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Millennium Development Goals {MDGs} and the Yar'adua's Seven Point Agenda in Nigeria: Prospects and Challenges (Pp 57-72)

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Abstract

One global identity today is glaring poverty. The intercontinental epidemic has its worse effects on the developing nations of the world, Africa and Nigeria in particular. Indicators of this glaring poverty span through all human socio-political economic lives of the citizenry, from health to education, gender inequality and to environmental degradation. The United Nations woke up to this startling reality in September 8, 2000 in New York to adopt a millennium declaration to address this problem. This has hitherto been adopted in Nigeria by the democratic government of Presidents Obasanjo and Yar'Adua. Yar'Adua in the wake of his administration declared a 7-point agenda to combat poverty and its attendant indicators head-long. This paper therefore observes that, though MDGs and its incorporated 7-points agenda of Yar'Adua seem to have the prospect and capability to address the problem of poverty in Nigeria, yet it lacks the in-built capacity to

address poverty especially in this era of global economic meltdown. To this end the paper contends that some policies in the past failed to address similar problems due to lack of strong political will and corruption. Therefore, the paper examines some challenges confronting the attainment of MDGs and the Yar'Adua's 7-point agenda in Nigeria. Finally, the paper identifies some policy suggestions towards realising the MDGs and the 7-point agenda. Content analysis is relied upon in the course of the research.

Introduction

States exist for the good of the people. In their opinion, the utilitarian school of thought opines that the purpose of the state is to provide happiness for the greatest number of people under its jurisdiction (Anifowose 2005:98). To this end, the state makes policies to meet the needs, yearnings and aspirations of the people. We seldom hear of policy statements, enactment of policies, declaration of policy intentions and commitment of millions naira to the implementation of certain policies. The lives of the people are in fact affected and influenced by policies made by governments and communities, social organisations, churches, labour groups, educational business and service organisations. The results of these policies are evident around us: provision of social amenities and services, the cost of fuel, the availability or non-availability of imported goods, the scope of economic activities, the availability of agricultural loans and employment opportunities, the security of jobs and how and what tax to be paid, etc are results of policies (Ikelegbe, 1994:1). Policy is central to governments, private organisations or individuals. Governments commit much time, energy and resources to the development of policies. Policy is hereby defined as actions taken or to be taken and actions not taken or not to be taken by government or private organisation. It is a statement of what an organisation wants to do, what it is doing, what it is not doing and what will not be done. It can also be regarded as general rules, regulations, guiding practices or actions in a particular activity or problem area.

Successive Nigerian governments - both pre and post-independent have made different policies to address socio-economic and political problems of Nigeria. The colonial government adopted indirect rule system as a policy of administration, the first to four National Development Plans by General Gowon were to correct the inherent socio-economic malady during his regime. General Olusegun Obasanjo who continued after the assassination of General Murtala Mohammed adopted Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) and

Universal Basic Education (UBE) among others, while the democratic government under President Shehu Shagari employed austerity measures to salvage the economy. The military junta under the leadership of General Muhammadu Buhari used War against indiscipline (WAI) and other stringent policies to correct the distortions in the country. The Military President General Ibrahim Babangida adopted Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), which brought much pains to the people among other policies. The democratic government of Olusegun Obasanjo evolved a lot of policies ranging from privatisation, commercialisation, and deregulation of the economy as well as the Universal Basic Education. With the establishment of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), the administration introduced the Nigeria Economic Policy (NEP), 1999-2003, focussing on: market orientation, private sector-led development approach, highly competitive environment, technology driven, broad-based, and humane and open (FRN, 1999; Odebiyi, 2008:35). This prompted the government to launch national economic empowerment and development strategy in 2004 towards achieving the agreed Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Also in achieving the same goal the incumbent government under President Shehu Musa Yar'Adua introduced the 7- point agenda in 2007 at the wake of his administration. It is therefore the central aim of this paper to identify and examine the objectives of both the MDGs and the 7-point agenda of Yar'Adua vis-à-vis some clogs in the wheel of achieving the focussed objectives. In achieving these, the paper is sub divided into five segments. The first segment introduces the course of the study, while the second segment looks into the theoretical framework on which the study is based. The third segment examines the main objectives of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the 7- point Agenda of President Shehu Yar'Adua. The fourth segment underscores the inherent factors that may impede the achievement of the stated goals. The last segment summarises, concludes and makes some policy statements.

