

**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND POVERTY
ALLEVIATION:
THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE (2015-2023)**

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Abstract

The global war against poverty led to the United Nation's decision to reframe its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which it adopted in year 2000 to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) because the MDGs did not have a clear transformative vision and 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 that it was replaced with the SDGs in 2015 with the declaration to 'end poverty' as its major goals, and which has also become a social evil that has affected economic growth and development. This study makes use of Marxist theory to examine the politics of SDGs poverty alleviation programmes because the SDG programme is a capitalist policy and therefore may not be able to eradicate poverty in Nigeria. Findings from the study reveal that over fifteen (15) poverty alleviation programmes were implemented like National Poverty Eradication programmes but despite all of them, poverty has remained at an alarming high rate in the country. It was discovered that the high rate of absolute and relative poverty is as a result of political instability, inadequate and lack of policy continuity, especially during the military era. Similarly, corruption, mismanagement of resources allocated for these programmes, the social evils in the aspect of violence, terrorism, insurgencies, communal and inter-religious conflicts crippled the poverty reduction strategies. Economically, other factors include a fall in the prices of petroleum products which is the country's main source of revenue, and the budget deficit to finance the poverty-reduction. Consequently, the inadequate harmonization and collaboration between all tiers of government, private sectors, and civil society organizations has also contributed to the failures of economic intervention measures. The paper recommended agricultural policies and agribusiness initiatives, provision of social amenities, institutionalization of vocational education and training centres and entrepreneurship innovation to serve as a noble solution to this heartrending paucity diminution in Nigeria.

Keywords: Corruption, Development, Eradication, Goals, Poverty.

Introduction

The estimated number of people living in extreme poverty in the world runs into billions and nearly 1 out of every ten (10) people live below the international poverty line of \$1.90 a day and this accounts for about 689 million people (NBS 2012) and about 26.2% (2 billion people) live on less than \$3.20 per day in abject poverty especially in East Asia, South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. In 2019, the estimated rates of poverty in these three regions were 1 percent (East Asia), 9 percent (South Asia) and 35 percent (Sub-Saharan Africa). This implies stark change in the distribution of global poverty over time (World Bank 2023).

Therefore, the commemoration of the International Day for Eradication of Poverty on October 17, 2023 with the theme “Decent Work and Social Protection: Putting Dignity in Practice for All” aimed for universal access to decent work and social protection to uphold human dignity for all people, held a deep significance and wake-up call for Nigeria where over 133 million people are multidimensionally poor, according to the National Bureau of Statistics and it has been projected by the World Bank that over 20,000 million more are expected to join them on this poverty train by year 2026 (The Punch 2023).

This scenario is in line with the United Nations (UN) definition of Poverty as a denial of choices and opportunities, which is a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in

the society; not having enough to feed and clothe a family; not having a school or clinic to go to, and not having the land on which to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living, and particularly not having access to credit. It also means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households, and communities; and susceptibility to violence and often implies living on marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation. (Charity, 2019)

The situation is seen as unacceptable because the world has the resources and the capacity, if it so chooses, to eradicate absolute poverty and the current global environment is a real chance to qualitatively improve the conditions of life and also create a better world for the vast majority of people in the world who live in abject poverty. (United Nations Statement of May, 1998).

The above realization led to the United Nation's decision to rebrand its MDGs which it adopted in year 2000 to SDGs for more effectiveness and achievement in the developing countries of the world. Therefore, the Sustainable Development goals adopted by the Heads of States and Governments of the United Nations in year 2015 regarding poverty are as follows:

Goal 1: By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than \$1.25 a day.

Goal 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

Goal 3: 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 to implement programmes and policies to end poverty in all its dimensions

Goal 4: Create sound policy frameworks at the national, regional and internationalism based on pro-poor and gender-sensitive development strategies to support accelerated investment in poverty eradication actions. (United Nations, 2015)

However, despite this restructuring in 2015, poverty still persists in the world, particularly in Nigeria and it is from this backdrop that this study hopes to investigate the inability of the Nigerian government to meet the goals of the SDGs and eradicate or reduce poverty to the barest minimum through all the poverty-alleviation programmes that have been introduced by all the successive civilian governments since its independence from colonial rule in 1960.

Why is poverty a recurring decimal in Nigeria?

