

Short Commentary

PROBLEMS IN PARADISE! RETHINKING POVERTY AND THE RESPONSE OF THE NIGERIAN STATE

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Abstract: It is widely acclaimed that Nigeria has met the first goal of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (i.e., eradicating extreme poverty and hunger). However, despite its richly endowed natural resources, a large percentage of Nigerians still live below the United Nations' drawn poverty line. This paper investigates the factors that cause shifts in government policies and culminates in new frameworks for poverty alleviating initiatives in the country. The introduction of a series of poverty reduction programmes as well as the subsequent broadening of their scopes has been instrumental in the fight against poverty in Nigeria. Nonetheless, the future is strewn with a lot of challenges. The Nigerian government is yet to fully address poverty as a societal and developmental issue that tends to integrate inputs from the poor themselves. In order to overcome this challenge, this paper calls on the Nigeria government to focus more on macroeconomic issues that affect the poor such as high inflation and slow economic growth on development.

Keywords: Development Government Policies Poverty Resources

INTRODUCTION

Eradicating global poverty is at the heart of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The United Nations in year 2000 in a meeting commonly referred to as Millennium Summit in the United States of America arrived at a set of eight objectives set as goals for each member to meet by 2015. A top goal is the "eradication of extreme poverty and hunger" (United Nations, 2001). The intent of the global body is to halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people living on less than US\$1.25 per day. This includes halving the proportion of people who suffer from hunger and to achieve decent employment for all citizens by the target year. Since the inception of MDGs, successive administrations in Nigeria have come up with different policy documents aimed at achieving the Millennium Development Goals. From the National Economic Employment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) through the 7-point Agenda to the current Transformation Agenda, poverty reduction has received sufficient attention. Despite these official positions, many Nigerians live below the United Nations set poverty line.

Paradoxically, Nigeria is rich in human, natural and agricultural resources; yet it lacks the ability to provide the essential services needed to meet the targets of the MDGs. The questions therefore to ask are:

- a. why is there scarcity of material comfort in midst of abundant wealth in the country?
- b. can the country sufficiently meet the MDGs with its current level of policy intervention?
- c. are there sufficient structures and viable institutions available to meet the MDGs target year?
- d. beyond the MDGs, does the Nigerian government have alternative exit routes out of poverty for its citizens?

These questions are the thrust of this study.

Poverty has received sufficient attention in literature. To this extent, strongly held theories had been advanced for generations. Each can be applied in relations to broad policies historically or contemporaneously. For the purpose of this work, alternative governmental policies in Nigeria for dealing with large-scale deprivation or poverty will be analyzed according to the general principles of the theory of poverty located within political economic discuss. Rather than focus on the individual as a source of poverty, this theory concentrates on the economic, political and social systems which cause people to have limited opportunities and resources with which to achieve sufficient income and well being. To this end, Marx, Durkheim (cited in Bradshaw, 2005) shows that even the most personal of actions (suicide) is in fact mediated by social systems.

A reasonable percentage of the literature on poverty suggests that the economic system is structured in such a way that the poor fall behind regardless of how competent they may be. This is reflected not only in terms of wages but also the structural barriers preventing this critical mass (the poor) from getting better jobs, complicated by limited number of jobs and lack of growth in sectors supportive of lower skilled jobs (Jacks, 1996). The position above is a function of character of the distributive politics of the state. Thus, unequal distribution of resources confers power to control the further allocation of resources and hence, is a source of tension and conflict. As a consequence, inequality is supposed to arise not just from the particular mechanisms and principles by which resources have been and are being allocated and maintained, but also from the general consensus about social prestige and from the general distribution of institutionalized political power.

Efforts at Eradicating Poverty in Nigeria

In Nigeria, the fight against extreme hunger and poverty has necessitated over the years the establishments of different programmes by governments. Successive regimes/administrations sought specific projects/programmes reflective of regime-identity aimed at poverty reduction in the country.

Notable amongst them, in chronological order are: National Accelerated Food Production Programme and the Nigerian Agricultural and Co-operative Bank (1972), Operation Feed the Nation (meant to teach the rural how to use modern farming techniques) (1976), Green Revolution Programme (designed to reduce food importation and increase local food production) (1979), Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) (1986), Family Support Programme and the Family Economic Advancement Programme (1993), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) to replace the previously failed Poverty Alleviation Programme (2001) and the Transformation Agenda (2011).