Theoretical Framework

Rational-comprehensive policy making theory is employed in this study. It is closely associated with Herbert Spenser in his work *Administrative Behaviour* (1945). In his opinion, a decision maker operating according to the rational, comprehensive model would follow the under-listed procedures in arriving at a rational choice. The decision-maker defines his goals rather clearly and sets the levels of achievement of those goals that would satisfy him. The various alternatives that might achieve these goals would be

canvassed. The consequences that would follow from the selection of each alternative would be investigated. Each alternative and its attendant consequences would be compared with the other alternative.

The decision maker would choose that alternative which achieves his goals at the least cost (Anifowose 2005:298).

From the foregoing, it is clear that rational decision making involves the selection of alternatives which will maximise the decision maker's values, and the selection being made following a comprehensive analysis of alternatives and their consequences (Ham and Hill, 1985:77). The MDGs and the attendant 7-points agenda have their foundation in the economic growth model of the neo-classical theory, which states that: long term poverty reduction requires sustained economic growth, which in turn depends on technological advancement and capital accumulation (UN 2001; Odusola 2006; Falade 2008:). Towards achieving economic growth, Falade (ibd.) observes that the MDGs can play two key roles: first as 'ends' and secondly as a 'means to the ends'. For example, the MDGs are 'ends' in achieving economic growth, simply because they are 'societal goals' set to reduce the various forms of poverty, including 'reduced hunger, enhanced gender equality, good health and sound education, and broader access to safe water and sanitation'. And as such all the MDGs have direct impact on achieving economic growth. Similarly, MDGs are also the 'means to the ends', that is, the MDGs are the 'means' to achieving rapid 'economic growth' and further development. Essentially, MDGs are the various 'capital inputs' to achieving economic growth. Accordingly all forms of capital are required to support long term economic growth, which requires their holistic and comprehensive consideration. While some important investments in human capital and infrastructure such as energy services, sexual and reproductive health, transport, are not covered by the MDGs, they are nevertheless, crucial for achieving the goals and for spurring economic growth. This is where the 7-Point agenda of Yar'Adua came handy in achieving the MDGs goals.

In this bid, the federal government of Nigeria sets up a Presidential steering committee to look into the problem on hand as the case may be. The committee is empowered to deliberate on the issues at stake, stating the problems and various alternatives at dealing with the issue are discussed, alternatives are considered and finally the best alternatives are taken and consequently sent to the national assembly for ratification. In cases whereby the government is to adopt the policies that that are international in nature

and orientation, the government sends the policy to the National Assembly for ratification.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Yar'Adua's 7-Points Agenda

As stated somewhere, at the turn of the 21st century' the world woke up to the startling reality of a world so rich and yet with majority of its people being so poor. Half of the world three billion lives on less than two dollars per day and about 800 million go to bed without food in their bellies. By the year 2000, developing countries were spending \$1.3 on debt repayment for every \$1 they received in grants. In addition, approximately one billion people entered the 21st century not being able to read or write- intellectual poverty (Ibrahim, 2006:ix; Oke and Oluwasuji, 2008:61).

The above horrendous statistics propelled the United Nations General Assembly to adopt the Millennium Declaration in its largest gathering on the 8th of September 2000 in New York. From this Declaration came the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a set of eight goals, 18 targets and 48 indicators committing nations of the world to battle poverty, diseases, gender inequality, and environmental degradation and to foster a global partnership for development.

