

## EVOLVING POVERTY PROFILE AND THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*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. Situating the discourse within the positive feedback and the culture of poverty framework, the paper maintains that poverty breeds poverty in Nigeria and this metamorphosed in a force of culture which is transmitted from one generation to another. This culture is further reinforced and sustained by bad governance, corruption, unemployment and impotent poverty reduction programmes. Given the rising poverty profile, the Nigerian government keyed into the Millennium Development Goals-a new global partnership to eradicate extreme poverty and its correlates poverty by 2015. It is disheartening to note that with eleven years of implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, poverty still persists. This no doubt, poses a threat to the realization of the MDGs. The paper 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.*

**Keywords:** Nigeria, poverty profile, development, goals, corruption, bad governance.

### Introduction

Nigeria is endowed with abundant human and natural resources. Despite its substantial oil wealth, it remains one of the poorest nation 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.

Disturbed by the scourge of poverty, Nigerian governments over the years have been making several efforts in trying to eradicate the menace. Some of the programmes with poverty eradication thrust are Agricultural Development Projects (ADP), River Basin Development Authority,

Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Green Revolution (GR), Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), Family Support Programme (FSP), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), National Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) (Oladeji & Abiola 1998, Ewruhjakpor C 2005, Omonzejie 2007). 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.

The Millennium Development Goals MDGs which is predicated upon the nucleus provided by the United Nations conferences of September 2000 is not only a synthetic and integrated package, it also represents a bold attempt to tackle the global development stagnation via a set of tangible quantifiable targets that are central to the actualization of sustainable development. At

the core of the Millennium Development Goals is the recognition of the relationship between sustainable poverty reduction and sustainable development (MDGs 2005).

Poverty reduction is one and first among a set of eight strategic development goals globally packaged to fast track sustainable development in all especially developing nations of the world. The onerous task of accomplishing the goals especially that of poverty reduction has captured the attention and agitated the interest of Nigeria. This growing interest and concern is envisaged, considering the global consciousness to address extreme poverty with its correlates of hunger, disease, inadequate shelter, high child and maternal mortality, high illiteracy level among others. The paper therefore highlights the rising poverty profile and the challenges of achieving the Millennium Development Goals in Nigeria.

#### **Poverty - a conceptual clarification**

Poverty is a generic concept which scholars lack a consensus on the definition. This is because poverty affects various aspects of an individual including physical, morality, knowledge, and character among others. 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. Galbraith (1969) defines poverty as 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. In a similar vein, Sen (1987) sees poverty as the lack of certain capabilities that make it difficult for them to participate with dignity.

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

difficult for the poor to attain a minimum standard of living.

There exist two types of poverty namely; absolute and relative. 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).

The universal applicability of the concept of absolute poverty is not universally acceptable. It is dismissed on the ground that a definition of poverty must relate to the standards of a particular society at a particular time (Fields, 1997). This inevitably draws us to the concept of relative poverty. Relative poverty on the other hand, is a type of poverty that exists when people though may be able to afford the basic necessities of life but are still unable to maintain an average standard of living (World Bank 1996). It should be noted that the concept of relative poverty presents its own complexities. This is because as societies develop, understanding of relative poverty must also change. As societies become more affluent, standards for relative poverty are gradually adjusted upwards (Townsend, 1979).

Apart from the typology of absolute and relative poverty, it is also categorized along five dimensions of deprivation (Oladummi, 1994).

- Personal and physical deprivation: This has to do with deprivation that is experienced in nutrition, health, literacy, disability and lack of self confidence.

- Economic deprivation: This category of deprivation comprises the lack of access to property, income, money etc. The most vital and common manifestations of poverty is denial of access to basic necessities of existence.
- Social deprivation: This kind of deprivation involves the barrier to full participation in social, political and economic life. A person who is deprived in personal and economic spheres of life may be deprived of their fundamental human rights.
- Cultural deprivation: This deprivation occurs when people are found lacking in values, beliefs, knowledge and information e.t.c. As a result of this deprivation, victims are not able to take advantage of economic and political opportunities.
- Political deprivation: this involves the lack of political voice. Those who are deprived politically suffer marginalization and are subjected to coercion through physical or economic threats.

#### **Overview of Nigeria's poverty profile**

As noted above, poverty has many dimensions of deprivation that range from physical, economic, cultural to political deprivations. The causes of this deprivation are situated within economic, situational and political factors. A combination of these deprivations is used to determine the poverty profile of a given society. In order to have a better appreciation of the poverty situation, the data on incidence of poverty by sector and zones (National Bureau of statistics is represented in table 1:1 (see Appendix I) The table shows that the poverty profile in Nigeria for a period of 24 years (1980-2004).

In looking at the incidence of poverty by sector and zones, it is observed that with a period of 16 years (between 1980 and 1996),

the total poor head count rose from 27.2 percent to 65.6 percent representing an average increase of 8.83 percent. It should be noted however, that between 1996 and 2004, there was a decline by annual average of 2.1 percent. In spite of this fluctuation, the fact remains that over 50 percent of the total population is officially poor.