In the Fourth Republic, apart from the salutary reference made by the 7-point Agenda to the issue of poverty in Nigeria, two other programmes stand out in the crusade against the scourge. In order of magnitude, they are:

- a. The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) and
- b. The Transformation Agenda (TA).

Both programmes had institutional frameworks for implementation. While NEEDS had the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), the Transformation Agenda's equivalent is the subsidy Re-investment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P), the goals of both 'sub-programmes' was the elimination of "core" poverty over a government determined period.

In specific terms, NEEDS had the following objectives (a). wealth creation, (b). employment generation, (c). poverty reduction and (d). value re-orientation. Apart from learning from the experience of past failed programmes, NEEDS sought to articulate a clear vision of a realistic appraisal of what was feasible within the medium to longer-term framework for combating poverty in the country (National Planning Commission, 2004). The goal was to create a vibrant and growing economy capable of reducing the level of poverty in the country. It also was designed to sustain high but broad, non-oil growth of GDP at a rate consistent with poverty reduction and employment creation.

As a key component of NEEDS, NAPEP was to address not only the incident of poverty but also to eradicate it. Thus, to fully implement its programmes, certain causal factors were identified responsible for the inadequacy and failure of previous anti-poverty initiatives in Nigeria. They include:

- i. the absence of a policy framework,
- ii. inadequate involvement of stakeholders,
- iii. poor implementation and arrangements and
- iv. lack of proper coordination.

NAPEP's mandate was to monitor and coordinate all poverty eradication efforts in order to harmonize and ensure better delivery, maximum impact and effective utilization of available resources.

Nevertheless, the TA is anchored on three pillars and specific targets of Vision 20:2020. As a medium-term roadmap for securing a better future for the country, its targets are:

- a. creating decent jobs in sufficient quantities to resolve the protracted problem of unemployment and reduce poverty in Nigeria,
- b. laying a foundation for robust and inclusive growth within the Nigerian economy and
- c. improving on a sustainable basis the well being of all classes of Nigerians regardless of their personal circumstances and location.

To achieve these strategic goals, the Nigerian government is to focus its attention on four broad thematic areas:(a). governance, (b). human capital development,(c). infrastructure and (d). real sector.

Complimenting the above is one of SURE-P's terms of reference which is to monitor and evaluate execution of funded projects including periodic Poverty and Social Impact Analysis (PSIA). Through this mechanism, efforts at combating poverty in Nigeria were progressively gauged.

Despite the efforts itemized above, statistics show that Nigeria is among the five poorest countries in the world (World Bank Annual Report, 2013). According to the General Household survey conducted by the World Bank, "the poverty rates per capita between 2012 and 2013 in Nigeria is 33.1% with 44.9% in the rural areas and 12.6% in the urban areas." Although these statistics indicate lower poverty rates compared to 35.2% recorded between 2010 and 2011 with 46.3% in the rural areas and 45.8% in the urban centre, an estimated 60% of Nigerians population live below the poverty line of US\$1.25 drawn by the United Nations. Accentuating the problem is the level of employment in the country. The International Labour Organization Annual Report for 2013 shows that unemployment rate in Nigeria is about 7.5% (World Bank, 2013). The Nigerian case is not strictly unemployment but underemployment because most Nigerians cannot afford not to work, but a large percentage of the population is engaged in low productivity and low paying tasks.

The Paradox of Growth amidst High Incidence of Poverty

Nigeria is a country with massive wealth and a huge population to support commerce and other levels of economic development. Since the turn of the millennium, it has recorded a high level of economic growth. Despite this record, the incidence of poverty and unemployment has worsened, especially since 2004. At the level of policy, Table 1 below is a summary of Nigerian government's key priority policies, programmes and projects aimed at the transformation of the nation.