Table 1: Goals and targets

	Goal	Targets
1	Eradicate poverty and hunger	Have the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day: 1990-2015. have the proportion of people who suffer from hunger: 1990-2015
2	Achieve Universal Primary education	Ensure that by 2015 children everywhere, boys and girls alike will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.
3	Promote gender equality and empower women	Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005 and in all levels of education not later than 2015.
4	Reduce child mortality .5. improve maternal mortality	5. Reduce by 2/3 (1990-2015), the under- 5 mortality rate. 6. Reduce by ¾ (1990-2005), the maternal mortality ratio.
6	Combat HIV and AIDS, malaria and	7. Have halted and begun to reverse the spread of HIV and AIDS. 8. Have halted by 2015 and begin to reverse the incidence

	other Disease	of malaria and other major diseases.
7	Ensure environmental sustainability	9. Integrate the principles of sustainable development into policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources. 10. Have 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation.11have achieved by 2015 a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100million rural dwellers.
8	Develop a global partnership for development.	12. Development further an open rule based predictable, non-discretionary trading and financial system. 13. address the special needs of LDCs (include tariff and quota free access for LDCs exports, enhanced programme of debts relief for heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) and cancellation of official bilateral debts and more generous official ODA for countries circuted to poverty reduction). 14. Address the special needs of land locked developing countries and small Islands developing states (through the programme of action for the sustainable development of small island developing states and 22 nd general Assembly provisions). 15. Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries through national and international measures in other to make sustainable in the long term. 16. In co-operation with developing countries, develop and implement strategies for decent and productive work for youth. 17. in co-operation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries. 18. in co-operation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies especially information and communication technologies.

The Yar'Adua's 7-Point Agenda

1. Power and Energy

The infrastructural reforms in this critical sector through the development of sufficient and adequate power supply will be to ensure Nigeria's ability to develop as a modern economy and an industrial nation by the year 2015.

2. Food Security

This reform is primarily agrarian based. The emphasis on the development of modern technology, research, financial injection into research, production and development of agricultural inputs will revolutionalize the agricultural sector leading to a 5 – 10 fold increase in yield and production. This will result in massive domestic and

commercial outputs and technological knowledge transfer to farmers.

3. Wealth Creation

By virtue of its reliance on revenue from non-renewal oil, Nigeria is yet to develop industrially. This reform is focused on wealth creation through diversified production especially in the agricultural and solid mineral sectors. This requires Nigerians to choose to work, as hard work by all is required to achieve this reform.

4. Transport Sector

The transportation sector in Nigeria with its poor roads networks is an inefficient means of mass transit of people and goods. With a goal of a modernized industrialized Nigeria, it is mandatory that Nigeria develops its transport sector. The PDP government has already started this process by the ongoing rehabilitation and modernization of the railway. While the reforms might take some time to take effect, it is a need that must be addressed.

5. Land Reforms

While hundreds of billions of dollars have been lost through unused government-owned landed asset, changes in the land laws and the emergence of land reforms will optimize Nigeria's growth through the release of lands for commercialized farming and other large scale business by the private sector. The final result will ensure improvements and boosts to the production and wealth creation initiatives.

6. Security

An unfriendly security climate precludes both external and internal investment into the nation. Thus, security will be seen as not only a constitutional requirement but also as a necessary infrastructure for the development of a modern Nigerian economy. With its particular needs, the Niger Delta security issue will be the primary focus, marshalled not with physical policing or military security, but through honest and accurate dialogue between the people and the Federal Government.

7. Education

The two-fold reforms in the educational sector will ensure firstly the minimum acceptable international standards of education for all. With that achieved, a strategic educational development plan will ensure excellence in both the tutoring and learning of skills in science and

technology by students who will be seen as the future innovators and industrialists of Nigeria. This reform will be achieved through massive injection into the Education sector (Contact webmaster@nigeriaworldpages.com).

Challenges of MDGs and the 7-Point Agenda in Nigeria

Despite the avowed commitment of the government to the above policies in term of money, men and materials, the policies may not really achieve the stated goals. To this extent, certain challenges are identified: failure of past policies, the level of executive corruption in high places; the global economic recession, government contradictory policies and government insincerity among others.