Poverty has been marching in upward strides in Nigeria since her independence in 1960. In 2018, Nigeria overtook India as the World's Poverty Capital and has held on to the title till 2021 and now in 2025, it is

the second largest host country with 12% of the global population, that is, 71 million people living in extreme and multidimensional poverty. UNICEF warned that 25 million Nigerians are at the risk of hunger in year 2023. (UNICEF, 2023) and the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics reported that Nigeria's headline inflation rate increased by 33.88 percent in October 2024. This figure is 1.18 percent points higher when compared to the 32.70 percent recorded in September 2024. This means that on a year to year basis, the headline inflation rate was 6.55 percent higher than the rate recorded in October 2023 at 27.33 percent (NBS, 2024) Also, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO), Nigeria faced a number of labour market challenges such as high levels of youth employment, informality, working poverty and limited access to social protection measures and without the introduction of policy measures by the government to mitigate its impact on the labour market and household incomes, there were further effects on economic activity due to lower levels of consumption and investment. These led to prolonged recession and deepening inequalities and poverty in the country and it pushed over 65 million people, particularly in the informal sector into transient poverty. (ILO, 2020).

The term 'Poverty' may exist in a spectrum when viewed generally because it differs from person to person and from one country to another one. For example in Nigeria, some rich families may only be an inch away from the poverty index while some middle income families may feel rich because

they can afford the basic necessities of shelter, food and clothing while in paradox, some residents in the villages may be able to afford healthy, nutritious food even in large quantities because they are engaged in subsistence farming, but conversely, they may lack access to quality education and social amenities that the urban dwellers are enjoying. Also, citizens living in densely populated urban towns like Ibadan, may have to grapple with the challenges of environmental pollution, poor living and sanitary conditions. Hence, poverty will assume a multidimensional and multisystemic definition because a proper and fit definition of this concept must address a reduction in all these negative social factors by the government, the society and the institutions set up to carry out this task. (Adigun et al, 2011).

So, Nigeria has a slim chance of attaining Goal 1 of the SDGs which is aimed at saying ‘No to poverty’. This observation was based on the unending increase in the country’s poverty headcount, whether at a \$1.90 per day or \$3.20 per day poverty threshold.



Figure 1. People living below \$1.90 and \$3.20 a day in Nigeria from 2010 to 2021 in percentage (Source: Sustainable Development Report).

There are two poverty lines that are used to classify where people stand financially in Nigeria. The upper poverty line is N395.41 per person annually which is two-thirds of the mean value of consumption while the lower poverty line is N197.71 per person annually which is one-third of the mean value of consumption. So, if you fall under the lower poverty line, then you are extremely poor while if you fall under the upper poverty line, you are moderately poor.

In Nigeria, the low-income per capita figures show a mass or general poverty based on the “2022 National Measure of Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) Survey which was a collaborative effort between the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the National Social Safety-Nets Coordinating Office (NASSCO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the Oxford Poverty and

Human Development Initiative (OPH) sampled 56,000 households across the 36 States of the country between November 2021 and February 2022 and provided a multidimensional poverty estimate at Senatorial district level.(NBS, 2022).

Highlights of the survey revealed that 63% of persons living in Nigeria (133 million people) are multidimensionally poor. The National MPI is 0.257 indicating that poor people in Nigeria experience just over one quarter of all possible deprivations and those who are most at risk of poverty and financially insecure are Widows, Orphans, the physically challenged and the migrants.

Furthermore, 65% of the poor (86 million people) live in the North (with a multidimensional poverty of 91%), while 35% (47 million) live in the Southern part (with a multidimensional poverty of 27%). These findings show that over half of the population in Nigeria are multidimensionally poor and they cook their food with dung, wood or charcoal rather than clean energy (gas). There are also high deprivations in sanitation, access to healthcare facilities, insecurity to lives and property and high deficit in housing especially in the rural areas where 72% of the population are poor when compared to 42% of people living in the urban areas.

Food poverty is the most determining factor of vulnerability to poverty which is considered to be the root of all poverty and it is in tandem with Goal 2 of the SDGs which focuses on achieving zero hunger. According to

the United Nations (2020), , zero hunger entails the eradication of hunger, ensuring food security, improving nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture.

