POVERTY ERADICATION IN NIGERIA BY 2030: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract
About 70% of Nigerians are desperately poor, despite Nigeria's oil wealth and the growth potentials of the economy. There are more poor people today in the 21st century than in the 1970s when agriculture was the main stay of the economy. Despite the introduction of some programmes with poverty-related objectives by the government, the number of poor people is growing relentlessly. More importantly, the ideological basis for poverty reduction and commitment to see to its realisation is lacking. The paper identified some of the factors that militated against poverty reduction in Nigeria and, at the same time, examined the prospects for poverty eradication by 2030. The paper relied on secondary data, using content analysis while the Basic Needs Approach/ Theory was adopted as the Theoretical Framework.

Key words: Poverty Reduction, Economy, Programme, Needs, Development

Introduction

The problem of endemic poverty has become a global phenomenon because of its constraining effect on the attainment of economic development. International Institutions and Organisations, scholars, research and development experts, have devoted considerable attention to the problem of poverty reduction. Its tragic effect on the population is reflected in the fact that more than 1 billion people in the world are affected by poverty; in fact out of the 6 billion people on earth, about 1.3 billion earn less than $370 dollars a year (that is about $1dollar a day or about N85 a day).

Majority of the poor are found in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Over 200 million people are trapped in poverty in Africa; and on the average, 45-50% of Sub-Saharan Africans live below the poverty line- much a higher proportion than in any other region of the world, except South Africa(World Bank, 1997). In West Africa where almost all the countries (including Nigeria) are classified as either low income economies (by the World Bank) or low human development countries by the UNDP, human poverty affects about 50% of the population. A higher proportion of the population of West Africa (including Nigeria) suffer from income poverty, given the fact that human poverty affects 25% of the developing world, while income poverty affects 33% (UNDP, 1999).

In recognition of the global nature of poverty, the United Nations declared 1996 the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty. Similarly, October 17 each year was declared as the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty worldwide. Furthermore, to illustrate the need for poverty eradication, the Decade (1997-2006) was declared UN Decade for Eradication of Poverty (Ogwumike, 1998). A World Bank Report (1996) indicates that sub-Saharan Africa has the highest number of poor people in the world in terms of Gross National Product (GNP) and access to social and political life (Onah, 2010)..

Poverty in Nigeria is endemic and pervasive. In world ranking, Nigeria has the largest number of poor people after China and India. Two-Third (2/3) of Nigerians live on less than 1 dollar a day. According to 2001 UNDP Report (Onah, 2010), that Nigeria is one of the poorest countries in the world is not in doubt; she is worst off today than in the 1980s. Nigeria's Human Development Index speaks of the deplorable level of poverty affecting Nigerians in terms of life expectancy, literary rate, per capita income, access to education, housing, and food. The poverty rate in Nigeria increased from 27% in 1980 to 66% in 1996; by 1999, it was estimated that more than 70% of Nigerians lived in poverty. Life expectancy is mere 54 years, and infant mortality (77 per 1000) and maternal mortality (704 per 100,000 live births) are among the highest in the world. Other social indicators (from 1999) are also weak: only about 10% of the population have access to essential drugs; there are fewer than 30 physicians per 10,000 people; more than 5 million adults were estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS; among children under five, almost 30% are underweight; only 17% of children are fully immunised- down from 30% in 1990 - and almost 40% had never been vaccinated; only about half the population had access to safe drinking water (40% in rural areas, 80% in urban areas); some 29% of the rural population depended on forests for livelihood and domestic energy sources); rural households spend an average of 1.5 hours a day collecting water and fuel wood, with household members walking an average of 1 kilometre a day to collect water and fuel wood (NEEDS, 2004). Poor people cannot meet their economic, social, cultural, and political obligations.

Poverty manifests itself in poor living conditions, lack of access to credit facilities, poor environmental conditions, denial of rights, lack of access to education, housing and food etc. In many cases, poor people are not difficult to locate and identify. Poor people are jobless, plagued by one form of sickness or disease, and are indebted. The poverty situation in Nigeria has been compounded by corruption, lack of double-digit growth rates, high rate of unemployment, environmental degradation etc. The poverty situation in Nigeria is paradoxical. In spite of the abundance of natural and human resources, majority of Nigerians are poor. The discovery of oil and rapid population growth has aggravated the incidence of poverty in Nigeria. More Nigerians are poorer today than in pre- 1967 when oil was discovered. Nigeria's population is growing at the relatively rapid rate of 2.83% on yearly basis, making it difficult to increase per capita income. Igbatayo (quoted in Onah, 2010) asserts that poverty undermines development activities in Nigeria. With more than 112 million Nigerians wallowing in endemic poverty, the realisation of Vision 20:2020 will continue to be a mirage because of the low level of human capital development occasioned by poverty.

