



Eradiation of Poverty and Hunger in Nigeria: Issues and Options for Attainment of Millennium Development Goals

ERADICATION DE LA PAUVRETE ET DE LA FAMINE AU NIGERIA : LES ENJEUX ET LES OPTIONS POUR L'ATTEIGNEMENT DES OBJECTIFS DU MILLENAIRE POUR LE DEVELOPPEMENT

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Abstract

The saying that, "a country that cannot feed its poor, cannot assure sleep to its rich" is very apt. Eradicating poverty and hunger is the greatest challenge facing the world today. Progress has been made over the last generation in improving living standards in paper therefore, examined the challenges and options open in the poorest countries, but over a billion people still struggle in absolute poverty. This paper therefore, examined the challenges and options open in order to eradicate poverty in Nigeria. It was discovered that bad governance, poor economic policies, ill-timed reforms, corruption, lack of commitment to poverty eradication programmes and poor investment in rural agriculture were the prime cause(s) of hunger and poverty. All hope is not lost because there are options government can pursue such as ensuring broad-based growth good governance, tackling unemployment, basic needs approach etc in order to eradicate poverty and hunger. The paper is of the view that to eradicate hunger and poverty, economic growth is necessary but not a sufficient condition. There is need to induce broad-based growth and provide social services and infrastructure aimed at reducing/eradicating the depth and sovereignty of poverty and hunger across the country.

Key words: Poverty; Eradication; Hunger; Challenges; Agriculture

Résumé

Le dicton selon lequel, "un pays qui ne peut pas nourrir ses pauvres, ne peut pas assurer le sommeil de sa richesse"

est très pertinent. Eradiquer la pauvreté et la faim est le plus grand défi auquel fait face le monde aujourd'hui. Des progrès ont été réalisés au cours de la dernière génération dans l'amélioration du niveau de vie dans du papier donc examiné les défis et les options ouvertes dans les pays les plus pauvres, mais plus d'un milliard de personnes luttent encore dans la pauvreté absolue. Ce document donc examiné les défis et les options ouvertes en vue d'éradiquer la pauvreté au Nigeria. On a découvert que la mauvaise gouvernance, la mauvaise politique économique, les réformes au mauvais moment, la corruption, le manque d'engagement envers les programmes d'éradication de la pauvreté et les mauvais investissement dans l'agriculture rurale ont été la cause principale (s) de la faim et la pauvreté. Tout espoir n'est pas perdu, car il ya des options du gouvernement peuvent poursuivre comme assurer la gouvernance de croissance à large assise bonne, la lutte contre le chômage, etc... Approche des besoins essentiels en vue d'éradiquer la pauvreté et la faim. Le papier est d'avis que pour éradiquer la faim et la pauvreté, la croissance économique est nécessaire mais pas une condition suffisante. Il est nécessaire pour induire une croissance généralisée et de fournir des services sociaux et d'infrastructure visant à réduire / éradiquer la profondeur et la souveraineté de la pauvreté et la faim à travers le pays.

Mots clés: L'éradication de la pauvreté; La faim; Les défis et l'agriculture

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INTRODUCTION

Hunger in the midst of plenty is one of the difficult development challenges of our time. Aggregate food production continues to increase; yet hunger also continues to blight the lives of hundreds of millions of people. Hunger is sometimes caused by drought, disease, or war and there is always a need for a strong humanitarian response in those cases. But the more widespread and deep-rooted form of hunger is caused by people having neither the capacity to produce food nor the income to buy it. Fundamentally, hunger is caused by poverty. If we want to reduce hunger effectively, we have to reduce poverty and that requires action across a broad spectrum.

