

GLOBAL VISION: THE MDGS BLUE – PRINT FOR NIGERIA’S SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

World Bank rankings (Oct lies abysmally at 99th position out of 133 countries in terms of economic development. This is a sad commentary inspite of her huge human and material recourses. Even though there are skeletal improvements in agriculture, communication, health services etc, they are not sufficient to lift Nigeria out of under development quagmire. Another problem that has forestalled Nigeria’s developmental efforts is corruption. This has led to classification of Nigeria as one of the least developed countries. This paper examines in details the circumstance that have contributed to the problems and the roles of United Nations’ Millennium Developmental Goals (MDGs), Problems and prospects for Nigeria as a nation.

Historical Perspectives

Towards the threshold of the 21st century, the United Nations in partnership with developed nations of the world drew their attention towards other international communities, particularly Africa south of Sahara where majority of its citizens wallow in abject poverty .The burdens of abject poverty among the so-called Third World countries gave rise to public protests against the infirmities suffered by these group of countries. There were also protests by Non- Governmental Organizations [NGOs], inform of rallies significantly in most metropolitan cities of Europe such as Birmingham [1998], Cologne [1999] and Geneva [2001].The leaders of the so-called G8 [The eight most industrialized nations of the world] found to their chagrin that they could no longer keep quiet against global poverty meted out to those so called under-developed nations of the world.

Therefore, the hues and cries against this economic hardship and deterioration in many

social indicators in developing countries led the world into a summit on social development held in Copenhagen in march 1995.The summit enthroned poverty eradication, employment creation, enhanced expenditure on education [basic education] ,health and other social indicators of development all by the year 2015. A global review of progress in the implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration after five years in 2000,led to the Millennium Summit in New York in September 2000.At the summit ,189 heads of States, which is the largest gatherings of the world leaders in history adopted the UN Millennium Declaration committing their nations to a new global partnership in order reduce extreme poverty and setting out a series of time-bound targets, with a deadline of 2015 that have become known as the Millennium Development Goals[MDGs].The major blueprint of the MDGs were tailored towards 18 targets and 48 social indicators aimed at addressing extreme poverty in form of income poverty and hunger ,maternal and child care, the prevalence of disease, including HIV/AIDS and development aid. This declaration reaffirmed collective values, including equality, mutual respect and shared responsibility for the enjoyment of all.

The Situation of the MDGs in Nigeria

Nigeria did not borrow money from anybody in order to prosecute the civil war. By 1973 after the Arab-Israel war, Nigeria became one of the richest countries in the world because of the oil boom which later became oil doom for Nigerians. During this period, the then Nigeria’s head of state, General Yakubu Gowon was said to have boasted that “money was not the problem of Nigeria but how to spend it.” Because of squandermania, corruption and misplacement of

priorities, the economy retrogressed in 1980s. The first signs of economic retrogression became noticeable, leading the late sage, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, warning Shehu Shagari of the coming economic meltdown for Nigeria. Unfortunately Shagari through his battery of sycophant advisers dismissed Awolowo warnings as the “ranting of an old man.” By 1982, Shehu Shagari declared his infamous austerity measures which impoverished majority of Nigerians.

The military regimes worsened the situation by introducing massive corruption in the system and the economy retrogressed to the extent President Ibrahim Babangida was forced to say, “I did not know why the economy had not totally collapsed.” At the threshold of the 21st century, Nigeria had become one of the 25th poorest nations of the world together with excessive debt burden. At the same time, Nigeria still remained as the sixth largest exporter of crude oil and still at the same time, hosted the third largest number of poor people in the world. Statistics indicated that the incidence of extreme poverty using the rate of US \$1 per day increased from 28.1% in 1980 to 69.2% in 1997. Accordingly, the National Planning Commission indicated that poverty in Nigeria had decreased to 51.4%. Poverty in Nigeria is man-made simply because the nation planners lacked the skill or do not know what to do. Available indices indicated that the economic performance in the area of employment creation was dismal. Youth unemployment was at 60%, University graduates constituting 25% of total unemployment and with the formal sector only generating 7% of employment for all those labour force (Federal Ministry of Labour 2007). It is against this background that one would appreciate the hope that was placed on the achievement of MDGs in Nigeria. To attain the MDGs, the Nigerian Government embarked on economic and social reforms enunciated in form of National Economic Empowerment and

Development Strategy (NEEDS), the State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (SEEDS), the Local Government Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (LEEDS) as well as the Community Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (CEEDS), as frameworks for poverty reduction which aims at promoting wealth creation and employment. All these economic and social reforms were tailored to address.

