PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES OF THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGs) IN AFRICA: NIGERIA IN FOCUS

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Abstract

This paper explores the progress and challenges of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. Poverty reduction over the years has been of great concern and challenge to every government world over. There has been growing abject poverty in a world of growing material plenty. The Millennium Development Goals grew out of the various agreements and resolutions of world organizations in the past decade aimed at addressing the ever-growing poverty among the populace especially in developing countries. The Millennium Declaration has created a new focus for addressing the issue of poverty that undermines the international community's commitment to act with a renewed vigour or sense of urgency in achieving a specific benchmark within a given time frame. This has led to the formulation and acceptance of the Millennium Development Goals to be achieved by 2015.

Introduction

During the United Nations Millennium Summit held in September 2000, world leaders placed development at the heart of the global agenda by adopting the Millennium Declaration and a set of accompanying Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which set clear targets for reducing poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation, and discrimination against women by 2015.

Consequently, the debate has shifted from the mere scaling-up of aids to the more complex issue of its quality and impact. Also of importance is the limited capacity of many developing countries to benefit from the trade and direct foreign investment that will make their economies grow. Thus MDGs is both an opportunity and a challenge.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) originated from a series of UN resolutions and agreements made at the world conference held over the past decade, the goals were put forward with recognition that, while substantial improvements in living conditions have occurred in many countries, performances have been uneven and painfully slow in much of the developing world. The problem of faltering social progress is especially acute in Africa, in contrast to other regions that have witnessed more sustained improvements in living standards. Furthermore, in the light of the weak and often unstable macroeconomic performances in much of the Sub-Saharan Africa coupled with the prospects of continued civil conflicts and vulnerability to negative shocks due to weather and related natural events, and the fact that fertility rates and population growth outpace other regions, realizing the MDGs in the years ahead will be a difficult and challenging task for Africa and especially Nigeria.

Nigeria, a country in sub-Saharan Africa with current high poverty incidence remains an aberration given the country's abundant natural and human resources. The country is endowed with both material and human resource that disqualify her from the club of the poor. Thus, it is often said that "Nigeria is so rich not to be poor, but so poor not to be rich". The poor state of Nigeria is said to be emanating from past lackluster political leadership, economic mismanagement, corruption, poor social infrastructures, ethnic conflicts, insecurity and other social vices.

Although global wealth, technological capabilities, and linkages have improved greatly during the last fifty years, the wealth is however, unequally distributed thus creating major gaps regionally and nationally. For instance, the gap between the 20 richest and 20 poorest nations has doubled in the last forty years (World Bank, 2001). Out of the 6 billion people in the world, 2.8 billion live on less than 2 dollars and 1.2 billion live on less than 1 dollar per day. As far as regional manifestation of poverty is concerned, 28.0% of the poor live in South East Asia, 17.3% in sub-Saharan Africa, 17.2% in East Asia and Pacific, 35% in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2.0% in Europe and Central Asia and 0.5% in Middle East and North Africa (World Bank, 2001).

It is in recognition of the above that this paper is divided into five sections, section one has looked at the introduction, section two takes care of the Millennium Development Goals, the role of development actors and MDGs compliance by member countries and other development actors.
section three looks at performance per goal, section four takes care of the prospects of attainment of MDGs in Africa and challenges facing African continent in meeting the MDGs and section five takes care of the conclusion and recommendations.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)
All the 191 United Nations members states have pledged to meet by 2015, the eight MDGs as stated below:

• Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger: to reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day and to reduce by half people who suffer from hunger.
• Achieve universal primary education: ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling.
• Promote gender equality and empower women: eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015.
• Reduce child mortality: reduce by two thirds the mortality rate among children under five.
• Improve maternal health: reduce by three quarters the maternal mortality rate.
• Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases: halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS. Halt and begin to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.
• Ensure environmental sustainability: Through a significant improvement in lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020.
• Develop a global partnership for development.

1. Develop further an open trading and financial system that is rule-based, predictable and non-discriminatory.
2. Address the least developed countries’ special needs which include tariff and quota-free access for the exports: enhanced debt relief for heavily indebted countries: cancellation of official bilateral debt; and more generous official development assistance for countries committed to poverty reduction.
3. Address the special needs of landlocked and small island developing states.
4. Deal comprehensively with developing countries’ debt problems through national and international measures to make debt sustainable in the long term.
5. In-cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries.
6. In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies - especially information and communications technologies.