The Post-2015 Development Agenda enunciated by the United Nations provided the impetus for this paper. The United Nations enunciated Sustainable Development Goals to eradicate poverty. The SDGs are a follow-up of the MDGs. Under the SDGs, there are 169 targets to achieve the 17 goals. Target No. 1 focuses on reducing by half the number of people living in poverty by 2030, and eradicating extreme poverty (people living on less than $1.25 dollars a day. A tall dream indeed. The primary probing question are: why does the greatest oil producer in sub-Saharan Africa have the world's third largest number of poor people, after China and India? Why does half of the country's population live below the poverty line? The Holy Bible pointed out that we would always have the poor in our midst. The long standing development experience of most developed countries of the world like US, UK, France, Germany, etc points to the fact although these countries have attained a high level of economic development, they have not been possible to completely eradicate poverty. Since it is not possible to eradicate poverty, we would revert to the use of poverty reduction rather than poverty eradication.

Trends in Poverty Level by Zones (1980-2004)

ZONE	1980	1985	1992	1996	2004
South South	13.2	45.7	40.8	58.2	35.1
South East	12.9	30.4	41.0	53.5	26.7
South West	13.4	38.6	43.1	60.9	43.0
North Central	32.2	50.8	46.0	64.7	67.0
North East	35.6	54.9	54.0	70.1	72.2
North West	37.7	52.1	36.5	77.2	71.1

Source; NBS, 2004

Conceptual Clarification

As a concept, poverty has no universal definition. Onah (2010) argues that poverty has moral, evaluative and scientific meaning. Onibokun and Kumuyi (1996) defines poverty as a way of life characterised by low calorie intake, inaccessibility to adequate health facilities, low quality of educational system, low life expectancy, high infant mortality, low income, unemployment and underemployment, and inaccessibility to various housing and social facilities. Sancho (1996) defined the poor as the most vulnerable and lack resources, capacity to organise themselves and unable to exercise the right to protect their situation. Onah (2010) asserts that Aboyade (1975) regards poverty as relatively difficult to demarcate by giving it a specific definition. This is because of the imprecision of the concept and the difficulty of its measurement as a socio-economic phenomenon. In their own perspective, Tamuno and Alapiki (1995) explains that despite the complex nature of poverty, social scientists have been able to identify, describe and analyse poverty as well as proffer solutions to eradicate it. According to Fields (1994), poverty is the inability to attain or enjoy given social, cultural or economic benefits. We cannot discuss poverty without linking it to the economic condition of the society.

Among economists, poverty is defined as a situation of low income or low consumption. According to them, poverty has income or non-income dimension, usually intertwined. Poverty refers to lack of physical necessities, assets and income (Chambers, 1995). It is a subject of the general condition of deprivation whose dimensions include poverty, social inferiority, isolation, physical weakness, vulnerability, seasonality, powerlessness and humiliation. One indicator that characterises poverty is that it is an acute state of deprivation that denies the individual the basic necessities of life, rendering him economically and socially vulnerable to the vicissitudes of life. Aku, Ibrahim and Bulus (1997) identifies five dimensions of poverty which include personal and physical deprivation, economic deprivation, social deprivation, cultural deprivation, and political deprivation.

Theoretical Framework/ Approach

Basic Needs Approach/Theory

The Basic Needs Approach/Theory is one of the major approaches to the measurement of absolute poverty in developing countries. It attempts to define the absolute minimum resources necessary for long-term physical wellbeing usually in terms of consumption goods. The poverty line is then defined as the amount of income required to satisfy those needs. The 'Basic Needs' approach was introduced by the International Labour Organization's World Employment Conference in 1976 (Jolly, 1976. "Perhaps the high point of the approach was the World Employment Conference of 1976, which proposed the satisfaction of basic human needs as the overriding objective of national and international development policy. The basic needs approach to development was endorsed by governments and workers' and employers' organizations from all over the world. It influenced the programmes and policies of major multilateral and bilateral development agencies, and was the precursor to the human development approach(Ghai, 1978).
The basic needs approach tries to identify the needs of the poor and uses heterogeneous policies and programmes to meet such needs - those basic needs which would enable the poor to live a decent life (Obadan,1997). The basic needs includes all or some of such basic socio-economic necessities as food and nutrition, health care, education, shelter, clothing, transport, and employment. Olayemi, (1995) explains that basic needs programmes for poverty alleviation should have the following components: an economic component to promote broad-based economic growth and create employment and income-generating opportunities for both poor and non-poor; social services component and a safety-net component. The institutional arrangement for implementing basic needs' programmes might involve line ministries and other existing development institutions, the creation of entirely new institutions, or a combination of both. Each option, however, has its own merits and weak points
In the development discourse, the basic needs model focuses on the measurement of what is believed to be an eradicable level of poverty. Nevertheless, in terms of "measurement", the basic needs or absolute approach is important. The 1995 world summit on social development in Copenhagen had, as one of its principal declarations that all nations of the world should develop measures of both absolute and relative poverty and should gear national policies to "eradicate absolute poverty by a target date specified by each country in its national context.

