

# YOUTH AND THE ATTAINMENT OF THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS: IMPLICATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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## **Abstract**

*Young people ages 15 to 24 are 1.2 billion of the world's human capital. Around the world, many of them are already making contributions to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and their work should be further acknowledged and strengthened. Increasingly, youth are recognized as key participants in decision-making and development. Yet building the capacity of and creating sustained partnerships with young people are crucial strategies to achieving the MDGs that have not been fully realized by the international community. This paper aims to provide an overview of the ways in which youth are directly involved and affected by each Goal.*

**Key words:** Youth, Millennium Development Goals, Attainment, Sustainable development, Implication.

Young people's contributions to their communities and nations are not entirely understood or maximized. Youths are making a difference as activists, as leaders in community development, and by their recorded levels of volunteerism. In many parts of the world, they may be perceived as apathetic or disengaged, but this is largely inaccurate. Worldwide, youth are bypassing traditional forms of political participation (i.e. voting) through their activism and volunteering. However, the global youth movement is characterized by fragmentation, resulting in isolated actions that do not

reach their full potential, often due to lack of resources, access to knowledge and information, and institutional barriers. Without the guidance, understanding, support, and recognition of government leaders and other decision-makers, young leaders are often unequipped to fully participate in the decisions that are affecting their lives. Young leaders represent hope for the future, and have the greatest potential to push for the realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015, established by the United Nations (UNs).

### **Youth Policy**

Over the past decades, a number of countries have initiated the design and implementation of national policies and strategies focused on youth. However, most countries do not have specific structures in place for effective youth participation, neither have they successfully managed to mainstream youth concerns, as the issues relating to young people fall across a variety of policy areas such as education, health or juvenile delinquency. Despite youth constituting more than 50% of the population in many countries (United Nations, 2005), governments rarely consult young people on matters affecting their lives (Oyebade, 2001), such as poverty reduction strategy efforts. Even those governments that have developed legislation on youth issues often lack comprehensive and holistic approaches to challenges faced by younger generation. A progressive national youth policy obliges traditional decision-makers to not only work for young people, but with them in order to let their experiences inform the development of appropriate interventions and services. There is need to share experience and produce tools to assist government in addressing youth issues systematically. Given the wide diversity of political cultures and systems, countries must establish their own priorities and mechanisms in order to create an effective youth policy that is both authentic and relevant. The formulation of a national youth policy should not be a top-down process and should involve wide variety of social actors.

### **The Role of Youth in Addressing the Challenges of Attaining the Sustainable Development**

Many national youth councils and regional platforms already exist. Some of their functions are to:

- Act as a platform and umbrella for other youth organizations
- Facilitate young peoples' participation in local elections
- Liaise with local officials
- Share information among members and member organizations
- Organize local/national gatherings of young people
- Link regional Centers
- Host local workshops for youth
- Work on specific issues like habitat or the environment

### **Development as a Paradigm**

The problem of development has occupied the attention of scholars, activists, politicians, development workers and international organizations for many years with an increased tempo in the last decade. Even though there are different perspectives to development, there is a general consensus that development will lead to good change manifested in increased capacity of people to have control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology; and obtain physical necessities of life (food, clothing and shelter), employment, equality, sustainable development and peace. This is why some people have argued that the purpose of development is to improve people's lives by expanding their choices, freedom and dignity. However, the reality of the world is that many countries are underdeveloped with precarious development indices. More than 1.2 billion people or about 20 percent of world population live and survive on less than US \$1 per day in 2010 (United Nations, 2014). Wealth is concentrated on the hand of a few people. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in its 1998 report documented that the three richest people in the world have assets that exceed the combined Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of 48 least developed countries.

Nigeria, which was one of the richest 50 countries in the early 1970s, has retrogressed to become one of the 25 poorest countries at the threshold of the twenty first century. It is ironic that Nigeria is the sixth largest exporter of oil and at the same time host the third largest number of poor people after China and India. Statistics show that the incidence of poverty using the rate of US \$1 per day increased from 28.1 percent in 1980 to 46.3 percent in 1995 and increased again to 65.6 percent in 1996. The incidence increased to 69.2 percent in 1997. The 2004 report by the National Planning Commission indicates that poverty has decreased to 54.4 percent. The average annual percentage growth of GDP in Nigeria from 1990-2000 was 2.4. Recent development has shown that in 2014, Nigerian GDP rose above that of all African countries to 89 percent. This development is very encouraging, but the problem still remains that poverty in Nigeria is still in the midst of plenty. Nigeria is among the 20 countries in the world with the widest gap between the rich and the poor. The Gini index measures the extent to which the distribution of income (or in some cases consumption expenditure) among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. A Gini index of zero represents perfect equality while an index of 100 implies perfect inequality. Nigeria has one of the highest Gini index in the world. The Gini index for Nigeria is 50.6 (UNDP, 2003 2005).