It is essential to note that the benchmarks for the attainment of MDGs are based on the figures of 1990. Both goals one and eight are important because other goals address an aspect of poverty and are mutually reinforcing while partnership is equally crucial in harnessing resources and technologies as well as ensuring collaborative endeavours.

The Role of Development Actors
In order to achieve the above goals, roles and responsibilities are assigned to various development actors which in a nutshell are the following:

1. **Developed Countries:**
   - Ensure that their macroeconomic policies contribute to stability and growth in the world economy through for example, curbing inflation, fiscal policies/taxation, monetary policies etc.
   - Increased support in the area of trade policy and development by opening up market, removal of subsidies, increasing levels bilateral aid-financial support to developing countries.

2. **Developing Countries: that the developing countries:**
   - Fully understand a development agenda, lead and own it, thus the developing countries must own and be the driving force for MDGs to succeed.
• Put in place the enabling environment for achieving the MDGs through adoption and implementation of appropriate policies that lead to achievement of pro-poor economic growth, private sector investment, and empowerment of the poor.
• Develop and implement policies for enabling economic climate e.g. sound macroeconomic policies, policies to enhance investors’ confidence, appropriate trade policies, good governance and appropriate financial physical infrastructure.
• Investing in the poor by giving access to key public services, and ensuring social inclusion.

3. **Multilateral Institutions:**
• Monitoring the progress made by states towards the achievement of MDGs led by UN which is supported by a research and advocacy.
• UN team led by UNDP supports respective countries with monitoring progress.
• MDG reports are produced to create awareness, promote study and debate around the great development challenges.
• MDG reports build on common country assessments, poverty reduction strategy papers/national human development reports.

It was expected that each country will by the end of 2004, have produced at least one timely report to the Secretary General UN. So far many have not submitted.

4. **The World Bank, IMF and Regional Development Banks:**

The multilateral financial institutions including regional banks are mandated to engage in policy dialogue with respective countries and report to their boards progress.

5. **The International Donor Community:**
• Provide the financing needed to achieve MDGs about 40 to 60 billion dollars is required in order to realize MDG goals.

6. **The Poor:**
• To assume centre stage in the design and implementation and monitoring of poverty reduction strategies.

7. **Civil Society and Faith Based Organizations:**
• There is very little mention of the role of these critical actors in MDGs except general recognition.

**MDGs Compliance by Member Countries and Other Development Actors**

An effort is hereby made to determine how far the various actors have come in terms of performance and commitments since four years ago. In summary, the following are observed (ADB, 2002):

• North Africa has performed very well. All of the member states are on track. This should not be a surprise given the level of their per capita income, government political commitment and their geographical proximity to the developed world.
• In Sub-Saharan Africa, a few countries are more or less on track. For example, Uganda, Mauritius, Botswana, South Africa, Senegal but most others including Nigeria are lagging behind.
• The multilateral institutions and other development partners are not fully on course in terms of their financial commitments. As the time factors, quantity and quality are not met hence MDG member eight remains a big challenge.
• It seems that the role of civil society remains undefined and many within the sector itself although making a substantive contribution to poverty alleviation is not fully conversant with the MDGs.
Performance Per Goal

Goal I: Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger

The MDGs call for the reduction of the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day to half the 1990 level of 27.9% by 2015. Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest proportion of people living in poverty, with nearly half of its population below the international poverty line which means that some 300 million people face the daily struggle of surviving on less than one dollar a day. Between 1990 and 1999, the number of poor people in the region increased by one-quarter, or over 6 million yearly and if the current trend is maintained then Africa will be the only region where the number of poor people in 2015, will be higher than in 1990 (ADB, 2003).

According to the African Development Bank (2003) in 1997, Nigeria had 70.2% of her population living above one dollar per day and 90.8% below two dollar a day using the international poverty line criteria. By the same criteria, Nigeria currently has 34.1% of her population living below the one dollar a day. The poverty line is defined as a line below which adequate acceptable nutrition-shelter and personal amenities cannot be assured. This indicates that poverty among the population is escalating, as most macroeconomic fundamentals seem to be getting worse.

Malnutrition and under nourishment are closely linked to income poverty. Nigeria had made dramatic progress in reducing the proportion of under-weight children, consequently, the African Development Bank (2002/2003). reported that Nigeria had only 7% of the children under-nourished with food availability at 2S40kcal/person/day between 1998-2000. This may not be an ideal situation as there is room for progress.