The prevalence of undernourishment refers to the proportion of the population whose caloric intake is inadequate to meet the minimum requirements for a healthy life. The minimum caloric requirements, as explained by UNICEF (2021), vary by individual based on age, gender, weight, and activity levels. On this indicator, the share of the population of undernourished in Nigeria is at 12.7%. The other countries have less than 7% of their population that are undernourished.

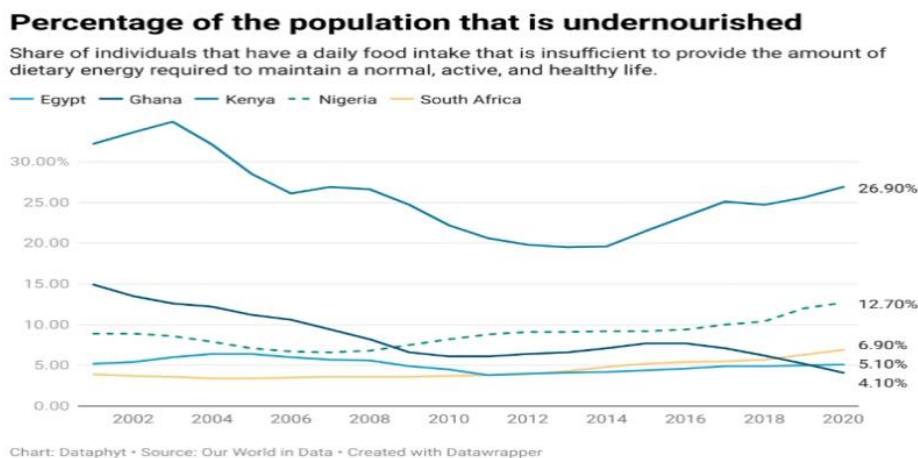


Figure 2. Percentage of the population that is undernourished in some countries in Africa from 2002 to 2020 in percentage (Source: Sustainable Development Report, 2023).

It is worth stating that since 2015, Nigeria has been experiencing a rise in the prevalence of its undernourishment. In fact, its performance in recent years has been worse than it was in 2001. Added to this is the prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the population. Moderate food insecurity is associated with the inability to regularly eat healthy, nutritious diets, while severe food insecurity is more related to insufficient quantity of food.

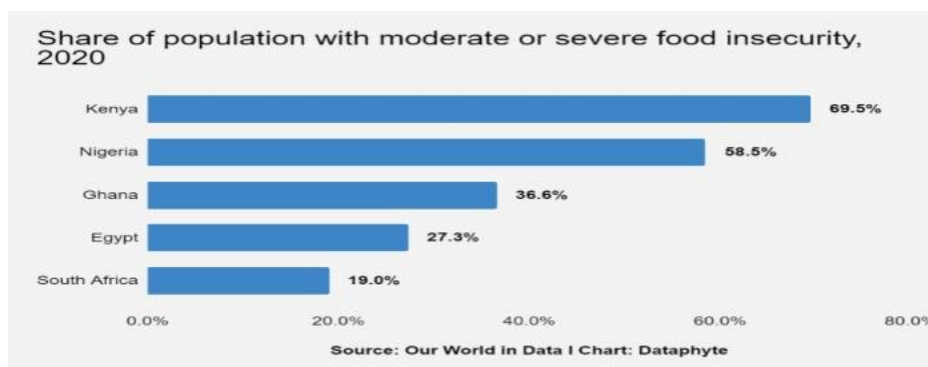


Figure 3. Share of population with moderate or severe food insecurity in Year 2020. (Source: Sustainable Development Report, 2020).

More than half of the population in Nigeria (58.5%) is said to be experiencing severe food insecurity. This means more than 5 in every 10 persons in Nigeria suffer from moderate and severe food insecurity.

This high level of poverty is unacceptable for a country with massive wealth and a huge population to support and boost its commerce, a well-

developed economy and abundant natural resources like crude oil and man-made resources. Due to this recession in the economy, many citizens are faced with a lot of economic challenges like limited financial opportunities, extreme information poverty and unemployment, lack of access to information technology resources and other debilitating environmental circumstances, especially multidimensional poverty.

In order to stem the negative effects of these challenges, governments in the past and present regimes have rolled out many economic programmes /reforms and opportunities but these programmes have not been able to overcome the varied factors that make poverty a consistent, recurrent and insolvable problem in Nigeria. These factors are income inequality, ethnic conflict and political instability, corruption, and the impact of COVID-19 have been disastrous to the economy with inflation of prices of food items on the rise and low purchasing power of the citizens. Vincent (2020).

