



## **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Challenges of Poverty Reduction in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

Global continuous war against poverty facilitated the UN decision to rebrand the MDGs to SDGs. The major objective of the Sustainable Development Goals, is to combat poverty in its entirety all over the world while preserving the environment for future generations. Nigeria is one of such countries that poverty remains a major problem. Though, programmes and measures have been taken to curb it, both internationally and locally, poverty still exists. This study hopes to investigate the problems surrounding the inability for the UN's SDG goals to be met in Nigeria. It hopes to examine those challenges the program has encountered on its journey to eradicating poverty and possibly suggest ways in which such hiccups can be dealt with. The study adopted the Structural theory on poverty, which describes poverty as emanating from the opportunities given by various aspects of the society; economic, political or social to its people which limits their capabilities. Secondary qualitative sources of data were used for the study and the analytical method of data analysis was adopted in presenting the findings. The study recommends that the Nigerian government at levels need to create measures, monitor these measures that will ensure poverty is reduced to the barest minimum.

**Keywords:** Development; Sustainable Goals; Poverty; Poverty Reduction; Nigeria

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## Introduction

The genesis of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is traced back to the declaration adopted by Heads of states at the millennium summit of the United Nation in 2000. These goals were set to curb extreme poverty and many other numerous challenges as they remain a threat to global human survival. Achieving these goals will lead to a general improvement in the general standard of human life, more specifically the less disadvantaged. The MDG programme brought notable reduction in poverty in some countries (Australia, Bangladesh, India etc.) as a result of the successful implementation of the programme in these countries. However, the MDGs were noted for not having clear transformative vision because their major focus was towards alleviating the effect of poverty without capturing the required fundamentals in achieving a sustainable outcome. It was for this reason; it was replaced with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs was introduced in 2015 with the declaration to ‘end poverty in all its form. Some of its targets are;

1. By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than \$1.25 a day.
2. By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions.
3. Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable.
4. By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance.
5. By 2030, build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters
6. Ensure significant mobilization of resources from a variety of sources, including through enhanced development cooperation, in order to provide adequate and



predictable means for developing countries, in particular least developed countries, to implement programmes and policies to end poverty in all its dimensions.

7. Create sound policy frameworks at the national, regional and international levels, based on pro-poor and gender-sensitive development strategies, to support accelerated investment in poverty eradication actions.

Observing the above targets which forms part the target of the SDGs, its plans and what the programme hopes to achieve, is more all-encompassing because apart aiming to eradicate poverty in all its entirety, it aim to ensure that the end of poverty is maintained not to come up in the future.

Despite the restructuring of the MDGs and upgrading to SDGs in 2015, poverty still persists in the world especially among developing countries, particularly in Nigeria. According to the World Bank's report (2020), 10% of the world still lives in abject poverty especially in low income countries such as Nigeria, with its 40.09% poverty rate that it is noted for (World Bank, 2020). It is worthy of note that Asian countries, which are referred to as developing, seem to be faster in the race to eradicate poverty when compared to it African counterparts. There is therefore an urgent need for Nigerians and other African countries to wake up in its bid in tackling poverty particularly, if it hopes to attain the SDG goals and meet the 2030 set target.

It is from this backdrop that this paper hopes to investigate the problems surrounding the inability for the UN's SDG goals to be met in Nigeria. It hopes to examine those challenges the program has encountered on its journey to eradicating poverty and possibly suggest ways in which such hiccups can be curbed.

## **Conceptual Clarifications**

### **Poverty**

As a socio-economic concept, poverty has been explained mainly as it suits the situation or the society wherein it is been experienced especially, in developing countries, where it is prevalent. Still, its definition is problematic because what may be seen to be poverty for one society may be different poverty entails in another. Omotola (2008), views poverty as a condition of deprivation that impedes human development. To him, 'anything' that limits or



stops human development in any society is seen as poverty. Also, Mohammed et. al. (2021), asserted that “several types of poverty exist depending on such factors as, time or duration (long, short terms or cyclical).” This definition views poverty as a periodic ailment. Poverty may be widespread throughout a population, but the occurrence itself is limited to direction and distribution (widespread, concentrated individuals). In spite of the numerous definitions that are available, one thing is certain and that is poverty is a condition of the inadequate access to the pivotal needs of life which could be detrimental to human survival.