Goal II: Achieve Universal Primary Education

The conference on education for all, held in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990, pledged to achieve universal primary education by 2000. But as history has it in 1999, there were still 120 million primary school-age children not in school, three-quarters of them were in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the net primary school enrolment ratio grew by 6% points over the decade, from 60% in 1990, to 63% in 2000. The increase was faster for girls (53% to 65%) than for boys (63% to 65%) thereby closing the gender gap. But despite this, only seven countries are on track to make primary education universal by 2050.

Since the inception of the Civilian Administration in Nigeria, the educational sector had witnessed some improvement in its performance, as enrolment in primary schools had increased. The increase would not have been unconnected with the introduction of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme. An impetus was given to this programme when the National Assembly passed into law the Children Right Bill in 2002. The bill makes it mandatory that Nigerian children of school age must not be denied the basic primary education, consequently, parent risk going to jail should any child be denied the basic education. Although the introduction of UBE saw budgetary allocation to education rising from N62.567.1 million in 2001. to N114,768.2 million in 2004 (CBN, 2001 and 2004). The fund was used in rehabilitating some of the dilapidated schools across the country.

The main challenge hindering the attainment of these goals by most countries in Saharan Africa is the operational costs of running free primary education by the already over-stretched governments, in addition to the divergent social, political, economic, and cultural factors surrounding the different communities and countries.

Goal III: Promote Gender Equality and Women Empowerment

In most low-income countries, girls are less likely to attend school than boys, and even when girls start school at the same time as the boys, they are more likely to drop out often because of the parents’ traditional and cultural thinking that boy’s schooling is more important or that girl’s work at home seems more valuable than schooling. This gives the reason as to why more young girls are illiterate than boys. In an effort to address this, the MDGs call for the elimination of gender disparities in primary and secondary by 2050 and at all levels by 2015.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the gap between the girl and boy net primary enrolment ratios has declined over the past decade. In more than half of the countries in Africa, girls enrolment represent over 90%, and in Botswana, Malawi, Namibia, Tanzania, Zambia, and Equatorial Guinea, the net enrolment of girl is equal or even larger than that of boys (ADB, 2003).

Nigerian laws are gender neutral, however, in practice, females are discriminated against. Consequently, the target is to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2050, and at all levels of education by 2015.
Goal IV: Reduce Child Mortality Rate Especially the Under 5 by 2/3 by 2015 (U5MR)

Although one of six children in the Sub-Saharan Africa will not live to see their fifth birthday. Through the U5MR declined over the years, the progress has been too slow to achieve the universal goal. Nevertheless, some African countries seem to be on track for meeting the target - Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea and Guinea achieved over 20% reduction in U5MR over the past decade. Cape Verde and Comoros reduced U5MR by one third while even larger reduction were registered in Egypt, Gambia, Morocco, and Tunisia, but in contrast, in many countries where the spread of HIV/AIDS is high there was increased levels of U5MR (ADB, 2003).

Running at an average economic growth rate of about 3.3 percent a year in the recent past, most Sub-Saharan African countries may not achieve the goals, as the number of the poor in the region is likely to increase. Nigeria for example, has under 5 year mortality rates of 136 children per 1000 birth between 1990-94. From 1995-2000, this has increased to 153 per 1000 birth. This is in contrast to the 25 per 1000 in Mauritius and some other developing countries.

Goal V: Improvement of Maternal Health

The WHO and UNICEF estimate that more than half a million women in developing countries die from complications of pregnancy and child birth, the leading causes of death and disability among women of reproductive age. In Sub-Saharan Africa alone complications during pregnancy and childbirth cause the death of approximately 250,000 women each year that is about one in ever 1 hour minutes. The countries with the highest maternal mortality ratio include: Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Burundi, Ethiopia, Somalia and Chad. The continent is also home to seven of the twelve countries with the highest number of maternal death in the world that is Ethiopia (46,000 per year), Nigeria (45,000), Democratic Republic of Congo (20,000), Kenya (13,000) Sudan (13,000), Tanzania (13,000), and Uganda (10,000). The above mentioned seven countries account for one-third of all maternal deaths in the world (ADB, 2003).

