

**POVERTY REDUCTION AND THE ATTAINMENT OF
THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN NIGERIA:
PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS**

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ABSTRACT:

The paper gives abroad overview of the poverty situation in Nigeria. Consequent upon this, the inauguration of the MDGs, which represents an attempt at combating poverty through global partnership for development, appears to constitute the key to Nigeria's escape from poverty trap. The paper examines evolving poverty profile and the challenges of actualizing the Millennium Development Goals in Nigeria. It is a shocking paradox that a significant proportion of Nigeria's population is poor despite its enormous wealth. The paper therefore critically examines the problems and prospects of achieving a remarkable reduction in Nigeria's poverty profile within the framework of the MDGs. This paper analyses the effect of eradicating poverty in Nigeria via the instrumentality of the MDGs. It recommends 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. The paper concludes that government at various levels must come up with genuine poverty reduction programme if the challenges of poverty must be tackled.

Keywords: Poverty reduction, Millennium Development Goals, Development, Corruption, Unemployment

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INTRODUCTION:

Poverty is not new but at each mention, 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. This could be evidenced even amidst plenty because there could be reeking poverty as a result of lack of knowledge to translate potentiality into practical creative benefits to actuate well being. In other words, if there is a poverty of something, it therefore means that there is a lack of it or the quality of it is extremely low (Anger, 2010). The foregoing shows the picture of our beloved country, especially when a deep reflection is made on the Nigerian question and the Nigerian condition.

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 therefore 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 (Omadjohwoefe, 2011).

Therefore, given this background analysis, the paper critically examines the problems and prospects of achieving a remarkable reduction in Nigeria's poverty profile within the framework of the MDGs by the target year of 2015.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM:

It is evidently clear that poverty is pronounced in Nigeria. Despite the resource endowment of Nigeria, many people are still suffering from hunger. It has been established by surveys of poverty profile that some 50% of Nigeria's rural population that accounts for some 70% of the total population live in poverty and that more than 50% of this crusted poverty is among women (Onimode, 1996). The rate of unemployment too is alarming. As the sixth largest exporter of oil, Nigeria is still hosting the third largest number of poor people after China and India. This has resulted in various crimes as cheating, corruption and in recent times, highway and daylight robberies. The levels of achievement of the MDGs vary across the globe. Out of all the countries

of the world, countries situated in Sub-Saharan Africa region have recorded least success in eradicating extreme poverty and hunger (Jekayinfa, 2011)

Poverty alleviation efforts in Nigeria have been pursued through the application of orthodox capitalist strategies. For instance, the first three National Development Plans indirectly attempted to deal with poverty reduction through the pursuit of economic growth. The fourth development plan attempted to curtail the level of poverty through, “The increase in the real income of the average citizen, even distribution of income among individuals and socio-economic groups” (Ekpe, 2011). Unfortunately, all of the so-called poverty alleviation programmes are organized top-down. It is mis-thinking to believe that the rural poor do not know their problems and perhaps also naïve to think that they cannot proffer solution(s) to their problems. Perhaps what they need is an exogenous interventionist(s), particularly purveying resource. For one, the notion of poverty originates from the mind and comparative perception of material standing of peer groups, age group or cohort. Reducing the comparison to strictly oneself provides different inference.

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. 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 souring with the worst affected age bracket being 13-25 years (MDG, 2006). According to Muhammed (2006), 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 (Anger, 2010).

In Nigeria, many workers lost their employment due to the adoption of capital intensive method of production in some sectors of the economy. Many were also laid-off due to the rationalization exercise that was adopted during the SAP years. Again, the structural adjustment program which was implemented in Nigeria from 1986 worsened the incidence of poverty in the country. According to Obadan (1997), it accentuated socio-economic problems of income inequality and led to unequal access to food, shelter, education, health, and other essentials of life. This was so due to some of the conditionalities which were spelt out to Nigeria by IMF and World Bank. Some of them included review of public expenditure, removal of subsidies and reduction of grants, as well as subventions and loans to parastatals.