### **Poverty Reduction**

With the continually increase in Nigeria poverty status, there is an urgent need for the government officials and stake holders to adopt all available means necessary in curbing the menace. As Achimugu et. al (2012), posited that poverty eradication has to do with the bulk of policies and strategies pursued by government, in active partnership with civil society, the organized private sector and other stakeholders towards the systematic tackling of poverty. Therefore, for a significant realization to the reduction of poverty, the government has a important role to play which cannot be replaced. However, for poverty reduction to be actualized, the citizenry’s cooperation is needed. Communication between the people and the government will enable the latter to know the basic needs of the people. This will guide against making implemented projects that are not required.

### **Sustainable Development**

The preservation of lives in any society is linked with its continual growth and development. Meaning that, whatever decisions is to be taken to attain development presently, most put in consideration future generations of that society. This agrees with the definition of sustainable development Onah and Vincent (2005), reviewed from the Brundtland Report of 1987, which states that sustainable development is the kind of development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In addition, Ndubisi (2002) and Nkwede (2014), while considering conditions for sustainable development focuses on institutions of government, and contends that the government of the day must necessarily come up with policies and legislations that address the issue of poverty today and not forgetting the future. This means that the institutions relevant stakeholders are responsible in ensuring development in any society is sustained. The masses too have a part to play in ensuring development continues by managing the scare resources made available to



them, either by the state or nature. From the foregoing, sustainable development is the concerted effort made by policy makers, implementors, evaluators, as well as the citizenry to ensure that development is achieved and continued as long as the existence of mankind.

### **Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction**

Researches have been conducted on sustainable development particularly how it refers to reducing poverty in societies in the world. This is the reason why scholars have viewed it as a measure to save and preserve lives. Though, the concept of ‘sustainable development’ does not only mean saving the environment or some particular species, but human survival (Barter and Russell, 2012) which is most important living being. Barter et al (2012) also points to a clear statement that the human environmental system makes up a single, indivisible system, since by mentioning the “generations” it refers to generations - past, present and future - related to the human environment, since they are inseparable”. This idea is corroborated by Weiss (1992:20), when he emphasizes that “intergenerational equity corresponds to maintaining the planet’s natural resources we share with other species and humans, in past, present and future generations”. In the words of Barter and Russell (2012), “the definition of sustainable development does not refer to saving nature, but to the internalization of strategies, and thus adding new resources to enable economic growth and prosperity to be shared by all”.

The key principle of sustainable development “underlying all others, is the integration of environmental, social, and economic concerns into all aspects of decision making, all other principles in the sustainable development framework have integrated decision making at their core” (Dernbach, 2003). “It is this deeply fixed concept of integration that distinguishes sustainability from other forms of policy. Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (UN, 2015). The concept of sustainable development “can be interpreted in many different ways, but at its core is an approach to development that looks to balance different, and often competing, needs against an awareness of the environmental, social and economic limitations we face as a society” (Pisano, Lange, Berger and Hametner, 2015). Sustainable development “aims towards economic growth without human-lead damage to the environment, long term view in relation to future generations to include environmental,



economic and social aspects in mutual balance as well as proposes changes in humanity's behaviour and materialized through strategies involves processes and practices"(UN, 2015). On the other hand, Anger (2005), described poverty as "the lack of income needed to acquire the basic needs of life". Here, poverty depicts is a major threat to human existence. Edoh (2003), state that "people are poverty stricken when their income even if adequate for survival, falls below those of the commodity they cannot afford what the larger community regards and deems necessary". Aliyu and Dansabo (2017), asserted that "several types of poverty may be distinguished depending on such factors as, time or duration (long, short terms or cyclical). Poverty may be widespread throughout a population, but the occurrence itself is limited to direction and distribution (widespread, concentrated individuals). It can also involve relatively permanent insufficiency of means of securing basic needs (Mohammed, Hassan & Zakari, 2021).

The condition may be to describe the average level of life in a large group in concentrated or relatively large groups in an otherwise prosperous society". Poverty as lack of access to basic needs/goods is essentially economic or consumption oriented. Thus, the poor are conceived as those individuals or households in a particular society, incapable of purchasing a specified basket of basic goods and services". "Basic goods as used here include; food, shelter, water, health care, access to productive resources including education, working skill and tools, political and civil rights to participate in decisions concerning socio-economic conditions"(Gbosi, 2004). "Based on the concept of generalized poverty reduction, the goals proposed can be divided into three categories: multidimensional poverty reduction goals, sustainable development goals, and global partnership goals. Ending extreme poverty and achieving sustainable development by 2030 is the summary of the SDGs, reflecting the significance of poverty reduction in the issue of development" (UN, 2013).