(a) The issue of governance and service delivery at the state and local levels.

(b) Promoting coherence in implementation, this stems from proper policy planning. (c) Having value for money by minimizing wastage of resources and high cost of governance.

The NEEDS document as produced by the federal government identified several lapses in nation’s social, economic and political development. However, there is very indication that the good document involving strategic planning cannot guarantee poverty reduction. To tackle the problems, concrete actions became necessary. However, much of the MDGs have been achieved. This can be gleaned from the MDGs report of 2007 by the National Planning Commission;

The highlights of the report on the different goals were as follows;

(1) Eradication of Extreme Poverty and Hunger.

The report showed that poverty is on the decline. The proportion of population living in relative poverty reduced to 54% and 35% respectively. The percentage of underweight children was 30%. Policy reform and micro-economic stability created a platform for strategic investment in agriculture and other pro-poor sectors.

(2) Achieve Universal Basic Education.

According to National Planning Commission, enrolment in educational

institutions was success story. About 84% of school age children attend school and an increasing number stay there till primary 5. Net enrolment ratio was 84.26% as against 81.1% in 2004. However, there is need to improve the quality of teaching and schooling together with sustained political commitment to the implementations of the UBE. Literacy rate of 15- 24 year old was also said to have improved from 76.2% in 2004 to 80.20% in 2005.

(3) Promote Gender Equality

The ratio of girls to boys in education improved from 79% in 2004 to 81% in 2005, while the proportion of seats held by women in Nigeria still face inequality in political participation.

(4) Reduction in child mortality.

Reduction of child, mortality remained a key challenge to Nigeria. As against the global target of 30/1000 live births in 2005, Nigeria had 110/1000 live births in 2005. In spite of these mediocre achievements, there are still low maternal education, low coverage of immunization, inadequate Primary Healthcare (PHC) system, high incidence of poverty, inequality and poor household practices among others account for high mortality rate in Nigeria.

(5) Improved maternal Health

Maternal mortality continued to be high (800/1000 live births in 2004). It is even higher in rural areas and northern parts of the country. About 15% and 46% of urban and rural dwellers do not go for ante-natal check up. About 2 million women of reproductive age do not survive pregnancy or childbirth.

(6) Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other Diseases:

Since the identification of the first HIV/AIDS scourge in the mid 1980s, the HIV prevalence rate has continued to be on the increase from 1.8 to 5.8 percent in the period between 1991 and 2001. It declined to 4.4% in 2005. While the HIV prevalence among pregnant women aged 15-24 improved, AIDS orphans are on the increase. Malaria and T.B are still major public health problems in Nigeria. Malaria accounts for 60% of out-patients and 30% of hospital admissions.

(7) Ensure Environmental Sustainability

Nigeria is endowed with abundant environmental resources. However, high population growth rate and increase demand for these resources threaten environmental sustainability. The environmental situation is challenged by myriad of problems which impact negatively on the utilization of the resources for development and poverty alleviation. Deforestation is high (3.5% annually). Oil companies pollute water in the Niger Delta while gas flaring still remains high. Access to safe drinking water is improving while housing has reached a crisis point with only 31.1% having secured tenure.

(8) Develop a Global Partnership for Development.

The report shows that Nigeria has enjoyed the benefit of progressive partnership with international community. The debt services as a percentage of exports of goods and services improved from 7.4% in 2003 to 3.4% in 2005 and foreign private investments rose by 27% in 2005. These were indicators of improved partnership. However, access of Nigeria’s agricultural and semi-processed goods to industrial countries markets remained weak.

The sustenance of the economic and structural reforms already initiated at the federal level and widespread replication at the state level remained paramount. It is important to note that the earlier report by the National Planning Commission in 2004 remained Nigeria's first report on the MDGs state of information. This available information showed that it is unlikely that Nigeria will meet most of the goals by the magic year of 2015, especially the goals related in eradicating extreme poverty, hunger reduction, child and maternal mortality and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other disease such as leprosy and tuberculosis. The 2004 report stated that if the current trends continued, it will be difficult for Nigeria to achieve the MDGs target by 2015.