It is strongly contended that the most crucial factor that accounts for the persistence of low levels of living, rising unemployment, and growing income inequality in the Third World is the highly asymmetrical distribution of economic and political power between the rich and poor countries. This makes the rich nations to not only control the pattern of international trade but also to dictate the terms whereby technology, foreign aid, and private capital are transferred to developing countries. Given the highly unequal distribution of world resources between the North and the South, it is not surprising that the economies of the latter cannot be resilience and self-reliant. Under this situation poverty alleviation is untenable and cannot be sustained (Ekpe, 2011).

UNDERSTANDING POVERTY:

There is a plethora of literature on the concept of poverty. Quite a number of works have been done on the concept of poverty but rather than reaching a consensus on its meaning, scholarly works have proliferated alternative poverty concepts and indicators. This condition explains the complexity involved in the conceptual analysis and dissection of poverty. Ayanwu (1997) lend credence to the above. He maintains that a concise definition of poverty is elusive because different criteria are used in conceptualizing it.

Who the poor are? Where they live? and how they earn?. These are the three fundamental questions to understand the meaning of poverty. Poverty is multidimensional, and extends from low levels of income and consumption to poor health and lack of education to other 'non-material' dimensions of well being, including gender disparities, insecurity, powerlessness and social exclusion. A good understanding of the nature of poverty enables a comprehensive exploration of poverty determinants.

Poverty is 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. Poverty is also seen as the inability of an individual to cater adequately for the basic needs of food, clothing and shelter (Galbraith, 1969). The inability encompasses social and economic obligations; lack of gainful employment, assets, self esteem etc (CBN 1999). Kankwenda (2003.3) sees 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.

Nwaobi (2003:3) identifies the dimensions highlighted by poor people to include lack of income and assets to attain basic necessities (food, shelter, clothing and acceptable levels of health and education), sense of hopelessness and powerlessness in the institutions of the state and society; and vulnerability to adverse shocks. Development Assistance Committee (DAC) (2001) posits that poverty encompasses different dimensions of deprivation that relate to human capabilities including consumption and food security, health, education, rights, voice, security, dignity and decent work (Oshewolo, 2011).

There exist two types of poverty namely; absolute and relative. World Bank (2000) defines absolute poverty as 'a condition of life degraded by diseases, deprivation and squalor. Again, in relative sense, poverty implies relative deprivation. 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).

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).

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGS):

The MDGs are currently the highest-level expression of the international community's development priorities. They commit the international community to an action agenda which emphasizes sustainable, human development as the key to fulfilling social and economic progress. All 191 Member States of the United Nations have pledged to achieve these goals by the year 2015 (Abama and Kwaja, 2009). The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is an agreement signed by the UN member states, the UN and international financial organizations, according to the rules of the games of international cooperation. In this context the world member states agreed for the first time on concrete numerically expressed objectives. These objectives are divided into eight parts. The most important element is the eradication of extreme poverty. Other objectives for 2015 are universal primary education, promotion of gender equality, reduction of child and maternal mortality, ensuring environmental sustainability and global partnership for development.

The MDGs came into existence in September 2000 at the United Nations Millennium Summit held in New York. It is aimed at reducing the number of people who lived on less than a dollar in year 2015 by pursuing the following eight objectives:

- 1) Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- 2) Achieve universal primary education
- 3) Promote equality and empower women
- 4) Reduce child mortality

- 5) Improve maternal health
- 6) Combat HIV/AIDs, Malaria and other diseases.
- 7) Ensure environmental sustainability.
- 8) Develop a global partnership for development (FRN, 2006).

The MDGs represent a co-ordinated attempt by the international community to raise the quality of life in poor countries. These goals focus on key aspects of human capital that have salutary impacts on overall development and therefore deserve international focus. However, while it is true that a transfer of resources from developed countries to developing countries can indeed help the countries deal with some of the serious human development catastrophes that they face such as HIV/Aids, transfers can only go so far.