### **Millennium Development Goals**

In September 2000, 189 world leaders met at the Millennium Summit and committed themselves and their countries to eight goals known as Millennium

Development Goals (MDGs) aimed at meeting the needs of the world's poorest people (United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO), 2005). These goals resulted from deliberations on how to make significant, measurable improvements to people's lives, with the ultimate objective of reducing poverty throughout the world. The eight goals, which are to be met in partnership with the world's leading development institutions by the target date of 2015 are to: eradicate extreme hunger and poverty; reduce child mortality; improve maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability; and, develop a global partnership for development. For each of these goals, the world leaders established yardsticks for measuring results, not just for the developing countries but also for the developed countries that assist in providing the funds for development programmes, and for the multilateral institutions that help countries implement them (UNDP, 2005). The Goals are listed below:

**Goal 1:** Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

**Target 1:** Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day.

**Target 2:** Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

**Goal 2:** Achieve universal primary education.

**Target 3:** Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

**Goal 3:** Promote gender equality and empower women.

**Target 4:** Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and to all levels of education no later than 2015.

**Goal 4:** Reduce child mortality.

**Target 5:** Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate.

**Goal 5:** Improve maternal health.

**Target 6:** Reduce by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio.

**Goal 6:** Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

**Target 7:** Halve by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS.

**Target 8:** Halve by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.

**Goal 7:** Ensure environmental sustainability.

**Target 9:** Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources.

**Target 10:** Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water.

**Target 11:** By 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.

**Goal 8:** Develop a global partnership for development.

**Target 12:** Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system.

**Target 13:** Address the special needs of the least developed countries.

**Target 14:** Address the special needs of landlocked countries and small island developing states.

**Target 15:** Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries through national and international measures in order to make debt sustainable in the long term.

**Target 16:** In co-operation with developing countries, develop and implement strategies for decent and productive work for youth.

**Target 17:** In co-operation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable, essential drugs in developing countries.

**Target 18:** In co-operation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications.

Source: Vesque, 2000.

### **The Situation in Nigeria**

The situation of MDG in Nigeria can be seen from two main sources: the Nigeria MDG report 2007 and the Nigeria MDG report 2013. It can also be assessed from MDG office, especially the Debt Relief Gains as provided in the 2006 annual budget. The 2004 report which was Nigeria's first report of the MDGs states that based on available information, it is unlikely that the country will be able to meet most of the goals by 2015 especially the goals related to eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, reducing child and maternal mortality and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. It further states that for most of the other goals (i.e apart from goal 1) up-to-date data exists which shows that if the current trend continues, it will be difficult for the country to achieve the MDG targets by 2015.

The Nigeria Millennium Development Goals 2007 and 2013 annual reports addressed the eight MDGs, highlights the status and trend of each of the MDGs, the challenges and opportunities in attaining the goal. The report concluded that there are high potential to some of the Millennium Development Targets namely:

- Achieving universal primary education
- Ensuring environmental stability
- Developing a global partnership for development

Given the current policy environment and strong political will, there is also the likelihood of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. However, based on available information, there is the need for sustained efforts to ensure that the country meets the following goals by year 2015:

- Achieving gender equality and women empowerment
- Reducing child mortality
- Improving maternal health, and
- Combating HIV/AIDs, malaria and other diseases.