What is multi-dimensional poverty?

Multi-dimensional poverty is a way of understanding the many facets of poverty and the ways that they intersect and overlap. It encompasses the challenges, barriers, issues and adversities that people who experience poverty face in their daily lives including lack of access to healthcare, education, food, water, energy, family planning, as well as exposure to violence and threats to safety and environmental hazards. Over half of the population of Nigeria are multidimensionally poor and cook with dung,

wood or charcoal, rather than cleaner energy. (NBS, 2022) High deprivations are also apparent nationally in sanitation, healthcare, food insecurity, and housing. (NBS, 2022).

Multidimensional poverty measurement therefore offers a more holistic approach which better reflects peoples lived experiences rather than focusing on one dimension of poverty alone e.g., income, which fails to capture the true reality of people’s circumstances and policy –relevant insights. The data it produces are able to pinpoint the areas of people’s lives that are most impacted and when it is combined with intersectional analysis, it can show who specifically are experiencing poverty and in which areas of their lives. World Bank Report (2024)

The National Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) is also reported with a linked Child Multidimensional Poverty (MPI) which reports that two-thirds (67.5%) of children (0-17 years of age) are multidimensionally poor and half of the poor people living in Nigeria are Children with 90% of them living in the rural areas. The highest deprivations are in Child Engagements which shows that over half of poor children lack access to the intellectual stimulation that is important to their early childhood development because about Four million Nigerians (21% of the population) are living with a child aged 15 – 17 years of age who is the first generation in their household to have completed primary education NBS (2022)

Vulnerability to poverty

People who are presently not in poverty and those who are currently experiencing poverty are both considered as "being vulnerable to poverty" and household vulnerability is determined by the chances or risk that a household will either fall under the poverty line or if it is already poor, that it will remain in poverty for a long time. (Oni & Yusuf, 2018). For example, if a household has 50% chance of falling into or staying in poverty, they are considered to be vulnerable to poverty. There are three groupings of vulnerability to poverty and they are the permanent poor people who find themselves in this group due to temporary abnormal event that occurred, those becoming poor are because of predictable events and those who become poor are because of damage to the economy that has affected the household's finances.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is the Marxist theory which states that inequality and poverty are functional components of the capitalist mode of production and capitalism necessarily produces egalitarian social structures in the society. Thus, inequality is passed on from one generation to the other through the sustenance and maintenance of lack of adequate services and opportunities which every individual is exposed to. In furtherance of this, the social typology of the state is made up of a hierarchy of community environment which ensures the reproduction, permanence or continuity of

the hierarchical class structure for a long period of time. Any change in the system will therefore resort to a change in the demand for labour. So, it is glaring that the continuous poverty being experienced in African countries, and particularly in Nigeria results from a continued system that seeks to and needs to produce and reproduce an industrial reserve army of poverty-stricken citizens. Therefore, inequality and poverty cannot be eradicated without fundamental changes being made in the country's system of production, distribution and exchange of capital. (Richard, 2010).

Furthermore, Marx and Engel in their Communist Manifesto of State said that the state is merely the "Political power organized by one class for oppressing another class, so, the Executive of the modern state is nothing but a committee set up for managing and protecting the common affairs of the bourgeoisie (the rich). (Das, 2009)

Hal Draper in his book (Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution) defines the state as the institution or complex body of institutions which bases itself on the availability of forcible coercion by special agencies of the society in order to maintain the dominance of a ruling class, preserves the existing property relations from changing and keep all other classes in perpetual subjection and subjugation. So, the State is fundamentally an instrument/machinery of class domination that is used by the bourgeoisie for the exploitation of the common people.

Thus, for this study, the Marxist perception of Africa's post-independence state serves as the foundation for this study. This is because Marxists view the state as the progenitor and upholder of a system or order that seeks to serve the interests of the ruling and political class in order to maintain the circumstances that will ensure the dominance and permanency of the ruling and dominant class. Ake (1985) notes that

The State represents a particular form of class domination wherein the ruling class is separated from the system of institutional mechanisms of domination and the state, itself is seen as an objective force assisting the society. This is achieved through the mediation of commodity exchange.