By targeting \$1/day poverty, Millennium Development Goal 1 directs attention to the poorest nations and the poorest groups within these countries. However, many middle income countries have pockets of poverty, especially those with high inequality. For many of these countries the MDG 1 target of halving \$1/day poverty may not be relevant in part because the group below this poverty line is often less than 2% of the population. It difficult to have such a small group dominates national poverty reduction policy.

Through the MDGs the world has unravelled the ugliness of global poverty and the basic tools with which it could be tackled as contained in the 8- point objectives. It has also provided additional entry point to engage governments on sustainable development issues. In addition, it has aroused local and international attention towards human centre development. Nigeria like other countries is optimistic that with the implementation of MDGs, poverty will be contained by 2015 (Anger, 2010).

THE NATURE AND INCIDENCE OF POVERTY IN NIGERIA:

Poverty and hunger are age-old human conditions. In spite of great technological advances and decades of post-independence, post-colonial experiments in development, the gap between the rich and poor continues to grow wider and widespread hunger and poverty continue to be among the most critical problems confronting mankind.

Nigeria has one of the greatest development potentials in Africa given the vastness of her resources and above all her rich human resource endowment. But regardless of these potentials Nigeria is still among the poorest countries of the world. The economy is mired by multiple difficulties (Ekpe, 2011). It is so pathetic in the sense that the country that is potentially rich in oil and gas and other natural and agricultural resources cannot boast of putting foods on the tables of its citizens. In fact, an average Nigerian is said to be living below one dollar. Research has it that the foundation of most social vices and corrupt practices both in high and low places is this scourge called poverty. At present, Nigerian is rated as one of the poorest country of the world; a country with abundant resources both in human and mineral replication (Anger, 2010).

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 problems associated with poverty in Nigeria are multifaceted. Nigeria has no reason to be a poor country because of the vast economic potentials and human resources that it is endowed with. But why is Nigeria then lagging behind a country like Libya that relies only on oil for survival? Put differently, why can't Nigeria's agricultural base serves as an engine of growth and development as is the case of Côte d'Ivoire? Even the agriculture sector that was promising exports earnings for the country in the early years of its independence nose-dived with the commercial production and exportation of oil. Between 1974 and 1975, there were ambitious and aggressive drives by the Nigerian leadership to use the revenues accruing from oil to tackle the problems of underdevelopment in the country. Sadly, policy makers failed in the process of implementation, which ultimately debarred the country to achieve the stated goals (Richard, 1978: 222).

On the basis of widespread economic crisis, and the recent global economic meltdown, the country is unable to raise the standard of living of its citizens to an appreciable height. Thus

poverty, in both absolute and relative terms, constitutes one of the most serious problems confronting Nigeria. Statistically, between 1960 and 1980, the poverty level covered about 28.0 percent of the population; by 1996 it rose alarmingly to about 66 percent of the population (Aliju, 2001). Statistical data from the Federal Office of Statistics (FOS) indicate the by 1960 poverty covered about 15% of the population of Nigeria and by 1980 it grew to 28%. By 1985 the extent of poverty was about 46% and then dropped to 43% by 1992. By 1996, poverty incidence in Nigeria was estimated to be about 66% in a total population of about 110 million (Aliyu, 2007). However, in absolute term, the population of Nigerians increased between 1980 and 2004. The percentage of the moderately poor rose from 28.9 in 1992 to 36.3 in 1996 while that of the core poor more than doubled from 13.9 in 1992 to 29.3 in 1996. Nigerians, in terms of the Physical Quality of Life Index (PQLI), scored 38% in 1991. The Human Development Index (HDI) was 0.391 in 1998, ranking the country as 142 out of the 174 countries surveyed. In the year 2000, the HDI score for Nigeria was 0.439, which ranked Nigeria in the 151st position among 174 countries surveyed. In 2002, the HDI score was 0.466, which categorised Nigeria in the low human development countries in the 151st ranking among 177 countries (UNDP, 2000, 2004).

The poverty situation in Nigeria is galloping. As observed by Anger (2010), 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.