Goal VI: Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases

With an estimate of over 40 million people living with HIV/AIDS and 20 million deaths since the disease was identified, AIDS poses an unprecedented public health, economic and social challenges. These broader and deeper development implications of the pandemic are nowhere more vividly underscored than in Africa where half of all new HIV infections are among the adolescents 15-24 years olds while many adults die at their prime age. WHO estimates that there were 2.3 million AIDS related deaths in Sub-saharan Africa, with the adult prevalent rates estimated to be over 8.4% vis-a-vis the global I-II/VI AIDS prevalent rate which stood at 1%

Nigeria has to cope with a growing threat of HIV/AIDS. According to the government's data, Nigeria had 3.47 million HIV cases in 2001. The prevalence rate among people aged between 15 and 49 was estimated to have risen to 5.8 percent in 2001 from 5.4 percent in 1999 and 1.8 percent in 1991. Nigeria is thus, the most populous nation to have crossed the 5 percent prevalence rate, the level, according to the UN, at which the epidemic begins to grow at an exponential rate (ADF, 2001). The government has responded to the worsening HIV/AIDS pandemic by launching at the start of 2002, an anti-AIDS programme, which includes the sale of generic life prolonging anti-retroviral drugs at the cost of 9 dollars a month, substantially cheaper than branded medicines.

As for malaria and other diseases, the "Roll Back Malaria" programme is one of the programmes put in place by governments in Sub-Saharan African countries to combat the incident of malaria, which currently ranks as the number two killer disease next to the HIV/AIDS scourge. A lot of financial/material resources both from internal and external sources have been injected into the programme. Despite these efforts, not much has been achieved as the disease continues to ravage the population thus, negatively affecting economic productivity.

Regarding other diseases, the incidence of leprosy, guinea worm, river blindness, polio, etc regarded as eradicated are currently rearing their ugly heads due to some cultural and health habits mostly due to all the poverty level among others.

Goal VII: Ensure Environmental Sustainability

Africa is richly endowed with natural resources but it has yet to put in place an effective and efficient system to enable it to fully exploit their development potential. And how can it do so when wars and conflicts including over the same resources continue unabated? Since environment is the main source of goods and services that sustain human development, there is the need to ensure that development interventions are concerned about a sustainable development. This is particularly true for poor people whose
livelihood rely heavily on environmental services. In addition, they are disproportionately affected by the impacts of degradation. The sustainable use of natural resources can improve the lives of the poor in many ways, including reducing vulnerability, increasing income, and improving health. Progress has been made in many areas, but challenges persist and new ones are emerging. Due to the degradation of environment, a number of communities are changing their healthy diets to poor ones and thereby increasing the rate of health infections and disease.

**Goal VIII: Develop a Global Partnership for Development**

Among developing countries, Sub-Saharan Africa faces the greatest challenge in meeting the MDGs. According to the African Development Bank (ADB), Africa and indeed, Nigeria may have an uphill task in meeting the MDGs criteria, while Nigeria in particular may not be able to meet any of the six criteria if the right policies are not adopted at the appropriate time. Consequently, it would be better for the country to concentrate on the poverty alleviation criterion in the meantime, while also, making concerted efforts to resolve the persistence conflicts and severe governance problems, which confront the country.

Achieving the MDGs will require greater international cooperation and assistance by the industrialized countries. While much will depend on the actions of developing countries and on the policies frameworks they have in place, the support of the international community is very critical.

Despite the commitment of the international community to the international development goals that preceded the MDGs, the real value of aid to developing countries is down about 8 percent in the past decade (RICFD, 2002). Combined with the weak trade performance and the continent's inability to attract foreign direct investment in significant quantities, the reduced flow in ODA further constrains Africa's growth and poverty reduction efforts.

Africa's continuing heavy debt burden is another important constraint. As at the end of 2000, the continent's total debt stock was estimated at 206 billion dollar, up from 177 billion dollar in 1990 (UNDESA, 2003). Close to 60 percent of it is owed to bilateral creditors, much 'of it in non-concessional form, and another 25 percent of multilateral institutions. On the average, therefore the ratio of the regions total external debt is to its exports of goods and services stood at 180 percent in 2000. while the ratio to GNP was 66 percent.

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), has received the imprimatur of the global community. Thus at the G-8 summit in September, 2002, the International Community affirmed its support for strong partnership with developing countries, based on mutual accountability and responsibility. The G-8 adopted the Africa Action Plan as a framework for action in support of the NEPAD and agreed to each establish enhanced partnerships with African countries whose performance reflects the NEPAD commitments. In addition, the UN General Assembly in September, 2002 unanimously adopted a Declaration on NEPAD.

Just as Koffi Annan, the UN Secretary General stated in the opening of the children's summit in May, 2002, "we the grownups must reverse the list of failures" the MDGs remain unfulfilled, but they also remain feasible and affordable.