Therefore, the State's ingenuity and ability to organize the structure that allows the ruling class and elites to maintain their dominance through the introduction of a capitalist economy is an aspect of its nature. This is achievable because the State is not a direct tool of the class that it serves because from both the ruling class and the ruled class, it seems to be comparatively independent. (Draper, 1974)

According to Ake (1985),

The State is by no means independent of the mode of production, even though it is institutionally constituted so that it is independent of the social class. Therefore, class dominance still exists under the State, but this independence tends to hide this from the 'ordinary citizen's eyes' and the State acts as a direct tool for capital accumulation for the dominant class due to

factors related to the degree of development of productive forces. Therefore, capitalist accumulation took the form of employing the State apparatus as an instrument for personal aggrandizement and enrichment by the Elite class.

In line with this study, the Nigerian state thus serves as a direct tool for Political office holders to accumulate capital and goods at the expense of the country's development and the interests of the masses. Because of Nigerian's obsessive nature, Politicians and Public officials perceive the management of poverty reduction initiatives like NAPEP, N-POWER, YOU-WIN, and even the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Programmes as a chance to materially benefit themselves (Onah, 2021).

It is glaring therefore, that, the Nigerian political elite is not willing to make significant investments in human capital training which is the building block and cornerstone of eradicating poverty, particularly in the nation's informal economy. State officials that are put in charge of these poverty-reduction schemes and initiatives use these investments in human capital as a means of embezzling money and this explains the reason for Nigeria's incapability and incapacity to be able to carry out sincere and long-lasting programmes that are aimed at reducing poverty in the lives of its citizens.

Consequently, poverty has directly affected the Nigerian economy, especially, the inability of the poor to partake in decision making, being productive, employed, attend school and access qualitative medical services. These factors contributed to child mortality, increased crime rate, low life expectancy and homelessness (Ucha et al, 2010).

Based on the aforementioned forms of denial, the phenomenon of poverty deserves crucial policies that will tackle the multifaceted consequences on the masses in the country through the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 2015) which sees Poverty reduction as the effort of National Governments in reducing poverty levels through policy initiatives aimed at enhancing the participation of vulnerable groups in the economic and social development process.

Poverty reduction refers to formal activities geared towards lowering the prevalence and rate of poverty and save humanity mainly through empowerment and education, thereby enabling them to take care of their own personal and family basic needs (Obiwuru, 2019).

Therefore, the Federal, State, Local Governments and Non-governmental organizations in Nigeria, especially after Independence in 1960, through the Structural Adjustment Programme introduced by the Military Governments, and after return to civilian government, had devised various policies/ programmes to eradicate poverty in line with the United Nations SDGs vision and goals. They are the 1972 National Accelerated

Food Production Programme and the Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank - this was an agricultural extension programme by the Federal Department of Agriculture during General Yakubu Gowon's regime and it focused on bringing about a significant increase in the production of maize, cassava, rice and wheat in the Northern states through subsistent production within a short period of time. Utedo (2023)

1976 Operation Feed the Nation – this programme evolved under the military regime of General Olusegun Obasanjo and it was launched in order to bring about increased food production in the entire nation through the active involvement and participation of everybody in every discipline thereby making every person capable of partly or wholly feeding him or herself. The programme also sought to teach the rural farmers how to use modern farming tools. Utedo (2023)

1976 River Basin Development Authority - the River Basin Development Decree was promulgated in 1976 to establish eleven River Basin Development Authorities. The initial aim of the authorities was to boost economic potentials of the existing water bodies particularly irrigation and fishery with hydroelectric power generation and domestic water supply as secondary objective. Utedo (2023)

1980 Green Revolution Programme – it was instituted by Shehu Shagari in April 1980 and was aimed at increasing the production of

food and raw materials in order to ensure food security and self-sufficiency in basic food staples. Secondly, it aspired to boost production of livestock and fish in order to meet home and export needs and to expand and diversify the nation's foreign exchange earnings through production and processing of export crops. Utedo, 2023

1986 Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFPRI) – it was set up in February 1986 to bring about a comprehensive food, roads and rural infrastructure development in Nigeria. Utedo (2023)

