduce the imbalance between the rich and the poor in Nigeria.

Strategies and Approaches of Tackling Poverty

The strategies and approaches for tackling poverty according to Garba (2006) has a universal applicability and can be found in the United Nations Millennium Development (MDGS) Agenda. According to Ilugole (2006), the aim of millennium development goal (MDGS) ranges from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS, and providing universal basic education to all citizens by the year 2015. However, the (MDGS) blueprint was agreed upon by all the world's leading development institutions to encompass the following strategies:

- Mapping out the Key cause and underlying determinants of extreme poverty by individuals, societies, regions and gender.
- Consistent with poverty maps, the MDGS aims at undertaking a need assessment to identify the specific investments to achieve the goals.
- To convert the need assessment into 10 years framework for action, including public investment, public management and financing.
- To elaborate a 3-5 years MGDS based on poverty reduction strategy within the context of the 10 years framework.

Following this assertion, it is crucial to note that the 10 years framework and the 3 – to – 5 years poverty reduction strategy includes a public sector strategy with key factors on accountability, transparency, human rights and result based oriented management. Having identified the four steps strategy for (MGDS), the United Nations millennium projects also specified the best practice in the investment and policy clusters that can be used to achieve the MDGS. These include:

- **Rural Development:** Rural development has been suggested as the best approach to increase food output and income through increased investment (Sule 2006). This is so because rural development increases rural access to transport, information and

communications, safe drinking water, sanitation, modern energy, and reliable water for agriculture. With all these in place, it is believed that poverty reduction will be enhanced and MDGS achieved.

- **Urban development** Urban development according to Balogun (1999) is essential ingredient for sustainable economic development.. This is because urban development enhances job creation, upgrade slums, and develop alternative new slum formation. For instance, through poor people support programmes, efforts will be made by them to build decent houses and promote other social activities that will be used in formulating national policies meant for poverty reduction as stated in the MDGS.
- **Improve healthcare services:** For poverty to be reduced to the barest minimum, healthcare services to cater for the poor is expected to be promoted universally to ensure wide spread healthcare services in every nock and corners of towns and villages in the country.
- **Improved quality of education:** As far as education is the bedrock for any development in any nation, improving the quality will result to human capital development. This according to Sule (2006) can be encouraged through universal basic education, post primary education and expanded higher education. It s pointed out that educational enhancement will brake the tight of income inequality and bring the poor out of poverty.
- **Building national capacity in service, technology and innovation:** To allow self sustenance and self reliance economy to exist in Nigeria, national capacity in science, technology and innovation meant to encourage entrepreneurial development must be made a priority in most government policies and programmes. This will lead the country to a greater height and bring everybody out of poverty. From the foregoing, it is important to point out that the millennium development goals (MDGS) like other government programmes in Nigeria still face the challenges of defeat if care is not taken because of the following reasons:
- **Poor governance:** Since independence, Nigeria has been having the problem of poor governance. The outcome of poor governance according to Stephen: (2006), has two distinct underlying causes, one is gravely corrupt leadership, where power is held by brutal leaders. The country is ruled like personal

treasury by the leaders. This type of ruling usually oppresses and subjugates the citizenry and as such, there will be no hope in realizing a major reduction in poverty.

- **Weak governance:** Governance is said to be weak not because of ill-will of the leaders but because state lack financial resources and technical capacity to manage the administration of the country effectively (NEED 2003). Lack of financial resources as a result of mismanagement of public funds put Nigeria in the category of nations that lack resources to run the public sector effectively. This is so, because Nigeria is noted as one of the richest countries in African sub-region, yet, many of its citizenry are wallowing in poverty because of some corrupt practices in governance.
- **Religious intolerance:** The issue of poverty in Nigeria according World Bank (1996) is monumental and pathetic. In some parts of the country foreign and domestic companies are moving away to other part of the country because of religious riots and intolerance. Also, most peoples' properties and belonging are burnt on the cause of riot rendering them homeless. This situation increases poverty levels and distorts economic progress.
- **Neglect on part of government on supply and maintenance of essential services:** Neglect and erratic supply of essential services such as power supply, water, fuel scarcity, inefficient civil service, inadequate crime control, poor judicial system and inadequate primary healthcare can jeopardizes the progress and development of any economy.

Following the above assertion therefore, the millennium development goals as stipulated in the millennium development project can achieve its objectives, if the following recommendations are adhered to.

Firstly, poor implementations of most policies and programmes aimed at reducing poverty in Nigeria in the recent years are not encouraging. In this case, the poor should be involved in the design and implementation of policies aimed at helping to alleviate poverty. This will help them to know the prone and coins of the happening in the economy.

Secondly, the poor should be identified in every society and be made to enjoy the benefits of targeted policies such as education, healthcare, crime prevention, power supply and housing. This will help in poverty reduction which is the main contention in

millennium development goals.

Thirdly, the poor should be helped and taught how to cooperatively initiate and implement self-help projects, by identifying their needs, prioritizing their needs and designing and implementing strategies regarding poverty eradication.

Fourthly, all the elected officials to any political posts should be made to account for their efforts to combat poverty. This should be done on annual basis at annual town and village meetings to be held in wards and constituencies of the elected officials. Failure to produce results after being elected to office should be call to book and face the riot of the law especially where there is evidence of corruption and self enrichment. This will serve as a deterrent to other political office holders.

Fifthly, religious tolerance should be encouraged in all sectors of the economy among religious groups if poverty is to be alleviated. This is because religious riot has negative effect in economic and social development, since it creates hatred and social disturbance that can negate communal living.

Sixthly, government should provide grass-root attractive incentive programmes aimed at helping to alleviate poverty. Such incentives could be inform of grants, social security payments or capital for starting new economic activities that will aim at reducing poverty.

Sevently, tackling major policy lapses especially in agricultural and non-agricultural business that were to be enjoyed in the past should be encouraged. In this regard, the private enterprise, the public sector and non-governmental organization should be involved for accountability. On the private sector side, farmers at various levels should be incorporated to enhance efficiency and increases output for the benefit of the poor masses.

Finally, NGOS should work closely with the poor by making them to act as a watchdog on various activities sponsored by government on poverty reduction to achieve the millennium development goals.

CONCLUSION

The study has attempted to explain the meaning of poverty in relation to Nigeria economy. It has also identified the causes of poverty and the strategies for tackling poverty in Nigeria society. The study

viewed various policies and programmes aimed at alleviating poverty as adequate and pointed out that what matters much is poor implementation of the programmes. The study also revealed that the millennium development goals may face the same defeat if care is not taken. Following these assertions, recommendations of how to achieve the MDGS were made.

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