Poverty, both in absolute and relative terms is afflicting most Nigerians. To be sure, successive Nigerian regimes have adopted series of measures to ameliorate the plight of the poor. Regrettably, the application of capitalist policies and strategies has not been able to alleviate poverty. On the contrary, the poverty level has soared instead of abating (Ekpe, 2011). As noted by Ovwasa (2000:68), evidence abounds to illustrate that Nigeria is a poor nation. This position is justified because a large percentage of the population lives below the poverty line. Socio-

economic indicators also present a pale picture of the situation. Four decades after independence, Nigeria remains a poor country with an annual per capital income of barely \$300. This figure is below the sub-Saharan average of \$450. At the dawn of the third millennium, approximately 70 percent of the population still lived on less than US \$1 a day, an indication of extreme poverty. Real GDP growth has remained sluggish averaging 3.5 per cent per annum since 2000.

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 (Anger, 2010).

Putting the problem in proper perspective, Nwaobi (2003:5) asserts that Nigeria presents a paradox. The country is rich but the people are poor. Given this condition, Nigeria should rank among the richest countries that should not suffer poverty entrapment. However, the monumental increase in the level of poverty has made the socio-economic landscape frail and fragile. Today, Nigeria is ranked among the poorest countries in the world. The fight against poverty has been a central plank of development planning since independence in 1960 and about fifteen ministries, fourteen specialized agencies, and nineteen donor agencies and non-governmental organizations have been involved in the decades of this crusade but about 70 percent of Nigerians still live in poverty. The pervasive poverty situation in Nigeria clearly betrays the high hopes at independence that the country would emerge as a major industrial haven in the world. The high hopes were hinged on the availability of abundant natural and material resources in the country (Oshewolo, 2011).

Poverty in Nigeria, a country with over 140 million people is all encompassing. The scourge has also shown a rising tendency in the past couple of decades accounting for the nations low development indicators and its ranking alongside the poorest nations in the world (United Nations, 2001 and OXFAM, 2003). 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). Today, Nigeria is ranked among

the poorest economies in the world; a situation described in Nigeria's political lexicon as a 'bewildering paradox.'

THE POLITICS OF POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA:

In reaction to the horrendous poverty crisis in Nigeria, different interventionist programmes have been established by successive governments. Measures taken to combat poverty and promote development in the country actually started at the beginning of Nigeria's statehood. This was achieved through the adoption of different development plans. However, literatures on development in Nigeria have categorized government's efforts into two distinct time frames or eras. These include the pre-SAP, SAP/post-SAP eras (Oshewolo, 2011). During the SAP era, which witnessed the worsening of the socio-economic and political situation of the country, the government equally made some attempts to fight the scourge of poverty (Omotola, 2008:506).

According to Ukpong (1999), as a means of reducing poverty, the first three National Development Plans placed premium on, "the real income of the average citizen, more even distribution of income among individuals, and socio-economic groups". The Third National Development (1975) focused on development; that development should prevail simultaneously in all geographical areas of the country and emphasized that lagging regions can no longer be tolerated. Rural development involves conscious efforts to contribute to the overall rate of economic growth and the process of structural and attitudinal transformation of rural areas (Enoh, 1991). Prior to the National Third Plan, the Fund for Agricultural and Industrial Development (FAID) was established by Eastern Nigeria Government in 1963 to boost agricultural production. The South Eastern State Government established the Farmers Credit Schemes to grant loans to farmers and fishermen in 1972 (Ndaeyo, 1982).

The Military regime of General Yakubu Gowon (1966-1975) launched the National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) in 1972 but with no tangible result. It was with the intention to stem the deterioration in the agricultural sector that the government initiated policies that would encourage productivity because agriculture is still an important sector of the Nigerian economy.

In 1973 the Federal Government created Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme Fund (ACGSF) mandating the Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB) to implement. In 1987, the Basins Loan Scheme, the National Livestock Development Project (NLDP) and the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) were introduced. Relatively recent were introduction of Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI), Better Life for Rural Women, Family Support Programme (FSP).