From the above studies, it is evident that a lot has been done in regards to understanding poverty and the place of sustainable development in fighting poverty. Despite that, further studies need to be conducted this is because of the growing rate of poverty despite various measures put in place to checkmate this peril.



### **Theoretical Framework**

The theory used in this study is the Structural theory on poverty. To the structural theorists, poverty is due to the structure of the larger socioeconomic order (Abdulai and Shirmshiry, 2014). The proponents of this theory attribute the source of poverty to economic, political, and social system which causes people to have limited opportunities and resources with which to achieve income and well-being (Bradshaw, 2006). The same view is expressed by Samati et, al. (2012) who believe that larger economic and social structures is a cause of poverty. They argue that capitalism creates conditions that promote poverty and that irrespective of individuals' effort; (hard work, skills and competencies); the structure of some economies, for instance the economy of United States of America ensures that millions of people are poor. In other words, a greater number of literatures suggest that the economic system is structured in such a way that the poor fall behind regardless of how competent they may be (Bradshaw, 2006). The theory also asserts that within a market-based competitive economic system, unequal initial endowments of talents, skills and capital which determine productivity of an individual cause poverty Davis and Sanchez-Martinez (2014).

A critical look at the challenges of tackling poverty in Nigeria, one can attribute some of the factors to the political and economic structures that are present in the country, one can rightly say it has contributed to the impoverished nature of its people. The government's inability to formulate and implement such policies that could bridge a gap between the rich and the poor has continued to make the poor people poorer and the few rich people, richer. In rare situations when few of those policies are made, no efficient monitoring team is put in place to ensure such policies are obeyed to the latter. Furthermore, no political will among the political office holders to ensure the basic needs of the people are met. Instead, they ensure that economic and political power continues to remain the hands of a selected few in the society. This could assist in understanding some of the challenges faced by the SDGs.

### **Methodology**

This study used the analytical method of data analysis to revisit existing literatures on Sustainable Development goals with emphasis on poverty reduction in Nigeria. It clearly stated the aim of the programme in eradicating poverty in all its entirety and the current challenges prevalent in Nigeria which stands in the nation's way in its effort to eradicate poverty. The study concludes by suggesting way out of poverty.



### **SDGs and Poverty Reduction: Global Perspective**

The decision of the United Nations General Assembly on the 15<sup>th</sup> of September 2015 to have a transformed and more developed world by 2030, birthed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This was targeted to aid developing countries in the globe with high rate of poverty who are members state of the United Nations. The SDG is collection of 17 interlinked objectives designed to serve as a "shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet now and into the future. Each goal typically has 8–12 targets, and each target has between one and four indicators used to measure progress toward reaching the targets (United Nations, 2017). The targets are either "outcome" targets (circumstances to be attained) or "means of implementation" target. These goals includes no poverty; zero hunger; good health and well-being; quality education; gender equality; clean water and sanitation; affordable and clean energy; decent work and economic growth; industry, innovation and infrastructure; reduced inequalities; sustainable cities and communities; responsible consumption and production; climate action; life below water; life on land; peace, justice, and strong institutions; and partnerships for the goals.

Some of the members of the UN member-states who adopted the SDG agenda in 2015 includes, Bangladesh, India, Liberia, Nigeria, Ghana, Lebanon, Iran etc. the aim for all the 193 states that ratified the programme, is to end poverty at all levels and every part of the world by 2030. This relevant actors with the responsibility of implementing the SDGs in each state such are the national governments, sub-national authorities, corporations and civil society. Therefore, cooperation is expected among these actors to ensure these goals are met. This is in terms of funds, infrastructures, institutions and human resources needed to achieve sustainable development.

### **SDGs and Poverty Reduction in Nigeria**

The poverty level in African's most populous state today is very high at 63% (UNDP, 2022). Unfortunately, this was not always the case. As at its independence in 1960, the poverty index rate in Nigeria was just about 15% of its population. Despite, increase in knowledge and technological advancement, poverty in the country has continued to grow. Over the years, different governments; military and civilian alike have introduced various programmes to tackle poverty. Some of the programmes include Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) Green Revolution, River Basin Development Authority RBDA, etc. some measure of success was



recorded in these various programmes but because each one of them lacked viability, poverty remained a menace and continued in growth.