The 2007 report showed that Nigeria has only the "potential to achieve some of the goals, especially those related to achieving universal primary education, combating HIV/AIDS, ensuring environment sustainability and developing global partnership for development ahead of target time. However, according to World Bank report of September, 2008 (<http://web/worldbank.org>) report on the progress on the MDGs, there is a mixed picture of significant progress and for mixable challenges. Although the first MDGs which called for reducing extreme poverty is likely to be met at global level, there are serious shortfalls in fighting hunger. On the current trends, the human development MDGs are unlikely to be met, as the world Bank report showed, when compared to other regions of the world. Sub-Saharan Africa lags behind in all MDGs, including poverty reduction, though many countries in the region are now experiencing improved growth (www.worldbank.org).

It is against this background that Nigerians need to commend the federal government for the economic reforms that have contributed to the micro-growth in the country. Also the states need to be commended for their attempt towards achieving MDGs.

Challenges to the Achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Nigeria 2000-2009.

[a] Lack of Holistic Conceptualization of Poverty

It is highly impossible for the MDGs to tackle the problems through the framework for the alleviation of material poverty. Material poverty may be difficult to eradicate in Nigeria unless the powers that be embrace the idea mental revolution. Lack of it by affluent Nigerians gives birth to unjust social and economic structures. The structures of inequality and exploitation of the masses in favour of the rich have sustained longstanding social and economic system where the wealthy class continues to live by the toils and sweat of the majority of Nigerians. The quest for material well-being through corrupt practices, misapplication and misappropriation of public funds together with near-neglect of rural folks can not reduce poverty in Nigeria unless the leadership re-define the system through organized mental revolution, not the present re-branding campaign of the federal government..

Because the Nigerian leaders are in the habit of grabbing everything to themselves and neglecting majority of the people, the semi-educated and well educated but poor to embark on civil violence, kidnapping, and high profile robbery. Poverty can not be eradicated unless the leaders evolve a policy that will see all Nigerians as citizens with equal opportunities in respect to appointments and employment. Presently, only Nigerians with green or red signatures are employable while same leaders tell the ordinary

people of ‘embargo’ on employment. Nigerian leaders need to restore the concept of personhood and egalitarianism where every qualified person have equal opportunity in the scheme of things.

[b] Bad Governance

Good governance in the country is the ability of putting in place necessary mechanism for translating the much talked about macro-economic growth into improved quality of life for the majority of Nigerians in the area of job creation, education, employment, security, healthy environment, and access to good water, electricity and health among others. The prospects for the success in achieving the MDGs depend to a large extent, on the practice of good governance. A lot need to be done at all levels of governance in the challenges of transparency, accountability and responsive governance. Nigerian leaders and opinion moulders need a lot of work to do in order to enthrone the rule of law and sustain the fight against corruption in government and the organized private sector.

The success of any government is determined by whether or not it promotes human dignity and the quality of life to the human person, especially the poor and the vulnerable groups. When a government is irresponsible, especially to the hues and cries of majority, it usually leads to massive crime, unrest and lack of trust on the part of government as currently experienced in the Nigerian society. Another good example was the military years of self-styled President ,Ibrahim Babangida who introduced Structural Adjustment Programme(SAP),when the International Monetary Fund(IMF)and World Bank demanded that for Nigeria to qualify and benefit from their loan, must cut down on public spending on infrastructure, education, agriculture, health and housing among other government responsibility. Nigeria’s military government agreed to this demand and the result was the introduction of

massive corrupt practices, armed robberies, prostitutions, human trafficking, incessant strikes, brain drain and many other social vices.

[C] Neo-Colonial Tendencies

Neo- colonialism is imperialism in disguise. Through their agencies, the Paris and London clubs and the Multi-National Companies [MNC] try as much as possible to offer help that are not rooted or shaped in local context .In their so-called quest for assistant to developing nations, they tend to skew the work of local organizations towards their preferred agenda, simply by funding only those concerns that can be of interest to them. Through this means, subtle cultural imperialism has been introduced in most developing countries, particularly in Africa. Their assumption always is the belief that their ‘civilization’ should be applied to other cultures with the same degree of usefulness and success .Nigeria’s government should understand that true development can only come if the masses by themselves are mobilized by their own decisions and by their productivity as was the case in Russia, China, Japan, India, Korea and Indonesia. Therefore, government solidarity with the masses should aim at empowering the people in the process of development. It should not be seen in form of government paternalism that attempt to treat those in need of help as minors.