According to Omoh and Binniyat (2008), rising populations, strong demand from developing countries, increased cultivation of crops for bio-fuels and increasing floods and droughts; have sent food crisis soaring across the globe. As a result, a new face of hunger is staring the world at large in the face. A perfect storm of food scarcity, global warming, rocketing oil prices and the world population explosion is plunging humanity to the biggest crisis of the 21st century by pushing up food prices and spreading hunger and poverty from rural areas into crisis. According to the World Bank's current report (2007) poor families spend up to 80 percent of their budget on food globally and that high food prices are a matter of daily struggle for more than two billion people. "High prices threaten to increase malnutrition, already an underlying cause of death in over 3.5 million children a year", reads the report, adding that "an estimated 100 million people have fallen into poverty in the last two years" and grimly warned that "prices are expected to stay high through 2015". "West Africa, the horn of Africa, and the fragile states are especially vulnerable", the report noted. Weather-related shocks and civil strife worsen the impact in some countries. And following a meeting with the heads of 26 UN related agencies in April, 2008, the World Bank President, Robert B. Zoellick said US \$755 million (1*90.6 trillion) in emergency aid for UN's World Food Programme (WFP) will be needed to mitigate the situation.

Poverty according to Chukwujekwu (2000) is a state where an individual or a group cannot obtain the basic necessities of life. A nation is poor when a fair proportion of its population does not have access to the basic necessities of life. Poverty can be caused by a number of factors such as lack of availability of sufficient natural and human resources; lack of capacity and capability to harness available natural resources; and mismanagement of available resources. In the case of Nigeria, we are poor because we lack the capability to harness our abundant natural resources; also we have mismanaged the little that has been harnessed.

POVERTY AND HUNGER SITUATION IN

NIGERIA

According to Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) 2007 world food situation report, 21 out of 36 countries in food crisis are in sub-Saharan Africa, and sadly enough, Nigeria is among them. With this revelation, may be Nigeria should not be in a haste to boast about being the "giant of Africa", when it comes to real development issues, since it is unable to feed its people.

According to Walters (2007) with prices of food stuff rising in Nigeria between 100 percent and 300 percent, rural-urban migration is getting to an all-time high, especially from the states on the Northern most fringe of the country. There are now more destitute on the streets than ever. It is no longer news seeing desperate starving Nigerians scavenging refuse dumps for food and whatever is of value for recycling in all Nigerian urban areas. While the rich are dying from diseases borne out of indulgent eating and drinking, millions of Nigerians are dying from hunger related problems. The poverty and hunger level is so bad that with basic minimum wage of N7,500.00 per month, a worker's salary on such grade cannot as much as buy the worker a bag of Thailand rice, which as at August 2008 sells for up to N15,000.00. A market survey in Abuja by Financial Vanguard in May (2008) revealed that a bag of Chilli Pepper that sold for N1,000.00 in 2007 is now N7,000.00. Palm oil, sold for N2,800 last year, has shot up to N6,000.00. The same song goes for garri, beans, yam and even meat, fish and poultry products. This gives an insight why hunger and poverty are ravaging the land.

CAUSES OF HUNGER IN NIGERIA

Poverty in turn stems in large part from too many depending on work in low productivity activities that offer meager returns. To make matters worse, the ability to make even a small amount of money in agriculture, one of the main means of employment for the poor in Nigeria, can be hijacked when bad weather causes harvest failure. Given that food insecurity or hunger is so often a case of not having the income to buy enough food, price rise constitutes a threat to nutrition. A sobering statistic is that, in rural communities in Nigeria, on average, the majority of farm households are net buyers of food that is they do not grow enough to meet their needs and regularly have to buy in additional supplies. Hence the great concern over the sharp rise in world of maize, rice and wheat seen over the past 18 months.

Anya (2003) attributed high poverty level in Nigeria to faulty government policies. Tangentially, the then vice-president, Atiku Abubakar remarked at the same event that the Federal Government's Poverty Alleviation Scheme (i.e. PAP, PEP, YES, NAPEP, ETC) these past four years were flawed. It is glaring that the poverty situation in Nigeria is now worse.

According to Odewale (2004), it is not democracy

and prosperity as experienced in developed countries but grim democracy and poverty, arising from obnoxious economic policies and bad leadership. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) noted in 2003 that Nigeria is in this situation despite that fact that she has earned more than \$200 billion in oil revenues since 1970. Yet, according to the UNDP report, our per capita income is roughly what it was in 1990, signifying loss of three decades in economic development. Tinubu (2004) aptly gave an admonition that policy makers at the Federal level need to put on their thinking caps to generate creative, imaginative and innovative solutions that will reduce, rather than add to the misery of Nigerians.