Factors that Constrained the Eradication of Poverty

1. Lack of Identification of Poverty as a Development Concern

Philosophically, the National Development Plans speak of the need for equal opportunities towards poverty reduction. In spite of the lofty ideals encapsulated in these plans, they were not directly targeted at poverty reduction. The Four Development Plans, including the Three Year Rolling Plans (1990s), paid emphasis on the distribution of income, power and opportunities, but failed woefully to expand economic opportunities for poor people, through the stimulation of economic growth and the diversification of the economy, provision of employment opportunities, access to food and housing, and the provision of safety nets for the vulnerable-sick, the old, disabled, those in the poorest regions of the country, and those suffering from temporary economic setbacks (CBN, 2000). As usual, the plans were bedevilled by primordial considerations of poor funding, arising from fall in oil revenue; lack of project execution, monitoring and evaluation etc. Government's response to the incidence of poverty has largely been ad-hoc and rhetorical, without the implementation of holistic and revolutionary measures to tackle the root of the problem. There is absolute lack of elite consensus on the need to eliminate poverty. Poverty serves the interest of the elite as it keeps the population docile and encumbered with the quest for daily survival. Majority of the poor people lack formal education and are alienated from exercising their fundamental human rights, including political rights. Since many of the poor are pre-occupied with the quest for daily survival, it gives the elites the latitude to continue to oppress the poor and engage in primitive accumulation. Karl Marx attributes poverty to class divisions in society. Poverty helps to maintain the domination of the bourgeoisie and serves the interest of the wealth-owning class (Iyoko, 2012).

Though the crusade to eradicate poverty has been an integral part of development planning with the involvement of about 15 ministries,14 specialised agencies and 19 donor agencies and Non-governmental Organisations, poverty rate has been growing relentlessly. This tragic situation lies in the failure of the ruling elite to serve as a catalyst of development by implementing appropriate policies that will emancipate the generality of the population, as in the case of the Asian Tigers (Ogunmola and Badmus, 2001). No explicit recognition was accorded poverty as a development concern with grave consequences for national growth and development.

There is lack of sustainable strategy to reduce poverty, let alone prevent the worsening of poverty. Soludo (2001) posits that if Nigeria succeeds in preventing the worsening of poverty which is a daunting challenge given the prevailing social, political, cultural, and economic conditions, Nigeria would still have some 170 million poor people in 2025. The Nigerian elite/policy makers have failed to enunciate sustainable development strategies to address the needs of the poor, in terms of food, housing, health, sanitation, credit, etc. Moreover, Ministries, Departments and Agencies of government, which serve as pivot for the implementation of government policies and programmes, are lacking in the enunciation of pro-poor policies to address the needs of the poor. In the absence of good governance anchored on the rule of law, transparency, and accountability, poverty will continue to be widespread, deep and severe.

2. Inequality and lack of access to economic opportunities

Inequality and lack of access to economic opportunities aggravates the poverty situation. Ogwumike (1998) states that inter-personal inequality was only emphasised as it relates to the income of paid employees in the public or the organised private sector. The programmes initiated, either wholly by government or in collaboration with international organisations, during the period of the four national development plans had no far-reaching effects on poverty alleviation, even as the target population for some of these programmes were often not specified explicitly as poor people or communities. The programmes were in fact designed to cater for poverty-related objectives like employment generation and rural infrastructure

These programmes include: free and compulsory primary education; adult or mass literacy scheme; rural electrification scheme; rural banking scheme; Operation Feed the Nation; Green

Revolution; Agricultural Development Programmes and River Basin Development Authorities; Water Supply and Rural Water Supply Scheme; Small-Scale Enterprises Scheme; National Directorate of Employment; Family Support Programme; Family Economic Advancement Programme; Peoples Bank; Community Bank; Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI); and Better Life Programme. Poverty is caused by a combination of factors; and as a result, no one single initiative can eradicate it. Given the Nigerian government's development trajectory which places emphasis on the financial size of the budget while neglecting the critical issue of human capital development, the number of poor people will continue to rise. Budgets are prepared without explicitly making provision for poverty reduction. President Jonathan's government scrapped the Poverty Eradication Programme (PEP) that aimed at reducing poverty among the youth by creating gainful employment through the Youth Employment Scheme. No other institution or programme was instituted to tackle poverty. Sheriffdeen (1997) elucidates on class relationship as a major determinant of poverty. He argued that the structure of political power in society determines the extent and distribution of poverty among the population. The ruling class, with its ideology of self-survival and self-perpetuation, control over 50% of Nigeria's wealth, while the larger society struggles for the crumbs. The ruling class sees the execution of every social and economic project, such as education, health, agriculture and industrialisation projects, in terms of private wealth acquisition