**Prospects of Attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Africa**

A paradigm shift is needed to achieve a true reversal of present trends in economic and human development on the continent. The world community has at its disposal the proven technologies, the polic; consensus and the financial resources to achieve the goals and change billions of lives for the better. Despite the large shortfall in growth rates required to meet MDGs, for example, there is still a chance for African countries to attain most MDG targets.

Countries can meet the goals through a massive scaling up of public investment, capacity building, domestic resource mobilization and Official Development Assistance (ODA), beginning this year 2005. This must be accompanied by embedding the MDGs in comprehensive development strategies with strong growth and employment-creation components, supported by improved governance structure and practices.

Currently, there are considerable variations in the prospect of individual African countries attainment of the goals. Those that have implemented sound economic policies and improved their system of governance have seen acceleration in growth and poverty reduction and are likely to make significant headway in the future. However, countries like Uganda and Mozambique for example recorded GDP growth rate average 6% a year in the 1990s, but with increasing prevalence of HIV/AIDS scourge may experience some difficulties in meeting the goals (Global Poverty Report, 2002). On the other hand, there are other countries where policy improvements are yet to be secured,
largely due to conflicts and poor governance, and where little progress on the MDGs is also unlikely. In
effect, other Sub-saharan African countries wanting to make progress towards meeting the MDGs, will
Acquire to act in three main areas:

- Deepening macroeconomic reforms and enhancing domestic competitiveness and efficiency, as a
  foundation for a favourable investment climate and pro-poor growth.
- Strengthening democratic institutions and systems of public budget and financial management to
  ensure that governments are accountable to their people, especially for the effective use of public
  resources.
- Investing adequate resources in human development.

The present civilian administration in Nigeria came to power in May, 1999, with the quest to
revive and grow Nigeria's comatose economy. The guiding principles were to operate an economy,
which is market oriented, private sector led, highly competitive, technology driven, broad based, open
and internationally significant. These were expected to raise the standard of living of the people
through gainful employment, provision of social infrastructure, aid capacity building and reduce
poverty. Thus, from May, 1999, to date, the government of Nigeria lia is put in place several measures for
the alleviation of poverty. These efforts include the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) a
framework for effectively fighting poverty and a vehicle for achieving the United Nations Millennium
Development Goals (MDGs).

(a) Challenges facing African Continent in Meeting the MDGs

Estimates indicate that attaining the MDGs is possible if African countries can scale up its
ability to effectively manage its resources, through sustainable growth over time, improved policies,
increased trade and investment, improvement in human capital development.

Despite the UN Millennium Declaration on MDGs poverty is still rampant among various
countries especially those experiencing war like the Great Lakes Region, Horn of Africa and where
economic mismanagement still persists due to corruption.
- Lack of political will and commitment as well as bad governance.
- Unsound/prohibitive macroeconomic policies especially trade policies, debt burden and trade
  barriers in developed countries.
- High population growth in some countries.
- The prevalence of HIV/AIDS and other diseases e.g. malaria, TB, etc.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In this paper, we have discussed the reason for the existence of the Millennium Development
Goals (MDGs) that the goals were put in place during the United Nations Millennium Summit held in
September, 2000, in New York. United States of America. The declaration stated as follows: "we will
spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing
condition of extreme poverty to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected". This
declaration has created a new focus for addressing the issues of poverty that undermines the
international community's commitment to act with a renewed vigour or sense of urgency in achieving
specific benchmark within a given time span. The goals therefore, are supposed to be achieved by 2015.

From the above, it could be stated that the MDGs is currently enjoying the goodwill of all and sundry.
However, a lot of efforts still need to be put in place by individual countries for the attainment of the goals
by the target date of 2015. These efforts are enumerated in the following recommendations:
- The need for consistent and systematic monitoring and evaluation of the MDGs achievements.
- Stronger coordination among the key players in the implementation of the MDGs.
- Pledges by the member states, multilateral institutions and donor community must be honoured,
- The poor who are vulnerable, voiceless and powerless must be included in the decision making.
- Women's potential needs to be harnessed and used appropriately for the common good.
- There is need for a visionary, committed and focused leadership.
- Evolution of a new value ethical system that affirms human dignity and sharing of resources as
  opposed to resource generation for profit purposes.
- Embrace African initiative such as NEPAD and creative and innovative national plans that are
  pro-people.
References