Far back as 1976 was the period rural electrification first appeared in the development dictionary of Nigeria (Adawo, 2011). It was to tame the steady decline in agricultural productivity that in 1976 the Military government of General Obasanjo initiated the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) programme and the development of the rural areas. However, OFN was also a colossal failure and waste of money as its predecessor, i.e. NAFPP. It is in this connection that it is important to highlight that these unsatisfactory results are related to the mentality associated with what is known, in the Nigerian parlance, as 'quick returns'. Richard (1978: 232) argues that "the drive for easy and rapid wealth greatly contrasts with the rigour of farm work and the corresponding lack of interest in long-term productive investments by Nigerian private entrepreneurs." Copying the military, the civilian government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari (1979-1983) initiated the Green Revolution Programme with the objective of stemming the rising cost of food importation and increase productivity in agricultural sector. To all intents and purposes, the Green Revolution benefited only corrupt politicians and armchair bureaucrats/farmers and urban dwellers to the disadvantage of the teeming population of genuine farmers who could have made the necessary turn around in the poverty reduction drive.

The General Muhammadu Buhari's regime (1983-1985) introduced the Go Back to Land Programme that showed signs of improvement in food production before a palace coup swept the Buhari's military government away. When General Babangida seized power in 1985, he introduced a new dimension to the politics of poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria by giving high priority to the pet project of his spouse, the Better Life Programme for the poor that targeted especially woman in rural areas of the country. Furthermore, the Babangida regime initiated some poverty-controlled measures in the wake of the implementation of SAP that adversely affected the Nigerian poor. Such programmes included the Directorate of Food, Roads

and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), a pro-Poor Bank that was inspired by the Bangladesh experience of the Grameen Bank, and the National Directorate of Employment (NDE).

On assumption of office as the Civilians President and Commander-in-Chief of the Nigerian Armed Forces, the Obasanjo's regime launched the National Poverty Eradication Program (NAPEP) in 2001 as a means of lifting the poor out of the poverty. This was followed by the introduction of National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS) at the National level in 2004. This economic development program was to be duplicated by all the 36 states of the Federation under the rubric of State Economic Empowerment Program (SEEDS). The main reason for this was to encourage all Nigerians to be actively involved in thinking, knowing, and contributing to all aspects of development with a view to eradicating poverty (Ekpe, 2011).

Despite the introduction of the Poverty Alleviation Programme, poverty incidence in Nigeria remained perpetually high. Following the ineffectiveness of the programme, the government came up with the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) in 2001 (Omotola, 2008:2009). These antipoverty measures notwithstanding, poverty has consistently been on the increase in Nigeria, showing the ineffectiveness of the strategies and programmes. The policies of the pre-SAP and SAP eras obviously failed to eradicate poverty in Nigeria. During these periods, the poverty situation in Nigeria was steadily increasing. The failure of these measures has been attributed to lack of targeting mechanisms for the poor; political and policy instability; inadequate coordination of various programmes; several budgetary, management and governance problems; lack of accountability and transparency; and lack of mechanisms for the sustainability of the programmes (Oshewolo, 2010). 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 dilemma.

Despite several attempts by successive governments to ameliorate the scourge, Eze (2009:447) explains that the level of poverty is geometrically increasing. Poverty is deep and pervasive, with about 70 percent of the population living in absolute poverty (Okonjo-Iweala, Soludo and Muhtar, 2003:1). Poverty incidence has been consistently higher in rural areas than urban areas while wide disparity occurs in poverty trend in the zones. Again, food crisis has become a critical dimension of Nigeria's poverty situation. The ballooning poverty situation notwithstanding,

Nigeria is blessed with abundant resources (Oshewolo, 2011). Nigeria, according to Igbuzor (2006) is among the 20 countries in the world with the widest gap between the rich and the poor.