The bane of Nigeria's poverty level today has been attributed to the nation's adoption of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1985 by the Babangida's military administration. Though, the then administration had claimed to have adopted SAP to end poverty and improve the living standard of the common man. However, the programme did not achieve the above in Nigeria rather it further impoverished the populace and degraded the Naira. The introduction of new programmes in later military regimes such as Better Life Programme (BLP), Family Support Programme (FSP) etc were acknowledged, yet, none was able to stop the growing poverty in the nation.

The enthusiasm of the inception of democracy in 1999, brought with it, new programmes to fight poverty. Some of these programmes includes; National Poverty Eradication Programme, National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy, Poverty Alleviation Programme etc. Sadly, none has been able to cause a significant positive change towards eradicating poverty in Nigeria. Perhaps, that was the reason the government of the day in 2015, decided to adopt the Sustainable Development Goals of which one of its major goal is to eradicate poverty and all its forms.

## **Challenges of Poverty Reduction and SDGs in Nigeria**

### **Lack of Political Will**

Nigeria has been awarded with the ability to formulate brilliant policies. However, the major problem has always been associated with the implementation of such good policies. This has also affected the target set by the SDG in handling poverty. The political office holders who make the policies never ensure such policies are implemented properly. For instance, policies are made passed into law but inadequate funds are released for the execution of the policy (Edoh, 2003). Other times, where adequate funds are released, it is mismanaged to meet the targeted goal. In cases, where adequate funds are provided, the policies are executed haphazardly with no appropriate structure to evaluate the policy execution. Lastly, funds provided to reduce poverty are diverted by those saddled with the responsible to end the menace.



### **Insecurity**

In recent times, the safety of lives and properties in Nigeria has become a mirage. Incessant cases of banditry, kidnapping, farmers/herders' crisis, cattle rustling among others has hampered development in Nigeria. This is more prevalent in the Northern part of the country. Persons have lost their lives, means of livelihood to insurgency and any level of development that has been realized in the past in such areas, have been reduced to nothing (World Bank, 2020).

### **Misplaced Target**

When programmes are formulated, it is not formed isolation. It has a particular target for which that policy is formulated and a designated problem it intends to solve for the target. Sadly, when such policies do not get to the target, or benefit the target for which they were formulated, such policies are sad to have failed. A very good example can be seen in situations when monies and relief materials are provided by government and international organizations to cater for the needs of displaced persons as a result of insurgency in northern Nigeria, to reduce their sufferings. Unfortunately, most times little or no amount of the financial aids or relieve materials, gets to these people.

### **Corruption**

All efforts made by previous and the current government to curb poverty has been unsuccessfully majorly because of corruption. This has eaten deep into every aspect of the society. Lack of accountability and transparency has become part and government institutions. It is gradually becoming a political culture whereby anyone who doesn't exhibit corrupt features is seen as 'abnormal'. In such situation, no form of development can be maintained because institutions to ensure feasible development have compromised.

### **Conclusion**

Though efforts have been made by the Sustainable Development Goals through its programme to combat poverty, the government and political elites show little enthusiasm towards ending this societal menace. In addition, though poverty has the capacity of in affecting human resources, which will inevitably trickle to other aspect of the society, inadequate attention has been given to it by the necessary stakeholders. In conclusion, the corruption stands as a major obstacle in the journey to poverty eradication in the nation.



Perhaps, the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) Plan for Nigeria, from 2023 to 2027, alongside cooperation with the present government, will bring a lasting solution poverty solution in country and rid the polity of poverty in all its entirety.

### **Recommendations**

1. Federal and state governments in Nigeria need to initiate programmes to tackle poverty rate in the nation. This can be in form of introducing small-scale businesses to the target population and giving soft loans to start such businesses. Also, in areas where farming is lucrative, the government at all levels should provide improved and modern agricultural equipment, healthy hybrid grain, seedlings, and fertilizers at subsidized rates for the farmers
2. Stringent measures should be enforced with the help of law enforcement agencies in the country to ensure that funds set aside for projects and programmes geared towards eradicating poverty is not diverted or misappropriated. Once products (goods for small scale businesses, agricultural produce and equipment for farming etc) are set aside to be distributed to the poor, the government can make available the law enforcement officers at the place of distribution to ensure orderliness and ensure those responsible for distributing these goods, carry out their jobs diligently.
3. Accountability should be demanded by the government who initiated and funded the poverty reduction programmes from the implementors and executors of these programmes to ensure their work is done properly and by this, set goals are achieved.
4. The citizens to have a party to play in ensuring development sustained and poverty is checked. By making themselves available for government awareness and empowerment programmes which could be of help to them.

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