The general trend of the poverty profile is that the population of people in poverty has been on the increase. In other words, as population increases, the number of people trapped in poverty also increases. The number that was 17.7 in 1980 increase to 68.7 in 2004 (see table 1:1). The geographical dimension of poverty shows that the urban poor rose from 17.2 percent in 1980 to 58.2 percent in 1996. In a period of 16 years out of the 24 years under review, the core poor in urban areas rose from 3.0 percent in 1980 to 25.2 percent in 1996 but declined to 43.2 percent in 2004.

The rural areas recorded a corresponding figure of 6.5 percent in 1980 and increased to 31.6 percent in 1996 and declined to 27.1 percent in 2004. In comparative terms, the decline in the core poor is higher in urban areas than in the rural areas. Whereas the decline in urban area was 38 percent, it was only 14 percent in the rural area. This decline is far lower than the national average of 25 percent. It should be noted also that poverty has been consistently above the national average in the three northern geopolitical zone with the north east zone recording the highest. Also whereas, other geopolitical zones recorded a decline at some time within the 16 years, it was a consistent increase of the core poor in the North central zone (see table 1.1). the poverty situation is confirmed by surveys carried out across regions and states in 2007 and beyond (UNDP 2009).

The high poverty profile in Nigeria is better appreciated with a fair knowledge of the key correlates of poverty. Three correlates of education, occupation of head of households

and household size from 1998-2004 is presented in table 1:2 (see Appendix II)

The heads of household with a post secondary school in 2004 was 26.3 as against 68.7 without any form of formal schooling. The implication of this in terms of contribution to poverty is that whereas head of household with post secondary education contributes 4:3 to poverty, those without formal schooling contribute 47.6 to poverty (see table 1:2)

The occupational distribution of the heads of household shows that over the years, the occupation of the heads of household has been predominantly farming. Apart from 1980 and 1996 when heads of household recorded highest 45.0 and 71.4 percents in administration and service industry respectively, those in agriculture dominated other years under analysis (see table 1:2). The reason for this among others is that agriculture is the main employer of labour. The National Living Standard survey of 2004 shows that heads of household whose main occupation is agriculture have the highest likelihood of being poor.

In terms of household size, a very high proportion of the population is characterized by large family size. The factor responsible for it is that majority of the people live in

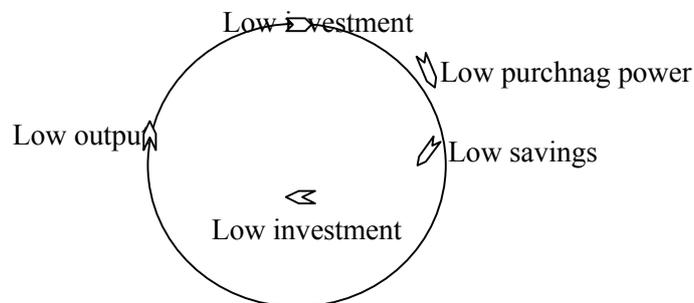
rural areas where children are perceived as assets. Secondly, the extended family and elaborate kinship ties are a major characteristic of the Nigerian family structure. A household with four and above has poverty incidence that exceeds the national average. Households of nine and above constitutes over 70 percent of poor household and over 90 percent of poor households have a size of 20 and above.

**Reflection on poverty and the MDGs**

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 (Ikhariale 2007). In spite of seemingly concerted efforts by subsequent governments to reduce poverty, Nigerians are getting poorer by the day (Okumadewa 1997, World Bank 2000, Obadan 2001, Ewurdjakpor 2005, Maduagwu 2007).

The theoretical framework that sufficiently explains the rising poverty profile in Nigeria is the feedback theory also known as the vicious cycle of poverty. The theory has it that poverty breeds poverty. The breeding process occurs through time and transmits its effects in a cyclical manner with no beginning and no end to the cycle (Moynihan 1968) the main thrust of the theory is represented in figure 1 below

Fig 1: The cyclical nature of poverty



Within the positive feedback perspective, poverty is seen as a system in which each unit reinforces the other and thus maintain the system as a whole in a cyclical manner. At the beginning of the cyclical process is low income that impact on the purchasing power and their ability save. As a result of the low savings, the propensity to invest is equally very low, thereby leading to very low output and this in turn breed low income. In this cyclical manner, poverty begets poverty.

The positive feedback system that perpetuate poverty is what the American anthropologist, Oscar Lewis refers to as the culture of poverty. Lewis (1966) argued that the culture of poverty is a response of the poor to their marginal position in a class stratified and highly individualistic society. He further stressed that the culture of poverty goes beyond a mere reaction to a situation. It takes the force of culture because its features are guides to action that are internalized by the poor and constitute a design for living that is transmitted from one generation to another.

In relating the theory to the Nigeria situation, it shows that most Nigerians are already in the poverty trap. This is explicated by the poverty correlate of the occupation of household that is predominately agriculture with large household sizes. This peculiar circumstance makes it not only difficult for them to escape from poverty but they also bequeath it to their children. Thus, a culture of poverty in which people, resign to fate is being perpetuated in the Nigerian society. The culture is being reinforced and sustained by bad leadership, corruption, unemployment, impotent poverty reduction strategies put in place by those in charge of governance.