Table1: Allocation by Sector & MDAs Under KPPP (2012-2015)

	2012 (N'million)	2013 (N'million)	2014 (N'million)	2015 (N'million)	Total 2012 -2015 (N'million)	%age share of Total
Real sector	228,519.80	251,450.73	267,722.37	272,562.77	1,020,255.67	14.17%
- Agriculture & rural Development	112,007.72	120,841.69	136,221.85	131,724.33	500,795.59	6.96%
-Water Resources	70,325.41	77,612.00	75,768.00	76,294.67	300,000.08	4.17%
- Commerce & Industry	14,534.90	16,156.17	16,413.36	16,975.56	64,080.00	0.89%
- Mines & Steel Development	12,901.77	14,340.87	14,569.16	15,068.20	56,880.00	0.79%
Physical Infrastructure	419,550.00	479,680.00	540,310.00	583,980.00	2,023,520.00	28.10%
-Transport	322,800.00	372,180.00	420,560.00	452,980.00	1,568,520.00	21.79%
Roads & Bridges	150,000.00	170,000.00	185,000.00	190,500.00	695,500.00	9.66%
FERMA (for	45,300.00	55,150.00	74,550.00	75,000.00	250,000.00	3.47%

	2012 (N'million)	2013 (N'million)	2014 (N'million)	2015 (N'million)	Total 2012 -2015 (N'million)	%age share of Total
Maintenance of Roads)						
Ports	2,750.00	2,980.00	3,210.00	2,860.00	11,800.00	0.16%
Aviation (excluding BASA Funds)	35,000.00	45,850.00	17,500.00	14,320.00	112,670.00	1.56%
Railways	89,750.00	98,200.00	140,300.00	170,300.00	498,550.00	6.92%
- Oil & Gas	18,750.00	22,500.00	24,750.00	32,500.00	98,500.00	1.37%
-Power	78,000.00	85,000.00	95,000.00	98,500.00	356,500.00	4.95%
Regional Development	229,113.71	243,315.74	193,186.77	174,922.65	840,538.87	11.67%
- Housing	41,647.71	47,615.74	54,183.24	59,537.65	202,984.34	2.82%
- Federal Capital Territory	142,466.00	105,700.00	35,600.00	4,004.00	287,770.00	4.00%
- Niger Delta	45,000.00	90,000.00	103,403.53	111,381.00	349,784.53	4.86%
Knowledge- Based & ICT	17,155.48	25,314.61	32,485.98	38,500.00	113,456.07	1.58%
Science and Technology	13,060.00	20,555.00	27,505.00	38,500.0	99,620.00	1.38%
Information Communication Technology	4,095.48	4,759.61	4,980.98	0.00	13,836.07	0.19%
Human Capital Development	89,420.75	186,140.51	194,910.58	225,646.98	696,118.82	9.67%
-Education	9,850.00	100,000.00	106,500.00	128,000.00	344,350.00	4.78%
-Health	45,310.00	54,000.00	60,000.00	70,000.00	229,310.00	3.18%
-Women & Social Development	7,103.45	7,519.03	7,129.33	6,619.58	28,371.39	0.39%
- Youth Development	11,833.61	10,270.42	6,285.14	6,812.41	35,201.58	0.49%
- Labour & Productivity	15,323.69	14,351.06	14,996.11	14,214.99	58,885.85	0.82%
General Administration	50,077.42	55,986.32	57,357.45	60,841.92	224,263.11	3.11%
Defence & Security	169,846.06	188,791.21	191,796.57	198,366.15	748,800.00	10.40%
GRAND TOTAL	1,203,683.23	1,430,679.12	1,477,769.72	1,554,820.47	5,666,952.54	78.71%
Government Contribution to Bankable Projects**					911,660.00	12.66%
Funds for Other Priority Projects not Listed***					621,387.46	8.63%
Total Funds available					7,200,000.00	100.00%

Source: Budget Office and National Planning Commission Reports (2014)

In the table are selected projects and their cost outlays for possible execution. In order to guarantee sustainability, there are attempts by government to enact enabling law, regulations and policies that could serve as institutional framework for effective delivery.

The intent here is that government should create the enabling environment necessary to facilitate sustainable growth and development in the country. Also funding options that have the potential to provide adequate, reliable and timely financing backup are expectedly put in place with corresponding implementation networks. Equally important is government emphasis on training, capacity building, strengthening inter-ministerial and inter-governmental relations needed to effectively and efficiently monitor the implementation process.

However, the official position summarized above is not reflected in the quality of life of most Nigerians in spite of the impressive economic growth over the past decade. Most government programmes have largely failed to overcome persistent poverty in the country.