3. Wrong Notion by Government that Poverty is only a By-product of Economic Stagnation

The neoliberal development orthodoxy which the elite inherited from colonialism as a development ideology has done tremendous harm to the fight against poverty. In the half-hearted attempt to fight poverty, government has failed to identify the critical social, economic, political and cultural factors etc that aggravate poverty. The single-minded pursuit of economic growth which is characterised by emphasis on GDP statistical growth rates has tended to regard poverty as a by-product of economic stagnation arising from poor growth. Aku etal (1997) argued in this regard, noting that this belief defined the context within which the Structural Adjustment Programme was conceived and introduced. Besides, they argue that policies aimed at reducing poverty need to identify which groups of people are poor, vulnerable and what their circumstances actually are before policy levers can be identified. The Structural Adjustment Programme was predicated on the neoliberal framework of diversifying the economy through deregulation, privatisation and commercialisation of public enterprises, as well as attract foreign investment. These measures informed the government's withdrawal of subsidy. In fact, government's budgetary allocations to education, health and water supply were generally below world standards set for human resource development towards the elimination of poverty (Uniamikogbo (1997). Budgetary allocation to education which was 14.9% in 1994 dropped to 13.0% in 1995. SAP plunged the economy into massive unemployment and worsened the socioeconomic condition of the people, thereby aggravating poverty. While incomes and social conditions continue to worsen, the population growth rate (2.8%) remains one of the highest in the world- thereby putting much pressures on resources and circumscribing development programmes (Soludo, 2001).

The neoliberal orthodoxy, which is premised on deficit financing, has plunged Nigeria into debt crisis. Since 1999 when civil rule was restored, Nigeria's economy had been plagued by debt. Despite being granted debt relief of $18 billion dollars by the Paris Club of creditors in 2005, Nigeria has relapsed into debt crisis. Government spent a total of N2.95 trillion to service domestic debt for a period of five years from 2010 to 2014 (Amaefule, 2016). This portends grave danger for the economy as little or nothing was ploughed into infrastructure and poverty reduction.

4. Lack of Effective Implementation of NEEDS Policy Document

Following the inception of democratic governance in 1999, the Obasanjo regime enunciated a number of economic and public reforms aimed at reducing waste and corruption, entrenching accountability, transparency and the diversification of the economy. It formulated the National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS) in 2004 which was anchored on four key strategies: re-orientating values, reducing poverty, creating wealth, and generating employment. More importantly, NEEDS was aimed at addressing the startling paradox bedevilling the nation: about 2/3 of Nigerians living in abject poverty in a country with vast oil wealth and resources. Poverty levels varied across the country, with the highest proportion of poor people in the North West and the lowest in the South East (NEEDS, 2004).

The NEEDS policy document indicated that several measures were adopted to streamline poverty-related institutions, review past poverty alleviation programmes, and harmonise sectoral efforts. However, several factors hindered the success of government efforts to reduce the level of poverty which included poor coordination among government agencies, the absence of a comprehensive policy framework; excessive political interference; ineffective targeting of the poor, leading to leakage of benefits to un-intended beneficiaries; the unwieldy scope of programmes, which caused resources to be thinly spread across too many projects; overlapping of functions which led to institutional rivalry and conflicts; the absence of sustainability mechanisms in programmes and projects; and lack of involvement of beneficiaries in project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation (NEEDS, 2004).

5. Lack of Effective Implementation of the MDGs in Nigeria

The MDGs are a multi-faceted development framework targeted at dealing with the human development challenges of underdeveloped countries. The programmes were adopted by the United Nations in 2000 and was targeted for realisation by 2015.

MDG Goal 1- Target 1A- focused on the reduction of poverty by half the proportion of people whose income is less than one (1) dollar and also reducing by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger between 1990 and 2015.

Goal 2 Achieve Universal Primary Education- to achieve universal basic education completion by 2015

Goal 3 Achieve Gender Equality and Women Empowerment - The target aimed at overcoming gender disparities in both primary and secondary education by 2005 and achieve equity at all levels by 2015

Goal 4 To reduce Child Mortality- The target aimed at reducing child mortality rate by 2/3 by 2015

Goal 5 Improve Maternal Health- The target was to reduce by 3/4 the proportion of women dying in childbirth by 2015

Goal 6 Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases- This was targeted at reversing the incidence of HIV/AIDS and other diseases by 2015

Goal 7 Ensure Environmental Sustainability- Reduce by half the proportion of people without access to clean drinking water and basic sanitation

Goal 8 To develop a Global Partnership for Development- The goal was aimed at promoting global partnership, between the have and have-not, for development and the creation of conducive local conditions for poverty eradication

Generally, the realisation of the MDGs was affected by the following cross-cutting challenges: lack of reliable and consistent data; huge funding gaps; human capacity and implementation; weak governance and accountability environment; poor coordination between the tiers of government; and unstable fiscal policy environment (Obasi, 2014).