Clearly, the Nigerian situation with regard to poverty has attained the status of national emergency calling for rescue operations at all levels, particularly in job creation and wealth generation. There is no conceivable way for the country to realize its development potentials without fiscal balancing among the three tiers of government namely, Federal, State and Local Governments. The ineffectual deregulation policy and suspended fuel levy primarily designed to generate N265 billion additional oil revenue for infrastructural development annually, and poverty eradication, are not directed at fighting poverty but rather aggravating it. Basically, an impoverished citizenry translates to an impoverished economy and underdevelopment which is the foundation base of poverty and hunger.

According to Ibrahim (2005), the bane of Nigeria has been bad leadership and poor followership. Good leadership that is concomitant with good fellowship and good governance must evolve in Nigeria for poverty eradication and sustainable development to thrive.

OPTIONS ON HOW TO ERADICATE POVERTY AND HUNGER IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

It is no longer news that Nigeria, “the giant of Africa” is one of the poorest countries in the world, in fact, it is listed among the last 10 most impoverished countries, alongside Mali and Chad. Independent assessors such as the World Bank, IMF, UNDP and the World Health Organization are all agreed that more than half of Nigerian’s population (about 80m people) still live below the poverty line—subsisting on less than one dollar (about N150) per day. The Federal Government has now adopted the Millennium Development Goals, which sets 2015 as the target year of poverty eradication in Nigeria. As laudable as the programme seems to be, there is apprehension that if there is no deliberate paradigm shift from the present “Father Christmas” approach to something more systematic and sustainable, the entire millennium goal or poverty

eradication may be defeated.

DEBUGGING

The object of this paper is to suggest a new paradigm for approaching the problem of poverty and hunger in Nigeria. This new approach is called debugging. According to Igbokwe (2007) debugging is a problem-solving technique. It is a term popular in computer lexicon. It means the removal of a bug in a programme. A bug is an error, mistake or fault in a system, causing a malfunction. Bugs are detected through diagnostic checks and programme tests, and can then be eliminated, even if it means rewriting part of the programme.

A bugged programme presents a crisis situation. The diagnosis approach is expected to carefully examine the programme to determine the source of the bug, the type of bug, how to correct it, and ways to prevent future occurrence. When all these are done, the systems begin to function normally for the benefits of users and clients alike. A country like Nigeria is like a programme with several bugs. There is no way it can function properly. At this point, it becomes proper for government to appreciate the fact that there is serious national crisis on hand. This new paradigm sees poverty and hunger as a crisis resulting from both national and human errors. As such, any approach to solving it must first get at the root of it. And getting at the root is all about correcting these errors, and making sure they do not reoccur. In fact, poverty is like the proverbial fufu in Igbo parlances, which has a head and tail; it’s only the uniformed that starts the eating from the middle. The head of poverty is prevention; its tail is sustainability and its middle is remediation. Therefore, as a crisis event, any solution to poverty must be total and should follow a three-pronged attack prevention, remediation and sustainability. The process is cyclical, and therefore continuous. It begins with prevention, moves on to remediation, then the sustainability, and back to prevention, on continuous basis. In all cases, the target is the poor and hungry person in the middle.

POLICY REFORMS

As the Federal Government has been pursuing its millennium development goals, it has been rolling out reform policies. But it is a well-known fact that policy reforms not only contribute to economic growth, but also work to the disadvantage of the poor. According to Obadan (1996), some reforms, particularly those associated with stabilization programmes can hurt the poor. Therefore, governments have to be attentive to be adverse effects of reform policies on the poor and some others who lose (e.g. Civil Servant laid-off). To this end, reforms should incorporate safety-nets for the poor. Indeed, safety-net should be an integral part of the overall economic reform package, and not added on an after-

thought after the reform programme had been initiated, as was the case in Nigeria's Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP).