Presently, the Nigerian government in their so called drive to eradicate poverty may not succeed because it is based on false assumption of western idiosyncracy. The western drive to eradicate poverty in most developing societies had only succeeded in creation of inequality which allow the elite perpetual privilege to corner much of state resources thereby, leaving majority of the people to suffer what they must.

[D] International Debt Burden

The so called debt relief provided by the Paris Club to Nigeria, in 2006were said to have

made significant changes in Nigeria. According to Senior Special Assistant to former President Umaru Yar'adua, Mrs. Hajiya Amina J. Ibrahim [2007], Nigeria now saves \$1bn with \$750m accruing to the federal government and \$250m to the states affected by the relief. She went further to announce to the College of Secretaries of State Governments meeting at Obudu Cattle Ranch that in 2006 alone, 145,000 teachers were given in-service training and 40,000 teachers were offered jobs nationwide. According to her, 166 new primary health centres were built and another 207 rehabilitated across the country. 79,000 doses of anti retro-viral drugs were provided to HIV/AIDS patients and 1049 rural electrification projects accomplished. She concluded by urging the federal government to continually press the World Bank to grant Nigeria more relief from the outstanding debts. It is not a secret that Nigeria as a poor country in spite of human and material resources including petroleum products spends in debt servicing more than the aids she receives from developed nations, yet Nigeria continues to press further for more financial aids.

[E] Lack of Justice and Fairness in International Trade

According to United Nations' Human Development Indices [2002], the great inequality between the rich and poor nations of the world showed a remarkable difference. 5% of the rich nations enjoy an income 114 times better than those of the poorest 5%. This situation is aggravated by the so-called 'free market economy' that is driven by capital which the poor could not afford. This is the main reason Todaro and Smith [2003:544], wrote that 'it is fair to claim that the principal benefits of world trade have been accrued disproportionately to rich nations'. This means that the rich nations have shaped the pattern of international trade for their own economic benefit. According to Rodney [1980], the most affected countries were

in Africa because they were made to produce what they can not consume and consumed what they could not produce. Not only that: imperialist nations manipulated the international trade by imposing restrictive tariffs and import quotas to keep out many goods. During the era of colonialism, Africans were asked to embark on cash crop farming for sole use by metropolitan industries. European merchants created marketing boards in order to regulate prices of these commodities. The main purpose was to encourage farmers to produce more and more thereby forcing glut in international market which made it possible for them to purchase the commodities at cheaper prices. The World Bank [2003] report indicated that the tariffs' high income countries charges from developing countries were four times as high as tariffs charged on imports from respective high income countries [p.329]. This state of affairs became more worrisome when western countries could afford to subsidize their own farmers. According to Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO:2002) subsidies to farmers in rich nations in 2002 alone amounted to \$235bn which represented 30 times the amount the rich nations give as aids for agricultural development to poor countries [FAO: 2003:21]. Today, Nigeria still ranked 20th in the global index of hunger. Continuing the tariff barriers by placing quota, the poor nations would continue to deny their nationals of high income and jobs and losses of revenues which may accrue to them by increased exports.

Conclusion

On the 11th of July 2009, the president of United States of America, Barack Obama addressed the Ghanaian Parliament. He urged the African youths to hold their leaders responsible for African woes. He blamed the leadership for Africa's economic and social woes on corruption and embezzlement of public funds by African leaders. He urged African leaders to uphold the

art of good governance. In the struggles to reduce poverty in Nigerian society, the leadership must tackle the problems of poor governance, corruption in high places and the unfair system of doing things that has reduced 75% of Nigerians into hardship and untold misery in spite of abundant human and material resources .

The eight Millennium Development Goals[MDGs] demonstrate the fact that United Nations have a good vision of creating peaceful world through the proportion of developing human dignity ,fundamental human rights together with eradication of diseases ,poverty, squalid living through basic education. However, the trajectories from developed nations tend to make it absolutely difficult to achieve. Pessimism is even greater because when one adds the indicators together, including lack of leadership qualities among Africans and their lack of moral rectitude in form of corruption and general malfeasances in high and low places, the target year of 2015 set by United Nations may be extended to 2050.

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