According to the statistics released in 2012 by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the incidence of poverty in Nigeria worsened between 2004 and 2010 (NBS, 2012). The report indicates there was a quantitative rise in the number of Nigerians living below the United Nations drawn poverty line (at US\$1.25); from 68.7m to 112.5m (63.7% rise in poverty incidence) with a corresponding population rise from 139.2m to 158.6m (13.9% rise in population) over the same period (bgl Research & Intelligence, 2012).

The 2013 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report shows that 68.0% of Nigerians are stated to be living below US\$1.25 daily while adult illiteracy rate for adult (both sexes) is 61.3% (Paul, 2013). Within the same period, the country recorded a Gross Domestic Product growth rate of 6.99% and a 7.87% real growth rate.

Indeed, the foregoing represents the paradox which is at the heart of the study. Also, it is symptomatic of a structural disequilibrium, not only at the level of policy but also at the level of the social contract between the leadership and the citizenry. This reverberates in terms of unemployment, social inequality and poverty incidence in Nigeria.

Unemployment Differentials

The Medium Term National Implementation Plan (NIP), 2010 – 2013, was drawn up with macroeconomic projections, strategies and measures as well as programmes and projects to be implemented in various sector of the Nigerian economy to accelerate development, competitiveness and wealth creation (NBS, 2012). The plan includes:

- a. creating employment in a sustainable manner,
- b. generate jobs to absorb the teeming unemployed and create new opportunities, etc.

Also the Transformation Agenda is anchored on the following three pillars and specific targets:

- a. creating decent jobs in sufficient quantities to resolve the protracted problem of unemployment and reduce poverty,
- b. laying a foundation for robust and inclusive growth within the Nigerian economy and
- c. improving on a sustainable basis the well-being of all classes of Nigerian regardless of their personal circumstance and location.

To realize these objectives, Table 2 below shows the projected Nigerian government investment in the various sectors. Physical infrastructure is accorded the highest priority in the government investment programme (33%). This is followed by human capital development (19%). The private sector investment is projected at an average of N3.4trillion per annum (US\$20b) 12.95 trillion in 4 years (US\$76.1b)

Table 2: Federal Government's Investment Priorities in the Implementation Development Plan, 2010 - 2013

Sector	Investment Amount, N' Billion	Percentage share (%)
Productive sector	1,557.1	16
General Administration	283.5	3
Regional Development	1,002.4	10
Governance & Security	1,042.8	10
Human capital Development.	1,894.1	19
Physical Infrastructure	3,318.5	33
Knowledge-based Economy	294.7	3
Capital Supplementation & Residual items	606.9	6
Total	10,000.0	100

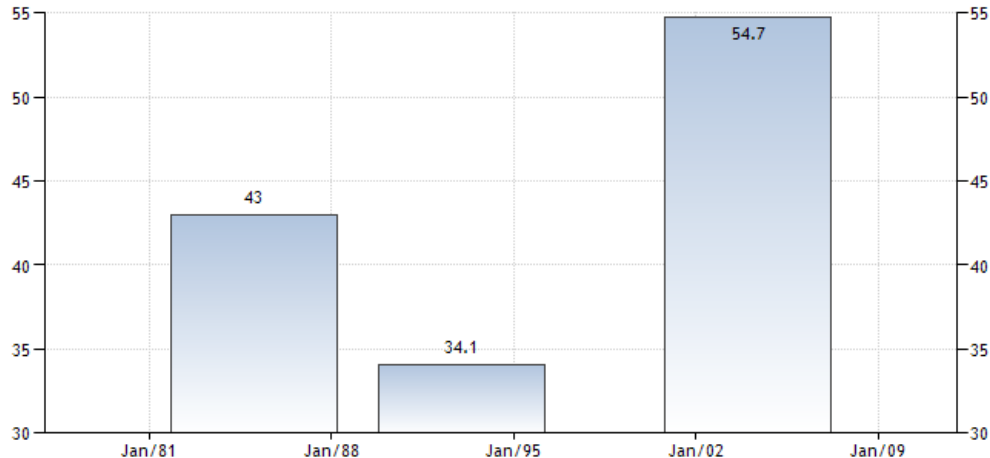
Source: Nigeria, National Planning Commission (2010), "Nigeria Vision 20: 2020 First National Implementation Plan, 2010 – 2013"