The conclusion of the MDG 2007 and 2013 report is very remarkable and gives hope that there is possibility of achieving all the MDGs in Nigeria with sustained effort. This conclusion is quite different from the conclusions reached by the first report in 2004. It is intriguing that without providing the basis and reason for the dramatic change, the 2007 and 2013 states that there is high potential to achieving 3 of the goals (Goals 2, 7 and 8) likelihood to achieve one with strong political will (Goal 1) and the need for sustained efforts to ensure that the country meets the remaining four goals (Goals 3, 4, 5 and 6). The details of current situation in Nigeria as captured by UNDP (2007) MDGs report and Vintagesam (2013) performance review of MDGs in Nigeria, each of the goals is shown below:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger (2015 target – Halve proportion of people living on less than \$1 a day, and those suffering hunger): The current rate of reduction in poverty is still slow to meet the targets set for 2015. 69% of the populace still live in abject poverty and as the day goes by, the gap between the poor and rich keeps widening. The growth in the economy has not generated adequate employment, majority of Nigerian youth are either unemployed or underemployed. However, recent economic growth in agriculture has reduced the proportion of underweight children from 35.7 per cent in 1990 to 23.1 per cent in 2008.
2. Achieving Universal Basic Education (2015 target- Achieve universal primary completion): State primary completion rates presently range from 2 per cent to 99 per cent. Nearly nine out of ten eligible children, 88.8 per cent are now enrolled in school. Literacy level in the country has steadily and gradually deteriorated, especially within the 15-24 years group. There is rapid improvement in youth literacy, from 64.1 per cent between 2000 and 2008. However, regional differences are stark, progress need to be accelerated in the north of the country. Also, the disadvantaged groups are still excluded and the quality of education remains very poor. Massive actions still need to be done in teacher education to improve the quality of teaching and the development of infrastructure.

3. Promote Gender Equality (2005/2015 target- Eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education enrolment by 2015, and achieve equity at all levels by 2015. Improvement has been made in gender parity in Nigeria. For every ten boys, there are nine girls and also female economic and political empowerment is on the rise; there is gradual gains in parliamentary representation for women, this need to be greatly expanded in future elections. However, there is urgent need to address cultural barriers in the north of the country and provide economic incentives for boys to attend school in the south-east.
4. Reduce Child Mortality (2015 target – Reduce by two thirds the child mortality rate): There is progress in reducing child mortality. Under-five mortality has fallen from 201 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2003, to 157 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2008. Infant mortality also shows significant reduction from 100 per 1,000 live births in 2003 to 75 deaths per 1,000 in 2008. The proportion of children immunized against measles by 12 months of age increased from 31.4 per cent in 2003 to 41.1 per cent in 2008.
5. Improve Maternal Health (2015 target – Reduce by three quarters the proportion of women dying in childbirth): Success in this goal has been slow and poses greater challenge to women existence. However, maternal mortality fell from 800 deaths per 100,000 births in 2003 to 545 deaths per 100,000 births in 2008. Reproductive health through the use of contraceptive is at the rate of 4%. The slow pace in this goal is as a result of poor facilities and half baked doctors and nurses.
6. Combat AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases (2015 target – Halt and begin to reverse the incidence of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other major diseases): The prevalence of HIV/AIDS among pregnant women aged 15-24 dropped from 5.8 per cent in 2001 to 4.2 per cent in 2008. Nigeria has made success in almost eradicating polio, reducing the number of cases by 98 per cent between 2009 and 2010. There has been remarkable decrease in malaria prevalence rates. The percentage of children sleeping under insecticide-treated mosquito net rose from 2.2% in 2003 to 5.5% in 2008 and 10.9% in 2009. Similarly, progress has been made with tuberculosis.
7. Ensure Environmental Sustainability (Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environment resources – 2015 target- reduce by half the proportion of people without access to clean drinking water and basic sanitation. Some of Nigeria’s natural resources which are part of valuable national assets are seriously threatened. For example, between 2002 and 2010, the area of forest shrank from 14.4 per cent to 9.9 per cent of land area. Access to safe water and sanitation has not improved significantly including other environmental challenges such as

erosion, coastal flooding and climate change. Example is the incidence of last year's devastating flood which nearly gulped the entire country.

8. Develop a Global Partnership for Development (Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources. 2015 target – reduce by half the proportion of people without access to clean drinking water and basic sanitation. By 2020 achieve a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers): Nigeria debt relief in 2005 reduced debt servicing from 15.2 per cent of exports in 2005 to 0.5 per cent in 2008. This provided new opportunities for investment in the social sector. However, the benefits of debt relief have not been matched by an increase in aid: trade and access to markets remain unequal.

A review of the Nigeria Millennium Development Goals 2007 report revealed a number of problems. The review shall be focused on only three of them. First, there is the challenge of accurate, reliable, credible and believable statistics.