1990 National Fadama Development Project (NFDP) - Fadama is the Hausa name for irrigable, low-lying plains underlain by “shallow” acquifers found along major river systems. it was designed to promote simple low-cost improved irrigation technology and increase the incomes of the Fadama users through the expansion of farm and non-farm activities with high value-added output. It had a World Bank financing of \$450 million and is being implemented in all the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory. Utedo (2023)

1993 Nigerian Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA) – it aimed at giving strategic public support for development, assisting and promoting better uses of Nigeria's rural land and their resources, boosting profitable employment opportunities for rural dwellers, raising the level/standard of living of rural people, targeting and assisting in

achieving food security through self-reliance and sufficiency. Utedo (2023)

1993 Family Support Programme and the Family Economic Advancement Programme – it made provision for the establishment of an empowerment programme for locally-based producers of goods and services and potential entrepreneurs in cottage industries. Also, it set forth eligibility criteria for loan facilities and provided for loan recovery schedules. Utedo (2023)

1999 National Poverty Eradication Council – took off with a N6 billion grant to establish poverty eradication projects in the states, Federal Capital Territory and the 774 Local governments. Utedo (2023)

2001 National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) – it was constituted to replace the previously failed Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) that was introduced by the Obasanjo Government in year 2000. NAPEP has a multi-various approach to poverty eradication including Capacity Acquisition Programme (CAP) which is an emphasis on skills acquisition and training for self-reliance, Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES) which is concerned with providing unemployed youth opportunities in skills acquisitions, generating wealth and gaining employment, a Mandatory Attachment Programme which is concerned with giving of credits and trade training and commerce, a Rural Infrastructure Development Programme which is

concerned with ensuring all-round improvement in rural developments and the Social Welfare Services Scheme (SOWESS) which was concerned with providing social and welfare services for its benefactors. Utedo (2023)

2002 National Special Programme on Food Security (NSPFS) – it was launched in all the 36 states of the Federation during the Olusegun Obasanjo regime and their broad objective was to increase food production and eliminate rural poverty. Utedo (2023).

2003 Root and Tuber Expansion Programme (RTEP) – it was launched under Olusegun Obasanjo’s administration to cover 26 states and was designed to address the problem of food production and rural poverty and it was aimed at improving the cultivation of root and tuber crops by farmers to ensure food sustainability. Utedo (2023)

2011 Agricultural Transformation Agenda (ATA) – it was launched with the aim of changing the perception about agricultural as a development issue instead of pure business. The aim of the agenda was to attract private investors in agriculture, increase value for locally produced goods, improve general conception about agriculture and also create jobs for its teeming youths and women in Nigeria. Utedo (2023).

2012 Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment programme (SURE-P) was set by the Goodluck Jonathan administration to address critical

infrastructure projects and social safety net programmes with direct investment on the citizens of Nigeria. Utedo (2023).

2015 National Social Investment Programme (SEP) – was created under Muhammad Buhari’s administration at a cost of N3.5 Trillion with the aim of ensuring a more equitable distribution of resources to vulnerable populations, including children, youth and women. The office of National Social Investment programme created four programmes to address economic development. One of them was N-Power designed to provide young Nigerians with job training and education as well as a N30,000 monthly stipends.

There was also the Conditional Cash Transfer programme which directly supports the “most vulnerable” by providing “no-strings-attached” cash to those in the lowest income group, to help to “reduce poverty, improve nutrition and self-sustainability and supporting development through increased consumption”. There is also the Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP) which provided cost-free loans to beneficiaries by helping them to reduce business startup costs. Another one was TraderMoni which was designed to provide small loans without collateral to small-scale traders or artisans that may not be able to access loans or credit through banks and traditional financial institutions. The two other arms of GEEP were MarketMoni and FarmerMoni, targeted at market women and farmers

to improve the traders' standards of living by expanding their businesses. Utedo (2023)

Poverty Alleviation Programmes that fall under the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (sdgs).

Nigeria was part of the 2020 Voluntary National Review of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and it focused on the key issues of poverty (SDG-1) and an inclusive economy (SDG-8), health and well-being (SDG-3), Education (SDG-4), Gender equality (SDG-5) and the enabling environment of peace and security (SDG-16) and partnerships (SDG-17). UN (2022)

The focus is based on Nigeria's current development priorities and challenges due to the huge challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic which tested Nigeria's public health systems and of the collapse in oil prices, which was a big setback for an economy that is still getting 80 percent of its public revenue from oil and Nigeria's 2017 VNR outlined the institutional dimensions for creating an enabling policy environment for the implementation of the SDGs through its Economic and Recovery and Recovery Growth Plan (ERGP) (2017 – 2020) with a focus on economic, social and environmental dimensions of development to make it consistent with the aspirations of the SDGs.