The Goal-specific challenges that affected the realisation of MDG Goal 1 include: low level of agricultural mechanisation; dominance by aged people in agricultural production without adequate technology; weak industrial processing technology resulting in high post-harvest losses and weak market linkages; poor rural infrastructure which induces rural/ urban migration and high rate of unemployment; and income poverty-poor people suffer from joblessness and poor income. The greatest constraint that bedevilled the implementation of the MDGS was underfunding. While the projected cost of financing the MDGs in the 2007- 2015 period was estimated at US$247.54 billion, the aggregate government expenditure of the three tiers of government stood at US$46.65 billion.

Nigeria made progress toward achieving universal primary education; environmental protection; and developing global development partnership. However, the country was weak in achieving MDG Goal1, reducing child and maternal mortality, and combating diseases such as HIV/Aids and Malaria.

5. Unemployment

Unemployment exacerbates the poverty situation because it is one of the root causes. Figures from the National Population Commission show that unemployment in Nigeria rose from 21.1% in 2010 to 23.9% in 2011. Similarly, figures from the National Bureau of Statistics illustrate the deep challenges in Nigeria's labour market, where the nation's rapid economic growth has not translated into job creation. The NBS (2013) estimates that Nigeria's population grew by 2.3% in 2011, from 159.3 million in 2010 to 164.4 million in 2011, reflecting rapid population growth. In 2011, Nigeria's unemployment rate rose to 23.9% compared with 21.1% in 2010. NBS indicates that the labour force swelled by 2.1 to 67, 256,000 people, with just 51,224,115 persons employed, leaving 16, 074, 205 people without work. Lack of sufficient jobs resulted in additional 2.1 million unemployed persons in 2011, up from 1.5 million unemployed people produced in 2010. Unemployment, income inequality and poverty are endemic features of the Nigerian economy. Although the NBS figures indicate that 1.4 million jobs were created in 2013, employers say that many of the jobs were seasonal jobs. The enormity of the unemployment rate is shown by the fact that 80% of our youths were jobless in 2013, compared to the 54% in 2012. With over 1/3 of the population of youths at ages 14 to 25 unemployed, according to United Nations Population Fund, and other 10% at ages 26 to 35, the reality is that unemployment is a time bomb about to explode. Not only are many millions of people unemployed or underemployed, about 3.5 million persons yearly enter the job market daily.

UN Secretary General, Jim Yong Kim, the World Bank President, identified Nigeria as one of the world's top five countries with the largest number of poor persons. Nigeria actually accounts for 7% of the world's poor, placing it at number three after India (33%) and China (13%); but just ahead of Bangladesh (6%) and Democratic Republic of Congo (5%) (Punch Editorial, 2014).

Studies have been carried out on the nature, characteristics and causes of unemployment in Nigeria. Adebayo (1991) evaluated the self-employment programme of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) and attributed the causes to diverse but mutually-reinforcing factors such as rapid population growth, rapid expansion of the educational system, improper design of educational system to match education with employment opportunities, rural-urban migration, the nature of the production technique, government contradictory economic policies of the past and the existence of barriers to smooth inter-regional and inter-state movement in search of employment opportunities within the Nigerian labour market. The challenge facing the government is to embark on the structural transformation of the economy to boost employment generation and alleviate poverty.

6. Corruption

Corruption is as old as Nigeria and constitutes the biggest obstacle to Nigeria's development and poverty reduction. Corruption has impacted negatively on the country's Human Development Index factors. Prolonged years of military rule institutionalised poor governance system and poor service delivery, macroeconomic instability, corruption and weak infrastructure. According to Ezekwesili (2015), empirical evidence points to poor governance-especially corruption as the biggest obstacle to the development of Nigeria. "Understanding the cancerous impact of corruption helps to explain how a country with... enviable potentials that are hardly available to more than one third of the nations of the world, has remained at the bottom of socioeconomic ladder as a laggard. Economic growth rate and ultimate development of nations are determined by a number of factors that range from sound policies, effective and efficient public and private investments and strong institutions. Economic evidence through researches proves that one key variable that determines how fast nations outgrow others is the speed of accumulation of human capital, especially through science and technology education. No wonder for these same countries, by 2011 - South Korea of fifty million people has a GDP of $1.12 trillion; Brazil of One hundred and ninety six million people has $2.48 trillion; Malaysia of twenty eight million people has $278.6 billion; Chile of seventeen million people has $248.59 billion; Singapore of five million people has $318.7 billion. Meanwhile, with our population of 165 million people we make boast with a GPD of $488 billion-completely way off the mark that we could have produced if we made better sets of development choices".