The attainment of these goals has been a challenge to the nations of the world and significant progress has been recorded worldwide (United Nations, 2014). The progress made has, however, not been uniform across the world, or with respect to specific goals. It has been observed that Sub-Saharan African countries are lagging well behind. These countries still have continuing food security, rising extreme poverty, high child and maternal mortality and a large number of people are still living in slums. The federal government of Nigeria faces the challenge of meeting the MDGs, and believes (rightly) that the attainment of the goals will be put in jeopardy as long as the human and material resources of the country remain untapped. One of the strategies adopted by the country in her multi-pronged approach towards attaining these goals and meeting the needs of people is the empowerment of people through education.

## **Youth and Millennium Development Goals**

### **Goal 1: Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger**

**Target 1:** Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day

**Target 2:** Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger Poverty affects young people in a striking and personal manner. A young girl in Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, living in extreme poverty cannot attend school because she needs to fetch water for her family. For this girl, poverty cuts across all needs; even if water is available, her family of six does not have the US \$5 per month necessary to pay for her school fees. Further still, if her family could afford to pay, she may only have the option of reaching the fifth grade.



Young people living in poverty lack access to opportunities for economic growth. A young person in Nigeria may grow up with a strong family support system and enough food to eat, but might never find decent work because of weak local economy. It must be stressed that the effects of “poverty of opportunity” are felt in various sectors such as health, education, housing and personal safety. Poverty threatens social stability to the point of war. Youth in conflict and post conflict zones are more likely to be poor and without access to school, decent employment or public services. Young people are integral to addressing the issues of extreme poverty and hunger. They can assist with providing fresh ideas when crafting development policies. Policy makers and development specialists should enact paradigm shift in the way they shape poverty reduction efforts and fully engage young people to avoid the perpetuation of poverty and hunger in villages and cities around the globe.

## **Goal 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education**

**Target 3:** Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

The World Declaration on Education for All, Article 1, paragraph 1 states “Every person - child, youth and adult - shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs. These needs comprise both essential learning tools and the basic learning content, required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning.

Ensuring primary education for all people is the key to unlocking the potential of all societies. Education enables people to take care of themselves and their families, to take control of their futures, and most importantly, to raise themselves out of poverty. Furthermore, achieving target 3 of the MDGs will help achieve targets for other MDGs; it will combat poverty, promote gender equality, create awareness of HIV/AIDS and maternal health, and promote environmental sustainability.

## **Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women**

**Target 4:** Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and to all levels of education not later than 2015.

Despite progress towards achieving gender equality, women are still not given the same protections, rights and roles as men and are denied opportunities for employment and education. Traditional practices, attitudes, and roles, in addition to religious and economic beliefs, result in unequal power relations, which may not be

recognized as discrimination. Poverty is the biggest impediment to gender equality. In developing countries girls are often expected to remain at home to care for younger siblings and the household. Often it is the boys who go to school as it is assumed that they can earn more money. Beyond education, a lower status of women is perpetuated by economic, legal, and political policies. Young women grow up in a world of wage disparities, unequal protection and inequitable laws such as those that deny the right of inheritance. There also exists a social misperception that women's work has no economic value since the majority of women's work occurs in the non-wage economy. Young women need the encouragement, mentorship and training to enter non-traditional roles to grow up and become leaders of society. Gender inequality is deeply rooted in culture in both the developed and developing world, but young people can be powerful agents of change. Young people recognize that it is extremely important not to impose western values of gender equality, but rather to empower women to help each other and themselves, and to identify their community needs.

### **Goal 5: Improve Maternal Health**

**Target 6:** Reduce by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio.

Maternal death and unsafe motherhood primarily result from lack of comprehensive reproductive and sexual education and health services, circumstances connected to diseases such as malaria and AIDS, complications during birth, and unsafe abortions. Pregnancy is the leading cause of death for girls aged 15-19 in the developing world, with maternal mortality twice as high for women aged 15-19 than women aged 20-29. For both biological and social reasons, young mothers are a vulnerable group. Gender-based violence, particularly domestic violence, trafficking, rape, economically coerced sex and sexual harassment, among other forms of violence, affect the health of young mothers all over the world.

In most of Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, one in three girls are married by their mid- to late- teenage years, while in most countries, only 2-3% of men are married this young. Early (adolescent) marriage reduces girls' educational opportunities, starts them on a path toward early childbearing with resulting health risks (including mortality), and often locks them into unequal relationships with much older men. Further, adolescents in highly dependent circumstances are subject to higher rates of abuse.