SDG -3 (Health and Well-being): There are still high rates of mortality rates in the under-five children and the COVID-19 pandemic challenged the

public health system's structures. There is a high rate of lack of universal access to clean water and soap and Nigeria's current access to basic drinking water stands at 64 percent. UN (2022)

SDG-4 (Education): A key challenge is that of Out-of-School-Children, a demographic challenge that is inter-related with employment (SDG-8), education (SDG-4), poverty (SDG-1) and the digital economy (SDG-17) with a population of approximately 200 million people, regional disparities are significant, with 78% of South Western children being able to read and write while only 17% of North-Eastern children can. And most surprising of all is that only 16% of the nation's GDP is devote to education. UN (2022)

SDG-8 (Inclusive Economy): Nigeria's informal economy is one of the largest on the continent with 53% of the labour force accounting for 65% of the GDP but 75% of all new jobs are informal and the Youth have a combined unemployment and under-employment rate of 55.4% or 24.5 million. To tackle this problem, the Generation Unlimited Intervention which targeted employment for 20 million youths was unveiled and the banking sector was encouraged to provide access to finance particularly for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). UN (2022)

2023 Restructuring of the Ministry of Humanitarian affairs to include Poverty Alleviation for aggressive poverty alleviation drive in Nigeria by President Tinubu. Its aims include the restructuring of the National Social Investment Programme for quick/efficient delivery; partnering with the World Bank to implement conditional cash transfers, business grants and other forms of support for the most vulnerable households via the National social safety net expansion programme in order to cushion the effects of fuel subsidy removal and other economic shocks; investment of N100 billion to purchase 1000 units of 20-seater Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) powered buses for cheaper transportation; investment of N200 Billion to cultivate 500,000 hectares of farmland to improve food security; the release of 225,000 metric tons of grains from the strategic grain reserves to households across the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory; the distribution of 225,000 metric tons of fertilizer and seedlings to farmers committed to the nation's food security; the release of N75 billion to support 100,000 SMEs and start-ups; Renewed Hope Shelter Programme for the Poor, Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons targeted at One million households; Renewed Hope Business Grants & Loans for Vulnerable Market Women, Farmers and Traders to expand their business (GEEP) targeted at 2 million beneficiaries.; Renewed Hope support to MSME to cover 1 million SMEs; Renewed Hope Skills Acquisition programmes for young Nigerians who express interest for different clusters targeted at 5

million Nigerians; The Renewed Hope National Home Grown School Feeding programme providing school meals for 10 million school children; the Renewed Hope for At-Risk Children Programme; Renewed Hope Community and Social Development programme for community grassroots projects and Renewed Hope Job Creation Scheme among other people centered initiatives. Utedo (2023)

Problems and politics of poverty alleviation programmes implementation, and success in Nigeria

The first major setback is frequent launching of new programmes by successive governments. Studies by Aliyu & Chukwudi (2015) and Jacob & Onwughalu (2015) have shown that poverty eradication policies in Nigeria are either imported or superimposed from international donor agencies, namely, the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, which have made the execution of the policies mere lip services, ad-hoc arrangements and colorful celebrations (Umar et al, 2016). For example, in 2007, the Yar Adua government launched a programme called the Seven-point Agenda purposely to address food security, wealth creation, provision of energy and power, transportation, security, land reforms and education but there was a sudden change of leadership due to the demise of the President. The new government equally launched another one called the Transformation Agenda in the year 2011, which reversed all the

implementation strategies of the Seven Point Agenda and yet it did not achieve any remarkable success (Abioro, 2016).

The second paradox is poor economic management and lack of proper coordination of the poverty reduction programme by the government, especially by those saddled with the duty of implementation. They are usually the non-poor and holders of political power who hijack the programmes for their own cliques, misappropriation of funds and lack of genuine beneficiaries. There are difficulties in accessing the programmes, lack of adequate sensitization about the programmes and how to access them, and programme discontinuity, which affects the potency and operations of the programme. Therefore, instead of reducing the incidence of poverty, which is the main aim, these programmes serve as a means for draining the nations resources due to the pursuit of parochial interests of the politicians as a result of fostering corruption, dishonesty, mismanagement, imitation of other country's programmes, political interference, lack of funding, etc. (Rasaki, 2016).