Analysts and development experts believe that corruption - political and economic - primarily explains the poverty situation in Nigeria (CRR, 2008). Attempts by the government to align budgetary allocations with development priorities failed because of corruption. Former World Bank President, Paul Wolfowitz, noted that Nigeria lost US$300 billion to corruption in the last four decades. The secretariat of the influential Catholic Bishops' Conference agrees, noting that corruption is a way of life, especially in government and business. Corruption is responsible in large measure for the broken promises, the dashed hopes and the shallow dreams that have characterised the lives of Nigerians in the past decades. Transparency International's 2006 Corruption Perception Index ranked Nigeria more corrupt than 37 out of the 45 African countries. Globally, Nigeria ranked 142 out of 164 countries. Without the eradication of corruption, Nigerians will continue to be poor and the country will not meet its target of being one of the 20 top global economies by 2020. There are many manifestations of corruption in Nigeria. These include political corruption, bureaucratic corruption (misappropriation of public funds, money laundering (such as looted funds and wealth kept secretly abroad, gratification (which involves monetary, pecuniary, material or physical favours as a condition or reward for performing official duty), and nepotism which confers undeserved favours and disadvantages without receiving or giving gratification except that of primordial identity (Onimode, 2001).

In the 21st century Nigeria, elite corruption is characterised by prebendalism, clientilism, and rent-seeking (Ojukwu and Shopeju, 2009). These anomalies have vitiated the effective implementation of poverty-related government policies and programmes aimed at its reduction.

Prospects of Reducing Poverty in Nigeria by 2030

In spite of the enunciation of the MDGs, poverty is still pervasive and endemic in most countries of the world. Nigeria is not an exception with over 1 billion people worldwide living on less than $1.25 dollars a day- the World Bank measure on poverty. In Nigeria, the National Bureau of Statistics estimates that about 69% (112 Nigerians) of the 160 million Nigerians are still living in poverty.

In spite of huge number of poor people in Nigeria, she can still make a significant dent on poverty reduction if it draws up a comprehensive and sustainable plan of action. What is required is for Nigeria to put its house in order. Some of the measures needed to tackle poverty include the following: boosting economic growth; provision of infrastructure, especially rural infrastructure; prioritising poverty eradication through policy coordination between federal/ state/ local governments; fighting corruption by strengthening the institutional capacities of the EFCC and ICPC to fight corruption; human capital development/ implementation of UBE counterpart funding; special schemes for the vulnerable people such as old people, children and identifying the poor; fighting insecurity; good governance through transparent and accountable leadership; strengthening and implementing economic reforms to curb wastes and leakages in government and channelling them into poverty reduction; reducing the cost of governance; and strengthening the MDGs for effective implementation.

1. Boosting Economic Growth

With abundant human and natural resources, Nigeria's economic growth potentials are limitless if the government can create a conducive political and economic environment. Economic experts believe that economic growth leads to poverty reduction. Government in collaboration with the private sector must work together to boost economic growth, create jobs and reduce unemployment. Presently, Nigeria's economic growth is not inclusive, pro-poor and job-creating enhancing. This is because of limited investments in the economy in terms of manufacturing and export. There is lack of value- chain production in the economy because of poor technology and skills. The private sector is handicapped by lack of conducive environment- lack of access to credit facilities, poor managerial skills, poor technology; lack of incentives; and harmful government regulations and practices. The commanding heights of the economy are dominated by foreign multinationals and allied companies- oil, construction, shipping etc. These multinational corporations do not catalyse forward and backward integration of economic activities. The few jobs that are created are taken over by foreign multinational corporations. What is lacking in the activities of these multinational corporations is value- addition to the Nigerian economy.

The Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) have been denied the potential of creating jobs in the economy because of lack of credit and harmful government regulations. SMEs represent 80% of economic activities that take place in the economy. The SMEs are the economic catalysts of any nation, and any nation that is desirous of realizing economic growth and development must boost the activities of SMEs. The SMEs have the potential of boosting the growth of the nation's GDP, foster linkages within the economy, reduce dependence on imported goods and services, enhance technological growth and achieve the diversification of the economy through manufacturing and export diversification. The neglect of agriculture by successive governments has given way to the dependence of the economy on oil. With agricultural production, the nation's economic growth can be boosted, provide raw materials for industrial manufacturing.. The SMEs and agricultural production remain the potential weapons for fighting poverty, unemployment and enhancing human capital development. With adequate and sustainable policies from the government, wealth creation can be achieved through agriculture and SMEs. Economic development in general and economic transformation specifically requires agricultural modernisation and industrial diversification (Nnadozie, 2012).