Over the years it has been observed that policies that are hitherto directed to solve poverty or reduce it are fraught with many problems. One of such problems so identified is purely institutional. Policy relating to poverty alleviation are conceived and implemented at three institutional levels viz; national, state, and local government. This in itself has placed a sort of bottleneck on the administration of funds allocated for poverty eradication programmes. The question then is who administer what and to whom is the programme directed? This equally brings us to the issue of methodological weakness both in the identification of the poor and the administration of programmes/projects or funds meant for them (Famuti and Omosulu, 2008:92). It is pertinent to state that the current democratic setting does not permit non-card carrying members to be beneficiaries as these funds are met for even the rich in the society. The poor are always short changed in the programmes that are designed to affect their lives.

In addition to the above, is the problem of non-continuity of government programmes by successive governments which is grossly responsible for so many programmes and policy summersault in the country. The regime- type policy making and implementation has constituted the bane of policy implementation and development in the country. Every programme represents each successive government from the military to the civilian regimes, each wanting to impress and surpass the achievement(s) of others.

Considering the above problems, which has inhibited effectiveness of policies in reducing poverty in Nigeria, it has however been suggested that efficient design of poverty reduction programmes in Nigeria requires that the

poor must be identified and targeted, and policies adopted should be consistent and sustainable. This observation has gone a long way to identified the methodological weakness and the over ambitious nature of the past policy measures to combat poverty in Nigeria (Famuti and Omosulu, 2008:92).

An appraisal of both past and current efforts to reduce poverty suggests that corruption has been a constant obstacle for countries trying to bring about political, economic and social changes desired for their development. Corruption has been a cause and by-product of poverty. For the country, the result produces a vicious circle of increased corruption, reduced sustainable growth and slower rates of poverty reduction (Transparency International, 2008). The executive corruption is alarming in Nigeria. In Nigeria, it is no longer news and strange that all the 36 governors as at May 1, 2007 were corrupt. Former EFCC chairman Nuhu Ribadu maintained that the governors were found to have corruptly abuse power, personalised their state treasuries thereby enriched themselves and were therefore liable to face prosecution. However, Ribadu was constrained to prosecute them because of the 1999 constitutional provision for their immunity. This predatory nature of African leaders must have informed the former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, at the July 2000 Organisation of African Unity (OAU) meeting, to berate African leaders for Africa woes. In his words; *“Instead of being exploited for the benefit of the People, Africa’s mineral resources have been so mismanaged and plundered that they are now source of our misery”*.

In an earlier press conference in London, he opined that, ‘billions of dollars of public funds continue to be stacked away by some African leaders- even while roads are crumbling, health systems have failed, school children have neither books nor desks nor teachers and phones do not work. Also miffed by the official political corruption, the acting Director, Nigeria Financial Intelligent Unit of EFCC, Mr A.B Okauru, (ceokafor@nigeriaworld.net) contends that: *By our calculation, the sum of \$10 billion is laundered in the West Africa sub-region out of which Nigeria accounts for \$7 billion.*

Another challenge to the achievement of MDGs and the 7-points agenda is the current wave of global economic recession. The tribe of jobless Nigerians is swelling by day. Many Nigerian are accustomed to hard times. The high cost of goods and services, the growing homelessness, insecurity and unemployment situation worsened by the frequent closure of industries and businesses across the country have been posing a great threat to their survival. The current global economic meltdown has only added to their

catalogue of woes (Tell, February 2, 2009, pp. 48-53). The backbone of Nigeria's economy is oil; the price has plummeted since the reality of global melt down. The price of crude oil in the international market which crossed the \$100 a barrel mark for the first time in early 2008 and peaked at \$147 per barrel in July of the same year has plunged to less than \$40 per barrel sending jitters to countries, like Nigeria, that depends on earnings from it for survival. Worse still, Naira, the official currency of the country has witnessed unprecedented devaluation in recent time. With one dollar exchanges for about two hundred naira, many individuals and businesses have been thrown into a spin. In his comment on the devaluation of naira to dollar, Obadiah Mailafia, Chief Executive Officer, Centre for Policy and Economic Research averred that:

This is an import-dependent economy in which most of the raw materials are imported. What the depreciation will do is to simply make our markets expensive and this could translate to higher cost of goods and would also *spur an inflationary spiral*' (Tell, February 2, 2009).