In spite of the above stated ambitious plans by the Nigerian government, the percentage of the unemployed compared to the population size of the country is significantly high. There was upward numerical movement from 23.90% in 2011 to 29.50% in 2013 (NBS, 2014). In demographic sense, 54% of Nigerian youths were unemployed in 2012 out of which 51.90% were females and 48.10% were males. Many of these people have not been able to find jobs or are under-employed regardless of their professional trainings. Thus, problem of unemployment becomes disturbing when the youth unemployment is considered. Seen as the number of people actively looking for a job as a percentage of the labour force, unemployment rate is higher in the rural areas (25.60%) than in the urban areas (17.10%) of the country. In terms of causality, the rise in the unemployment rate is largely attributed to the increase in number of schools (especially, tertiary and vocational ones) which produce graduates annually with no matching job opportunities. Closely related to this is the partial freeze on employment in many public and private sector institutions across the country and relative slow disbursement of the capital budget by the Nigerian government. Thus, unemployment remains a critical problem in the country. Put in context, in Nigeria the issue is not only unemployment but underemployment because most Nigerians cannot afford not to work, but a large percentage of the population is engaged in low productivity and low paying jobs.

Poverty Ratios

In incidence of poverty in Nigeria is high. In 2014, the World Bank president, Jim Yong Kim, stated that Nigeria is one of the top five countries in the world with the largest number of poor people (Omoh, 2014). The country is ranked third in the world with 7% of the global poor behind China (13%) and India (33%) respectively. The poverty headcount ratio at US\$1.25 a day in terms of Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) as a percentage of the Nigeria population between 1990 and 2010 stood at 68.00% (World Bank 2011). As shown in figure 1 below, the poverty gap at US\$1.25 a day in percentage terms of PPP stood at 33.70% within the same period.

Figure 1: World Bank Indicators-Nigerian Poverty Rates



Source: World Bank (2012)

This suggests that more than 60% of Nigerians lives in chronic poverty. Of this critical mass, the incidence of poverty is more pronounce in the rural areas than their urban counterparts. According to the General Household Survey (GHS) panel the poverty rate per capita between 2010 and 2011 was 35.20% with 46.30% in the rural areas and 15.80% in the urban centre (World Bank, 2012). Also, there is a disparity ratio in the geographical spread of poverty in Nigeria. Within the same context, there is a significant difference between the poverty level in southern and northern Nigeria.

The poverty rate in northern Nigeria is highest in aggregate terms than that of southern Nigeria; with the North-east and North-west recording higher figures. While southern Nigeria and northern central experienced declines in the

poverty 2012 and 2013, the poverty rate increased in the North-east and remained practically unchanged in the North-west.

At an average of 7.40%, Nigeria has one of the world's highest economic growth rates (World Bank, 2014). In 2014, the country's economy became the largest in Africa, following the rebased of its nominal Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The rebased GDP estimates reveal a large, more dynamic and complex economy than previous statistics did.

However, the recent figures released by the United Nations Development (UNDP) states that Nigeria is not one of the African countries recording remarkable improvement in its Human Development Index (UNDP, 2014). According to the report, Nigeria's position is 153 out of 186 low development index countries that were ranked. Although the statistics released by the World Bank within the same period shows a significant reduction in percentage terms the level of poverty in the country (55.9million) Nigerians (about 33.1% of the country's population of about 170 million) when compared to the figures released by the Nigerian Bureau of statistics which put the poverty level at 112.519 million (62.60%) Nigerians, the figures are still high in aggregate terms.

Inequality Standard

In Nigeria, socio-economic inequality is a fact of life. Within the first decade of the 21st century, income inequality in the country worsened from 0.43 in 2004 to 0.49 in 2009 (Aigbokhan, 2010). When correlated with differential access to basic infrastructure and social amenities, there are more rural poor than urban poor in Nigeria. Put in context, unequal distribution of oil wealth accounts for persistent inequality problem nation-wide. Oil exports contribute significantly to Nigerian government revenues and about 15.00% of GDP, despite employing only a fraction of the population. Agriculture, however, contributes about 45.00% of GDP and employs close to 90.00% of the rural population. This incongruence is compounded by the fact that oil revenue is poorly distributed among the population, with higher government spending in urban areas than rurally.