MDGs AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE:

The poverty profile in Nigeria over the years has consistently assumed an evolutionary trajectory. This indicates that a significant number of people in Nigeria are living below the poverty line (Omonzejie, 2007). In spite of seemingly concerted efforts by subsequent governments to reduce poverty, Nigerians are getting poorer by the day (Omadjohwoefe, 2011).

With the recognition of poverty as a common denominator in the global community, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were adopted in September 2000. Just like other countries at the UN Millennium Summit that gave birth to the MDGs, Nigeria launched her own version of the MDGs poverty reduction or eradication programme. This and other programmes targeted at achieving MDGs are contained in the NEEDS document. In fact, NEEDS has 'poverty reduction' as its third actionable goal. To reduce poverty, NEEDS has set the following broad targets: Increase average per capita consumption by at least 2 per cent a year; Create about 7 million jobs by 2007; Increase immunization coverage to 60 per cent by 2007; Increase the percentage of the population with access to safe drinking water to at least 70 percent by 2007; Significantly increase school enrolment rates, especially for girls, and increase the adult literacy rate to at least 65 per cent by 2007; Significantly improve access to sanitation (NEEDS Document; 2004).

Poverty pervades the Nigerian population. Poverty is still noticeable and its eradication is a daunting task for the government. The eradication of poverty is a significant objective in policy formulation and implementation in the emancipation of human being (UNDP, 2004). And as such, it should be a priority in decision-making for the Nigerian government. The 2006 MDGs Report statistics shows that 35% of the population lives in extreme poverty while much as 54% are poor in relative terms. Almost 52% on less than a dollar a day" (NPC, 2007). In general, poverty is more pervasive in the North than in the South of Nigeria. Putting the attainment of these goals in the Nigerian context, it is clear that they are real challenges. Flowing from our discussions on the MDGs above, the Nigerian government is obviously overwhelmed by the

tasks. The positive social impacts that the implementation of the MDGs can make in the lives of Nigerians were considered by the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) in giving debt relief to Nigeria. So far, the Nigerian government score sheet is unimpressive to the extent that the House of Representatives in 2009 threatened to stop financial allocation to any Ministry or Parastatal that has failed to implement the MDGs (The Vanguard, 2009). The real challenge that militates against the realization of the MDGs is those of policy implementation because adequate budgetary allocations were made by the government. Furthermore, the implementation of MDGs has been characterized by deeply entrenched corruption and gross inefficiency, and wastefulness. It is disheartening to discover that the Nigerian government did not meet these targets as contained in the policy document. Statistics reveal that Nigerians (especially the common man on the street) do not have access to safe drinking water, primary health care and the rate of unemployment is increasing on a daily basis. This paints an abnormal picture of the failure of NEEDS as a poverty reduction policy (Anger, 2010).

The various attempts made over the years to eradicate poverty have not yielded practical outcome that have alleviated poverty. Lack of commitment and continuity, policy inconsistency, corruption, 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 target line of 2015. In as much as the war against poverty cannot be won, the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals remains a mirage (Omadjohwoefe, 2011).

As reported by Social Watch (2008), the overall goal of the Millennium Declaration which gave birth to the MDGs was a reinstatement of commitment to free all men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty by the year 2015. With reference to sub-Saharan Africa including Nigeria, the inauguration of the MDGs more or less represents an exit strategy from poverty trap. The global partnership for development which constitutes the substance of goal 8 reflects the commitment of the industrialized North to the fight against poverty in the developing world through official development assistance. In view of the practical impact of the MDGs on the different dimensions of poverty in Nigeria, the MDGs have been fully domesticated through the creation of MDGs office. Despite the implementation of the

MDGs in Nigeria and the activities of other poverty alleviation agencies, the scourge still remains widespread (Oshewolo, 2011).

Ban ki-moon (2007) remarks that we have just passed the midpoint in the race to reach the MDGs by the target date of 2015 and the global score card is mixed. He claims that some regions, particularly the sub-Saharan Africa, are not on track. AFRODAD (2005:iv) reports that despite rapid advances by some countries that show that the MDGs are achievable, most countries in sub-Saharan Africa including the populous nation of Nigeria are yet to mobilize resources, political and financial supports to meet specific global challenges, especially the fight against HIV/AIDS and weak fragile economies. These positions, sadly, reflect the practical realities in Nigeria.