Perhaps the dwindling price of crude oil will pose the greatest challenge to government, especially as it contributes more than 90 per cent of the country's revenue from which the government wants to achieve her MDGs and 7-points agenda. Recently, the price of a barrel fell to \$35, a clear \$10 lower than \$45 per barrel benchmark price in the budget. Government's projection of N2.940 trillion revenue for the year, based on oil production of 2.29 million barrels per day, bpd, is not likely to be realised with oil production falling to as low as 1.88 million bpd. If revenue receipts fall below expectation, Yar'Adua may not be able to fund the budget. There are concerns that government may fail to deliver results in the five key priority sectors vis-à-vis 7-points agenda programme: infrastructure, human capital development, land reforms, and food security, Niger Delta and security.

One problematic area is that of technology, technology exists in every industry, from building computers and electronic equipment to cars and trucks. Those who are engaged in the field of technology are problem solvers, people with good hands-on, mechanical skills. However, it seems we do not have many of such people in information and communication technology (ICT) sector in Nigeria. The widening digital divide within the country can be situated within this perspective. The MDGs of the United

Nations Millennium Declarations signed by world leaders also attempt to bridge this technological gap. Among other things, the MDGs have at its heart, the goal of raising a global partnership for development. MDGs represent a shared commitment by all countries to fight hunger, degradation of the environment and poor access to basic infrastructure like roads, power and telephone.

There is prevalence of poor quality telecommunication service nationwide (in Nigeria today). About 60million subscribers are available on the networks. It shows that about 80million Nigerians still do not have access to telephone. Meanwhile, 70 percent of Nigerians live in the rural areas. However, the network operators have so far concentrated their energies in the urban cities and communities, where some folks own three mobile and two fixed lines (Olaegbe 2009:41).

The rural area are not accessible due to bad roads, as such those Nigerians who have been restricted to that part of the country would not have access to the computer and telephone. The situation is even pathetic in that some of these villagers have not seen electricity in their lives and majority of the country's population reside there. People in this category, majority of Nigerians, lack universal access to information and communication technologies.

Meanwhile, the country has intimidating population and irresistible market that daily attracts foreign investors. Nevertheless, basic infrastructure like roads, telephone and power are in complete state of disrepute and shamble. Thus while the UN's MDGs report referred to Ghana, Malawi and Togo among other countries with success stories, in terms of infrastructure by asserting that "Demonstrating rapid and large scale progress towards the MDGs is possible when strong government leadership and good policies are combined with adequate financial and technical support from the international community". In Nigeria today, the dormancy posture that governance has assumed coupled with the insensitivity of government to the plight of the vast majority of our people as well as corruption have polarized the citizenry and the government to the extent that it has become weak and lacking in political will to prosecute the ideals of the MDGs. But like many countries, Nigeria has not escaped the global storm. It relies heavily on oil and gas exports, which provide more than 95% of all foreign exchange earnings and most of the government's revenue. Both have been thumped by the tumbling price of crude, now at about \$40 a barrel, more than \$100 less

than at last year's peak. With nothing else to export – all those containers leave empty – Nigeria is especially vulnerable to volatile oil prices.

Oil and gas production, the economy's mainstay is also in bad shape. Long Africa's biggest producer, Nigeria last year ceded the top spot to Angola. Production is dropping in part, because militants in and off the Niger Delta Kidnap workers and scare away oil firms. A new pipeline built to export gas to Ghana, Togo and Benin should have opened in January but lies empty. Talk of spending \$12 billion to build another pipeline running 4,400km north across the Sahara to send gas via Algeria to Europe sounds fanciful. A sizeable share of local gas is simply flared off at source.

Meanwhile, Nigeria still cannot keep its own lights on, power supply is epileptically. Manufacturers, who account for a feeble 3-4% of GDP but at least create some jobs, grumble that they must rely entirely on costly diesel generators. Power cuts are common. It has long been obvious what should be done: existing turbines lack supplies of gas, transmission cables should be rolled out, and more power stations must be built. Successive governments have let power generating dwindle, yet none has let private contractor act instead (The Economist 2009:53).