It is disheartening to note that with eleven years of implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and four years to the deadline of 2015, the poverty profile is consistently on the increase. Unarguably, a greater proportion of the population still lives within the poverty line. This is characterized

by widespread unemployment, insufficient income, inadequate food, lack of basic health care, lack of shelter, safe drinking water, access to basic education and a host of others. This portends a fundamental challenge to the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals of eradicating poverty by 2015.

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.

### **Conclusion**

The discourse sufficiently reveals that there exists an evolutionary trajectory of poverty in Nigeria. A significant of the population still live below the poverty line. The trend shows that Nigeria over the years, has been experiencing a rising poverty profile. This unprecedented nature of poverty becomes more disturbing when view against the background of her enormous human and natural resources. Although, various regimes have responded through numerous interventionist programmes to eradicate poverty but with no desired results. In other words, the more Nigeria tries to tackle it, the more it persists.

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. 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.

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.

Appendix I

**Table 3.1: Incidence of Poverty by Sector and Zones, 2004**

		1980	1985	1992	1996	2004
<b>National</b>	Total poor	28.1	46.3	42.7	65.6	54.4
	Core poor	6.2	12.1	13.9	29.3	22.0
<b>Urban</b>	Total Poor	17.2	37.8	37.5	58.2	43.2
	Core Poor	3.0	7.5	10.7	25.2	15.7
<b>Rural</b>	Total Poor	28.3	51.4	66.0	69.3	63.3
	Core Poor	6.5	14.8	15.8	31.6	27.1
<b>South South</b>	Total Poor	13.2	45.7	40.8	58.2	35.1
	Core Poor	3.3	9.3	13.0	23.4	17.0
<b>South East</b>	Total Poor	12.9	30.4	41.0	53.5	26.7
	Core Poor	2.4	9.0	15.7	18.2	7.8
<b>South west</b>	Total Poor	13.4	38.6	43.1	60.9	43.0
	Core Poor	2.1	9.0	15.7	27.5	18.9
<b>North Central</b>	Total Poor	32.2	50.8	46.0	64.7	67.0
	Core Poor	5.7	16.4	14.8	28.0	29.8
<b>North East</b>	Total Poor	35.6	54.9	54.0	70.1	71.2
	Core Poor	11.8	16.4	18.5	34.4	27.9
<b>North West</b>	Total Poor	37.7	52.1	36.5	77.2	71.2
	Core Poor	8.3	14.2	9.0	37.3	26.8
<b>Population in Poverty (million)</b>		<b>17.7</b>	<b>34.7</b>	<b>39.2</b>	<b>67.1</b>	<b>68.7</b>

*Source: NBS, 2005. Poverty Profile for Nigeria, 1980-2004*

Appendix II

<b>Table 3.2: Dimensions of Poverty Incidence in Nigeria, 1998-2004</b>						
<b>Dimensions of Poverty Incidence: Education</b>						
	1980	1985	1992	1996	2004	Contribution to Poverty in 2004*
No schooling	30.2	51.3	46.4	72.6	68.7	47.6
Primary	21.3	40.6	43.3	54.4	48.7	4.9
Secondary	7.6	27.2	30.3	52.0	44.3	30.1
Post secondary	24.3	24.2	25.8	49.2	26.3	4.3
All Nigeria	27.2	46.3	42.7	65.6	54.4	100*
<b>Dimensions of Poverty Incidence: Occupation of Household Heads</b>						
	Poverty Head Count					
	1980	1985	1992	1996	2004	
Professional & technical	17.3	35.6	35.7	51.8	34.2	
Administration	45.0	25.3	22.3	33.5	45.3	
Clerical & Related Jobs	10.0	29.1	34.4	60.1	39.2	
Sales Workers	15.0	36.6	33.5	56.7	44.2	
Service Industry	21.3	38.0	38.2	71.4	43.0	
Agricultural & Forestry	31.5	53.5	47.9	71.0	67.0	
Production & Transport	23.2	46.6	40.8	65.8	42.5	
Manufacturing & Processing	12.4	31.7	33.2	49.4	44.2	
Others	1.5	36.8	42.8	61.2	49.1	
Students & Apprentices	15.6	40.5	41.8	52.4	41.6	
Total	27.2	46.3	42.7	65.6	54.4	
<b>Dimensions of Poverty Incidence: Household Size</b>						
No. of Persons	Poverty Head Count					
	1980	1985	1992	1996	2004	Contribution to poverty in 2004
1	0.2	9.7	2.9	13.1	12.6	0.6
2-4	8.8	19.3	19.5	51.5	39.3	19.4
5-9	30.0	50.5	45.4	74.8	57.9	58.9
10-20	51.0	71.3	66.1	88.5	73.3	20.5
20+	80.9	74.9	93.3	93.6	90.7	0.6
All Nigeria	27.2	46.3	42.7	65.6	54.4	100.0

Source: NBS.

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