PROTECTION OF SPENDING ON BASIC SERVICES

During reforms, social spending on basic services should be protected. Attention needs to be paid to both the level and composition of public expenditure so as to shift resources to basic services that benefit the poor most—basic health care, adequate facilities for education, safe drinking water, etc.

ECONOMIC GROWTH STRATEGY

This is a strategy which has been popular in some international lending agencies and donor countries. Under this scheme, attention is focused on those macro and microeconomic policies and programmes which would ensure rapid growth of the economy. Economic growth is regarded as it would generate income earning opportunities for the poor, and thereby make use of their most abundant asset—their labour. Human capital, the product of education and improvements in health, is also critical to raising living standards. Investment in education, by raising productivity, stimulates growth and by opening up economic opportunities to more people, they contribute to eradication of poverty and hunger.

BASIC NEEDS APPROACH

This approach is not unrelated to protection of spending on basic services earlier mentioned. This basic needs approach tries to identify the poor and uses heterogeneous policies and programmes to meet such needs which would enable the poor to live a decent life. The components of basic needs include all or some of such basic socio-economic necessities as food and nutrition, healthcare, education, shelter, clothing, transport and employment.

GOOD GOVERNMENT

This refers to the way government exercise political power and daily administration responsibility in managing a country's human and economic resources. There is now growing belief that good governance must be part of the strategy for eradicating poverty and hunger. Three of its important attributes are accountability, transparency and participation.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

This takes cognizance of the need to give the rural sector a distinct attention partly in view of the fact that in most

countries, a disproportionately high percentage of the poor lives in rural areas. A rural development strategy is a consistent approach designed to positively affect the factors responsible for rural poverty in all its facets. The Integral Rural Development Strategy (IRDS) is one strategy that has received the most attention. It involves a simultaneous, holistic and intersectional manipulation of all cooperate variables which, together, could eradicate poverty and hunger.

TACKLING UNEMPLOYMENT

One of the greatest symptoms of poverty in Nigeria today is massive unemployment. The only way to reduce unemployment is to create a large number of small scale industries producing goods and services. The present penchant of our people for trading cannot help us. Presently, we have too many people selling too few goods. What is needed is more people producing goods for sale. We can only establish a large number of small scale industries when we can manufacture on our industrial equipment. This is a role which the government should take initiative in order to eradicate poverty and hunger; and achieve the 2015 millennium development goals.

RETURN TO PARLIAMENT SYSTEM

Another step to take in eradicating poverty and hunger is to constitutionally return the country to parliamentary system of government, which is not so expensive and power intoxicating as the presidential system. According to Odewale (2004), parliamentary democracy, as practiced in the First Republic promotes party discipline and responsive governance. It establishes official opposition that puts an incumbent government on its toes for sound policy formulation and efficient implementation. Moreover, the system would conserve billions of naira being purportedly expended on bogus, emoluments of overcrowded political jobbers at all levels of government for grassroots development and human empowerment.

CONCLUSION

Poverty and hunger are burdens Nigerians brought upon themselves due to long years of neglect, marginalization, greed, corruption, lack of vision, ethics bigotry, injustice, lack of planning, bad leadership, double standards, unproductively, name them. All these negative forces acting together have produced a hydra-headed monster that is now threatening to devour the entire country. The high rate of crime in the country is symptomatic of this level of poverty and hunger. A poor person is a person in crisis. Poverty creates in its victim an emotional trauma that tends to block the individual's capacity for sound judgment. Poverty can only be reduced and eventually eradicated in Nigeria when we embark on manufacturing

as a way of life. This we can only do when we give science and technology their rightful place in our education, policy formulation and implementation. That Nigeria is a signatory to NEPAD is a declaration that it wishes to play a major role in eradication of hunger and poverty not only in Nigeria but Africa inclusively. Certainly, the all-important task at hand for the stakeholders in the polity, especially the executive and legislature, is to reverse the unwholesome trend of spreading poverty and hunger under democratic rule in Nigeria, so, as to achieve the target set in the millennium development goals.

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