As the UN Millennium Project Taskforce on Goal 4 articulated in their interim report, there exist the technology and specific health interventions to prevent the majority of conditions that kill women of reproductive age and to enable all people to protect and promote their health. In that sense, the challenge is not a question of

medical technology but of implementation and ensuring access to these technologies through development. This challenge is social, economic, cultural and unavoidably political, in the sense that it relates to the distribution of power and resources within and between countries, as well as their laws and traditional practices.

Youth should be actively involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of development activities that have a direct impact on their daily lives. This is especially important with respect to information, education and communication activities and services concerning reproductive and sexual health, including the prevention of early pregnancies, safe sex education and the prevention of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

**Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other Diseases**

**Target 7:** Halve by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS

**Target 8:** Halve by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases

The HIV/AIDS epidemic is having a devastating effect on the lives of young people. Young people between ages 15 and 24 account for more than half of all new cases. Increasingly, young girls are the most susceptible to infection as a result of biological, cultural and socio-economic factors. It is estimated that in 2001, 7.3 million young women and 4.5 million young men were living with HIV/AIDS, and that every day 6,000 young people become infected with the virus. Young African women aged 15-24 are three times more likely to be infected than are their male counterparts (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 2004). AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria combined kill over 6 million people each year, and the numbers are growing. About 800,000 children under the age of five die from malaria every year, making this disease one of the major causes of infant and juvenile mortality. In Africa, malaria takes the lives of more children than HIV/AIDS.

**Goal 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability**

**Target 9:** Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources

**Target 10:** Halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water

**Target 11:** By 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers Historically, rapid economic development has resulted in extreme environmental consequences. To achieve the other seven MDGs, national and regional development planning must adhere to the principles of sustainable ecosystem management. Without the earth's terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems there

would be no food and no life. As freshwater becomes scarce and air quality deteriorates, natural resources have become a source of conflict. While biological systems and biodiversity continue to decline, young people face an uncertain future. Special emphasis should be placed on the involvement of city and local government authorities in engaging and supporting young people to achieve the MDGs at the local level. Priorities for Local Authorities should include the creation of local youth councils to provide input to decision-making, the provision of physical meeting spaces for young people to gather and coordinate projects, support for youth artistic and cultural expression, promotion of sport for development and peace and access to Information and Communications Technologies. The establishment of City-to-City development partnerships with an emphasis on youth should be encouraged.

### **Conclusion**

This paper provides an overview of youth participation as it currently exists outlines ways in which youth are directly involved and affected by each goal, demonstrates the ways in which young people are contributing to the MDGs, and provides recommendations which governments, the United Nations, donors and other actors can harness, support and scale-up in order to enable young people to make a more significant contribution to meeting the MDGs. These recommendations ginger youth activities that can contribute to the achievement of the MDGs and the enabling environments necessary for youth to be active contributors to achieving the MDGs.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the discuss, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government should create youth development indexes and trend monitoring schemes that are aligned to the MDGs and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs)/Country Assisted Strategies (CAS). Such studies should include the UNDP 2006 Human Development Report and the 2007 World Development Report of the World Bank devoted to youth development.
2. Expand sex-disaggregated and age-based research, both qualitative and quantitative, on youth poverty at both national and regional levels.
3. Government should create mechanisms that ensure young people are involved in the development of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and Country Assisted Strategies (CAS) through National Youth Councils or other forums for youth representation. This will ensure that youth perspectives are heard and that PRSPs are relevant to local concerns.
4. A series of nationally-focused youth campaigns should be catalyzed around the world, led largely by young people themselves. The objectives of these campaigns should be to raise awareness about the MDGs, provide space for youth to express their views and share experiences related to MDG issues,

- enable young people to interact with their national leaders, and facilitate networking between youth groups to crystallize new projects. The campaigns would include several elements including school-based outreach, national conferences, local workshops, media activities including phone-in radio programs and televised debates, essay and expression contests.
5. Provide funding so that youth from developing countries can attend and participate in UN environmental processes. Governments, inter-governmental agencies and youth organizations to develop partnerships of joint environmental initiatives aimed at building capacity in young people at the National level.
  6. Build and support global networks amongst youth organizations promoting sustainable development. Foster partnerships opportunities with youth organizations and international agencies to develop local and national projects.

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