According to Obadan (1997), economic growth is necessary for poverty reduction, but not sufficient. The economic growth model of poverty reduction is known for its trickle down effect. Without pro-poor growth policies, it will take a reasonable long time before growth can make a dent on poverty reduction. Although the Nigerian economy has shown signs of growth: 60% in 2008; 7.0% in 2009; 7.85% in 2010; and 7.98% in 2011, poverty has been growing relentlessly. (Nnadozie, 2012). Growth is not pro-poor and all-inclusive. The poor and vulnerable groups are yet to benefit from the growth process. With the nation's persistent inequality, it will be difficult for the benefits of growth to trickle down to the poor, as in the case of Botswana and Brazil. Besides, the few jobs that are created by the growth are taken up by expatriates.

Given the weak institutional structure of the Nigerian economy and its dependence on foreign inputs, its ability to create jobs that will make a significant dent on poverty reduction is greatly hampered, unless the government re-invigorates the SME sub-sector to give job creation a big boost. Thus, the economic growth approach must not rely essentially on the market-based strategy alone to create jobs. Government must, as a matter of deliberate policy, enunciate reform measures to boost the activities of SMEs and revive the agricultural sector.

2. Provision of Rural Infrastructure

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (International Student's Edition) defined infrastructure as the basic systems and services that are necessary for a country or an organisation to run smoothly. More than 70% of Nigeria's population are located in the rural areas where the incidence of poverty is very high. The provision of rural infrastructure is critical to poverty reduction. Most rural dwellers lack basic services such as water, electricity, good and motorable roads, hospitals etc. There is high exodus of rural dwellers to the urban areas in search of gainful employment. Lack of rural infrastructure hampers the creation of jobs and poverty reduction. Rural dwellers lack access to credit facilities with which to establish businesses. Most rural dwellers are unaware of available business opportunities and credit-giving institutions like the Bank of Industry, Central Bank of Nigeria, and Allied Institutions involved in credit administration. Ironically too, most rural areas are blessed with abundant natural resources, but yet untapped.

There is, therefore, need for the government to develop an Integrated Rural Development Strategy for dealing effectively with the problem of rural infrastructure and poverty. The aim should be to provide rural dwellers with the basic necessities of life. Like the basic needs approach to poverty reduction, the Integrated Rural Development Strategy thrives on three basic components- economic growth, social services, and social welfare. In spite of oil windfall, Nigeria still suffers from a large infrastructure gap. The road network (km per 1000 inhabitants), rail systems and electricity generation (kilowatt hours per inhabitant) are well below the figures for peer countries such as Indonesia and South Africa. Power supply is epileptic. Without adequate power, industry cannot thrive. Cost of doing business will continue to rise. By July, total power output for Nigeria's 170 million people stood at 3,240 megawatts, not much more than the 3,000 MW of 1999 and after billions of US dollars had been spent, while demand is put at 15,000 MW.

3. Prioritising Poverty Reduction through Policy Coordination between the Federal/ State/ Local Governments

Prioritising poverty reduction in Nigeria is a necessity in order to sensitise the three (3) tiers of government to its imperative. The three tiers of government must come to the realisation that without poverty reduction, the country's development prospects will continue to be in jeopardy. The question is- is poverty reduction a priority agenda in Nigeria? The Nigerian government is yet to prioritise poverty reduction as a development agenda. Large number of Nigerians are still trapped in chronic long-term and dynastic poverty that is reproduced from generation to generation. Economists refer to the co-existence of vast natural resources wealth and extreme personal poverty in developing countries like Nigeria as the resource curse. Worst still, the country does not have guidelines to measure poverty, as in other countries.

4. Effective Collaboration and Cooperation among the Three (3) Tiers of Government and MDAs Remain one of the Key Factors for Achieving the MDGs

Collaboration between the different tiers of government is one of the key factors for achieving effective coordination and implementation of projects to alleviate poverty. For instance, some states are yet to assess the UBE funds and are unwilling to release their own counterpart funding needed to complete federal government funding. This is an indication that the criteria for accessing the UBE Conditional Grant needs to be reviewed. Another area of concern is budgetary appropriation for MDG-related MDAs by the legislative arm of government.

Although the CGS is perhaps the most successful MDGs' initiative, in the last six (6) years, there is lack of executive/legislative understanding in appropriating money for it (NPC, 2010). In yet another instance, when the executive arm of government proposed N51.19 billion naira for it in the 2010 appropriation, the legislature reduced it to N35.027 billion. This reduction may inhibit efforts to scale up CGS to the local government level.