THE WAY FORWARD FOR NIGERIA:

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 sustainable development through poverty reduction would require the decisive commitment of all stakeholders involved – individuals, communities, governments, non-governmental organizations and relevant international agencies (Anger, 2010).

Despite the Plethora of arguments pointing to the daunting challenges of alleviating poverty and achieving the MDGs in Nigeria, we can safely say there are prospects. However, the prospects of attaining the MDGs do not preclude the need to deepen governmental and structural reforms. Since independence, successive governments in Nigeria have embarked on different reforms with little results. But in contemporary development thinking, the frequency and volume of reforms is not the defining principle. There is the need for a national development plan that links the various development programmes and integrates the MDGs into the perspective plan. The creation of the MDGs office by the executive is a catalyst in this direction. However, strategic partnership and collaboration among the various stakeholders is required for success to be achieved. The involvement and participation of the relevant stakeholders will promote collective

ownership of the development plan as against previous practices and strategies largely dominated by the state.

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.

Effort should be intensified by the state to produce most of these essential goods locally with the application of indigenous technology and industrial input. If this is done, it will go a long way to generate enormous employment opportunities to alleviate poverty. It is also contended that, it is only strong state intervention, rather than unfettered market mechanism that is capable of stimulating development through investment on human capital development. If the Nigerian state gives priority on improving the educational system at all levels, it would likely enhance economic and industrial development. With a self-reliant economy, there is a greater likelihood that economic growth would be boosted, and by implication, the level of poverty reduced.

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, and create employment opportunities for the ever bloated labour force. 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 (Omadjohwoefe, 2011). IN ADDITION, 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. For Nigeria to meet or advance greatly towards the MDGs in 2015, this paper aligns with the submissions of Igbuzor

(2006) as espoused by Odion (2009) that there is need to formulate and implement policies that will promote transparency and accountability, overcome institutional constraints, promote pro-poor growth, bring about structural change, enhance distributive equity, engender social and cultural re-orientation, engineer political transformation, promote human development, generate employment and transform power relations.

CONCLUSION:

Poverty has weighty consequences on the poor, the family and on the society. Once poverty is not broken, it breeds vicious poverty at higher level. Social menace correlated with poverty calls for unreserved reasonableness to seek all practical means to reduce poverty. Poverty causes lack of regard for constituted authority. It breeds hunger, social rejection and dejection, and at the extreme case, armed robbery. In this study, it was discovered that several regimes had initiated several policy responses in the past to address the poverty scourge in Nigeria. These policies and efforts failed to yield the desired results of alleviating poverty because they were only declarative without concerted effort and lacked the required political will among several other reasons.

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. The work has maintained that poverty level in Nigeria has increased instead of reducing as could be glance from the empirical evidence drawn from the United Nation Development Programm Human Development Report (2008-2009). The situation has remained regardless of past government's efforts which were aimed toward alleviating poverty (Ekpe, 2011). In spite of the interest and ambitious efforts towards the Millennium Development Goals of eradicating poverty by 2015, nothing substantial has been achieved. Like past interventionist 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 (Omadjohwoefe, 2011). Though the MDGs provide a platform for addressing the poverty issue once again, the situation from the Nigerian perspective indicates that there are still glaring constraints and challenges such as corruption, infrastructural inadequacies and others.

For an average Nigerian, to achieve a dignified living condition in a truly human sense is difficult. Poverty is more endemic in the rural areas and the Northern zones still demonstrate no hope of escaping extreme poverty. However, since independence, successive governments have made different attempts to combat the scourge, but the failure of the interventions explains the inherent limitations in domestically generated ideas on poverty reduction. Poor governance, official kleptocracy, weak legislative framework and poor budgeting culture have largely been responsible (Oshewolo, 2011).

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