Another reason why most Nigerians still live in poverty is that the pattern of investment directed at economic growth is concentrated on sectors that are less labour-intensive, such as oil/gas, telecommunications and banking. Development of agriculture, the biggest employer in the economy is not commensurate with the sectors itemized above. To that extent, growth in Nigeria has not been inclusive in decades. While the rebased GDP could potentially improve the investment profile of the country, social progress remains essentially slow.

Beyond meeting MDGs

Goal 1 of the Millennium Development Goals aims at the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger. Its target area is:

- a. halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than US\$ 1 a day,
- b. achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people and
- c. halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger (United Nation Fact Sheet, 2015).

In Nigeria, successive governments since the Millennium Submit have introduced different poverty reduction programmes in the country. The two that are objects of this analysis are: The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) and the Transformation Agenda. Both had a set target to reduce poverty by halve by 2015. NEEDS has the following target:

- a. poverty reduction,
- b. employment generation
- c. value re-orientation and
- d. wealth creation

In meeting with the Millennium Development Goals, NEEDS was designed to reduce the incidence of poverty in Nigeria. The other national strategy with the same mission is the Transformation Agenda (TA). Its policy option sits on a tripod:

- i. laying a foundation for inclusive and sustainable growth of the Nigeria economy,
- ii. creating decent jobs in sufficient quantities to reduce the rate of unemployment and the incidence of poverty and
- iii. improving on a sustainable basis the well-being of all Nigerians.

To achieve these itemized goals, the Nigeria government intends to focus its attention on four broad thematic areas: governance, human capital, infrastructure and real sector, while these programmes have been essential in dealing with the problem of poverty in the country, their effectiveness in terms of strategies have been subject to different interpretations. According to Anger (2010:143), “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”. Although Lawal, Obasaju and Rotimi (2012) agree that the intervention measures severally put in place by the Nigerian government have yielded a degree of success, they are far from convincing. They identified poor funding, over-politicization by government, lack of grassroots interest, poor technical capacity among others as the bane of these programmes. This position corroborates the 2013 Human Development Report on Nigeria. The country’s Human Development Index (HDI) value for 2012 is 0.471. In terms of low human development category, Nigeria is at 153 out of 187 countries and territories (UNDP, 2013). Table 3 below is a review Nigeria’s progress in each of the HDI indicators. It shows that between 1980 and 2012, the country’s life expectancy at birth increased by 6.8years, mean years of schooling increased by 0.2 years and expected years of schooling increased by 2.4 years. Within the same period, Nigeria’s Gross National Income (GNI) per capita increased by about 34.00%.

Table 3: Nigeria’s HDI trends based on consistent time series data, new component indicators and new methodology

	Life expectancy at birth	Expected years of schooling	Mean years of schooling	GNI per capita (2005 PPP\$)	HDI value
1980	45.5	6.6		1,571	
1985	45.9	8.4		1,202	
1990	45.6	6.5		1,274	
1995	45.1	6.5		1,303	
2000	46.3	7.9		1,285	
2005	49	9	5	1,540	0.434
2010	51.4	9	5.2	1,928	0.462
2011	51.9	9	5.2	2,017	0.467
2012	52.3	9.0	5.2	2,102	0.471

Source: World Bank (2014).

Also, the World Bank (2014) statistics show a reduction in the number of Nigerians, in percentage terms living below the United Nations accepted poverty level. The figures show that 55.90 million Nigerians (about 33.1% of the country’s population put at about 170 million) are poor; a significant improvement on the 2012 figures released by the Nigerian Bureau of statistics which put the poverty level at 112.52 million (62.60%) (NBS, 2012).

However, the figures above are in percentage terms rather than aggregate terms. This means that the basis for the measurement is the percentage of the population of Nigeria who live below the poverty line instead of the actual number. Perhaps a better way to assess the foregoing is to examine the relationship between absolute and relative poverty in the country. The logic here is that whereas there are poor people in Nigeria and for example, the United States of America, there is a difference between a poor Nigerian and an American equivalent. While the latter is assured of social safety nets, basic social amenities and state funded social security/welfare packages, the former is subject to state neglect. The irony is that Nigeria, which was credited to have made significant progress in halving the number of poor people within its territory, is ranked among the top five poor countries in the world. According to the World Bank President, Jim Yong Kim, “an estimated one billion people across the world are still living in extreme poverty... Nigeria is currently listed among the top five countries in terms of number of poor people” (Omoh, 2014:14).