Another worry about the actualisation of the MDGs and the 7-points agenda is the conflicting policies of the government (Oluwasuji, 2008:168-180). The recent government policy output ordering the government and parastatals to return to the treasury unspent budget allocation poses a serious threat. On January 16, 2007, President Umaru Yar'Adua told the South-South senators that the accumulated N293 billion owed to the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) from 2001 to 2007 had "expired". This policy option has generated a renewed insurgency at the Niger Delta. This resultantly poses some great problems for the attainment of MDGs and 7-points agenda. Due to insecurity in the Niger Delta, investors are diverting their investments to a more peaceful and enabling environment resulting in capital flight from the economy e.g. Wilbros and Michellin.

Closely related to this problem is the insincerity of the government to pursue the actualisation of the programme. Budget as the case may be is the statutory framework on which the government's projected income and expenditure is based. Budget for the year 2008 fiscal year could not be passed by the National Assembly until late August and early September the same year. Thereby, many ministries and government parastatals could not access their fund for the year. The resultant effect was that they could not

perform their stated functions. Secondly, as a result of the government policy, the unspent budget allocation had to be returned to the government treasury. The 2009 budget as passed is been implemented haphazardly as a result of the reduction in government earnings occasioned by the global economic meltdown.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

For government to meet the needs of the masses, policies are enacted and implemented. Therefore, policy has to do with the relationship of government with unit to its environment. Over the years, the Nigerian government has evolved many policies in order to arrest some of the decline in social service delivery, especially to the poor. Among such policies are; Operation feed the nation (OFN), National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA), national Primary Health Care scheme, National Agency for Mass Literacy (NAML), Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Directorate of Foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI), Better Life for Rural Women/ Family Support Programme (BLRW/FSP), Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF), Peoples Bank of Nigeria (PBN), Community Banks (CB), Federal Urban Mass Transport Agency (FUMTA), Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA), Federal Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), Educational Trust Fund (ETF), etc.

In recent time, the government adopted Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and 7-points agenda to mitigate poverty in the lives of the Nigeria citizenry. The government has so far committed a lot of men, money and minerals to the pursuance of the stated government goals. Yet the attainment of the programmes remains a tall dream. The programmes have some serious challenges to contend with to be achievable. Such problems are: the effect of the global economic meltdown, leadership attitude to the programme, contradictory government policies, the level of poverty and executive corruption and money laundering, etc. Therefore, for Yar'adua to achieve his goals, this paper makes the following policy suggestions:

The government should in the light of dwindling foreign exchange inject more funds into the economy. This is in reality that the global economic meltdown is real afterward. If the avowed European capitalist countries could rise in effort to buy back their economy, Nigeria government should not be left behind.

The government should intensify the war against corruption. The institutions for fighting corruption should be better statutorily equipped to the task. They should really be independent of the executive arm of the government, probably to be under the judiciary.

The National Assembly members should be better educated to perform their oversight function of supervising and monitoring the economy. Rather than playing politics with the budget, they should realise and put to heart the interest of the people who voted for them.

The Niger Delta crisis should sincerely be addressed. The government should mount a political and moral will to fully implement the recommendations of the Lt Gen. Alexander Ogomudia-led special security committee on oil producing areas (Oluwasuji, 2007:34-49).

However, to be in tune with the original MDGs, we must move up and empower Nigerians, particularly those in the rural areas, GSM service providers, computer original equipment manufacturers (OEMs), software engineers and internet services providers (ISPs) must provide digital opportunities for rural dwellers. In addition, government must take adequate and prompt action to alleviate poverty that has become the bane of development in Nigeria. For government to fully realise the MDGs, there is need for a foundational political commitment and will. This will come in various forms. The first being that the government have to engage in massive policy and legislative reforms, that would guarantee efficient delivery of the social services as envisaged under the MDGs framework and in conformity with the seven-point agenda of the president.

Lastly, in line with the federal government the attainment of the programmes should include:

Accountability of government officials including politicians and the civil servants; Transparency in government procedures; Openness in government transactions; The rule of law and the independence of the judiciary is expedient; Free flow of information and vigorous protection of the freedom of the press; Respect for human rights and mass participation (FRN, 1999) towards ushering Nigeria to the next developmental level.

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