5. Scaling up Funding of the MDGs

Nigeria has abundance of resources that are wasted and stolen, which could be channelled into poverty reduction. It is estimated that in order to achieve the MDGs in Nigeria by 2015, $5 billion to $7 billion must be channelled to MDG programmes annually. The government is presently allocating about $1 billion annually out of which $750 million is by the federal government and about $250 million by state governments (CDD, 2012). Public expenditure levels by the three tiers of government are not sufficient to meet the MDGs as demonstrated in the 2006 MDG report. Government must, therefore, scale up funding the key MDGs that are critical to poverty reduction: eradicating extreme poverty and hunger; achieving gender equality in primary schools and empowering women; reducing child mortality; and improving maternal healthcare given our mortality rate of 800 for every 100,000 live births.

6. Focusing on Human Capital Development

Developing the country's human capital is very critical to poverty reduction. This calls for huge investments in education, healthcare and rural development. Investing in education will lead to a more productive economy through the acquisition of relevant skill, technology and adaptation. A higher level of human capital development increases the propensity for innovation and ingenuity in increasing production. Thus, increased investment in education will stimulate economic growth and achieve higher per capita income. A major policy shift is required that will prioritise and significantly increase social expenditure and include the poor in public budgeting (CDD, 2012).

7. Good Governance, Fighting Corruption- Strengthening The Institutional Capacity of the Bureau for Public Procurement, EFCC, ICPC etc

Strengthening the institutional capacity of the EFCC, ICPC etc to fight corruption is a necessary condition for poverty reduction. Corruption weakens the prospects for equitable distribution of economic opportunities in Nigeria and also militates against the realisation of economic growth and development. In addition to fighting corruption, the Nigerian state should be re-constituted into a developmental state, anchored on good governance. Good governance is very critical to the realization of the country’s development priorities. Nigeria must continue to improve its systems of governance to ensure the efficiency of resource use. This will involve strengthening the capacity of state regulatory institutions to fight corruption, enthrone accountability and transparency in the management of public resources. Because of the acute shortage of resources to finance development programmes, there is need to combat corruption which is a major hindrance to the achievement of economic development. Fighting corruption will help to reduce wastage of resources, reckless spending and leakages in government revenue which are either misappropriated or misapplied. The prospects for attaining poverty reduction in Nigeria remains bright if only the Mohammadu Buhari Administration can muster the political will and the requisite orientation to enforce the reforms introduced by former President Olusegun Obasanjo for curbing corruption and subversion of due process in the management of public resources and expenditure. It is widely believed even internationally that the problem of Nigeria is not the paucity of finance, but rather the quantum of financial resources spent on social services do not match expected results. The World Bank (2012) is of the view that the real problem with Nigeria's budgetary system is the low efficiency of budget spending and not inadequate funding.

8. Strengthening Economic Governance and Reducing The Cost of Governance

Pragmatic economic reforms are needed to drive economic growth. These reforms should address the problems of rising cost of doing business in the country, tackle inefficiency in the use of financial resources, lack of transparency and accountability, as well as increase national productivity. The Obasanjo regime established the Oversight of Public Expenditure (OPEN) and Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) for tracking public expenditure. OPEN is a good mechanism for fighting corruption. The MTEF aims at improving public expenditure management by introducing greater stability and predictability into the budget process, enhancing the quality of public investment, boosting public confidence and the credibility of fiscal policy and ensuring coordination between fiscal and monetary policies to achieve the country's macroeconomic objectives. High debt overhang and huge recurrent expenditure are indications of warped economic policies which have resulted in the rising number of poor people. The high cost of governance in Nigeria depicts the fact that 70% of the nation's budget is allocated to recurrent expenditure to the detriment of poverty reduction and industrialization. No economy can grow and reduce poverty without adequate investment in capital expenditures which are very critical to poverty reduction. Nigeria can fight poverty by reducing the high cost of governance, embark on huge infrastructure investment, provide safety nets for the poor as well as fight inequality through income and wealth re-distribution.

9 The Institutionalisation of Transparency, Accountability and Due Process

Since 1999, government had instituted some reform measures to improve public expenditure management. As part of the economic reform measures to increase government's transparency and accountability in the use of public resources, a number of measures were taken which include Due Process mechanism, Servicom and Freedom of Information Act. Through the Freedom of Information Act, government should dismantle all the barriers that hinder the free flow of information from the government to the people. Transparency, Accountability and Due Process should be instituted to deepen the capacity of MDAs for effective budget implementation and new budget orientation. Accountability involves openness and transparency. This demands that the conduct of government business should not be shrouded in secrecy, and should be open to investigation or inquiry. For accountability to thrive, the public and civil society must be involved in decision-making.

Conclusion

The development implications of poverty are enormous. Nigeria cannot escape from the tragedy of underdevelopment with the prevailing level of poverty. The countries that have achieved a high level of development have few number of poor people. With its abundant natural and human endowments, Nigeria is in a position to fight poverty, if only the elites and policy makers recognise poverty as a grave development problem, which requires the right development ideology premised on the implementation of robust, comprehensive and sustainable policies.

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