Furthermore, the Nigerian President, Goodluck Jonathan stated in his facebook page that “there are still many of our citizens living in poverty” (Nigerian Tribune Editorial, 2014:14). Therefore, regardless of the official position of the global body, the incidence of poverty is pervasive in Nigeria. As such, the United Nations Secretary General’s Zero Hunger Challenge mantra “we need to keep up our efforts until everyone can live healthy productive lives” (United Nations Secretary General, 2012) is worth heeding.

The Challenges Ahead

Indeed it is clear from the foregoing analysis that some of the challenges militating against the reduction and eradicating of the incidence of poverty in Nigeria are as follows:

- a. the challenge of improving governance through a sustained fight against corruption in the country. Over the years, widespread official corruption, misuses of public funds and outright embezzlement have become integral parts of the national psyche in Nigeria. The country has become a theatre of grand corruption with the government appearing helpless in combating it. The net effect is that Nigeria has continued to perform very poorly on Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index. In the index for 2013, Nigeria is ranked 144 with a score of 25 out of 177 countries and territories. This means, Nigeria consistently remains one of the most corrupt countries on earth. If the government continues to accommodate corruption, the prospect of achieving Goal 1 of the millennium project is a tall order.
- b. poor state of infrastructure necessary to generate the much needed jobs to reduce unemployment in Nigeria. Top on the list is electricity supply. Even with the recent privatization exercise carried out in this sector of the Nigerian economy, epileptic electricity supply remains a major threat to policy programmes of government to reduce the incidence of poverty in the country. To this effect, small, medium and large scale industries that would otherwise employ Nigerians operate below capacity. In the end, the growth potentials of the country are stifled.
- c. lack of continuity of programmes. Obviously, poverty reduction programmes in Nigeria are run on ad-hoc basis. Instead one programme flowing into another in terms of continuity and sustainability, policy intervention programmes in Nigeria are for regime identity. No matter how appropriate a programme might be, as long as it is identified with a previous administration, the succeeding one jettisons it for a new one identified with it. This tendency has a huge built-in-waste not only at the level of policy but also in the implementation process. As such, Nigeria has a disjointed approach to combating poverty.
- d. the need for external assistance in the fight against poverty in Nigeria. The country needs more external funding in order to meet the millennium Development Goals, particularly the first goal of poverty reduction. According to Iyoha et al (2014:16):

there is now a consensus that the MDGs will not be achieved without massive and substantial assistance from the rich countries... the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) estimates that the current level of external aid will need to increase by (about) US\$ 100 billion a year if the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), particularly the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger are to be met.

However, to guarantee increased official foreign assistance, the Nigerian government must put in place the enabling environment that would generate donors' confidence.

Conclusion

No doubt poverty is a scourge in Nigeria. As such, meeting the Millennium Development Goals (especially goal one) requires commitment in the formulation, implementation and actualization of policy intervention programmes by government. The challenge of militating the incidence and severity of poverty in the country is associated with serious socio-economic and political consequences.

In this study, it was discovered that successive regimes had initiated secular policy responses in the past to arrest poverty in Nigeria. Two of these programmes (the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy and the Transformation Agenda) were examined. While acknowledge the moderate success of these programmes, the paper discovered that much more would have been achieved had the Nigeria government accompanied its efforts with adequate political will. Consequently, there remain other constrains and challenges such as corruption, inadequate infrastructure, lack of continuity, external assistance, etc, that when fully tackled would make the fight against poverty in the country more meaningful. Therefore, government focus should be on how to achieve a broad based and inclusive approach that would create jobs, reduce poverty, and ensure equitable distribution of the nation's wealth in contrast to the prevailing structural inequalities in the country.

In sum, the Nigerian government needs to show more commitment to addressing the challenges raised in this paper. As we advance towards 2015, any genius efforts aimed at addressing these challenges will move the country closer to achieving the millennium Development Goals, especially Goal 1.

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