The third issue is the hydra-headed monster called corruption, bribery and fraud which has succeeded in plunging Nigeria to the bottom of the scale in human development index due to a high corruption score and has made a mockery of the country amongst the comity of nations. It is glaring that poverty and corruption are interrelated and encourages each other in all levels of the government – Local, State and National and this is evident in

our Federal system of government with a resultant fiscal decentralization which provides Nigeria's State and Local Governments with a considerable autonomy, including control over 50% of government revenues as well as responsibility for providing public services. But the lack of a stringent regulatory and monitoring system has given room for rampant corruption which has hindered past poverty alleviation efforts to a large extent since resources which could pay for public goods or directed towards investment (to create employment and other opportunities for the citizens) are being misappropriated. For example, Agbo (2024) reports that the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) arrested and detained a former Minister of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development, Sadiya Umar-Farouq, for interrogations over allegations of corruption in the spending and expenditure of N37.1 billion social intervention funds during her tenure.

Fourthly, is Nigeria's debt burden because the funds that are needed for the country's expansion and development are diverted to pay off its debt which at September 2023 is put at N22.7 trillion. So, less money is spent on providing basic, social and physical infrastructure for the underprivileged citizens. (Omoniyi, 2018). This inability on the part of government is also being heightened by the declining petroleum crude oil prices and the rising proportion of its external debt. (Okafor et al, 2021)

The fifth reason is that Nigeria's poverty is self-inflicted due to lack of political will by its political leaders. This assertion is not far-fetched and it is because despite being rich and abundant in natural and human resources, its successive Federal governments have been corrupt, inept, inefficient and lacked the leadership will to drive the economy efficiently and productively. For example, the Federal Government's economic and monetary policies since the assumption of the Tinubu-led administration have widened the gap between the rich and the poor in Nigeria. And, World Bank economic analysts, (Shubham,2022) have forewarned that the recent policies in the financial and energy sector will further create a widening gap in the coming years ahead without any sign of poverty reduction except palliative measures are put in place for the poor to absorb the shocks.

Findings in the commodities and financial markets indicate that much more money is now being controlled by the Rich as an aftermath of efforts by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to mop up excess financial liquidity in its attempts to control inflation but this goal is not achieving expected results as the plight of the poor worsens.

Although some of the big players in the economy and the rich members of the society who have stakes and investments in a few sectors were also adversely affected by the policies, but they have demonstrated the capacity to not only overcome the negative impact quickly, but are also exploiting the advantages of the new policies while on the other side of the divide, the

poor are groaning under the existing policies introduced in the early months of the current administration. Oxfam International, reported that the combined effort of Nigeria's five richest men (\$29.9 billion) could end extreme poverty at a national level, but yet, about 5 million citizens face hunger and more than 112 million people are living in poverty. (Oxfam, 2017).

However, more of such policies are still being rolled out monthly with indications that many more are still on the way in the years coming ahead. Some of the policies include the withdrawal of petroleum subsidy which impacts everyone but it disproportionately affects the poor due to increased transportation and living costs, depreciation of the Naira against the world's major currencies, raising of customs duty rates and raising of benchmark interest rates, all of which have propelled the inflation to a high rate. High inflation further exacerbates poverty by reducing the purchasing power of those who have fixed incomes. The roll out of new electricity tariffs has added to the rising cost of living and reduction of the disposable income of the poor. Interest rate hikes benefits the wealthy while burdening the borrowers, thereby widening the disparities in their wealth indexes.

According to Peter & Nkiruka (2024), amidst all these adversities and economic gloom, companies and individuals having stakes in these sectors have been declaring very high profits. For example, the banks have declared average industry profits of N5.5 trillion in 2023 and N11.7 trillion

in the first quarter of 2024 (Q1'24) indicating 220 percent and 314 percent average rise in profit for 2023 and 2024 respectively. The bulk of the profits went to the owners of the businesses in these sectors and to their employees who enjoyed salaries and allowances increases of about 75 percent. The Vanguard (2024).

The rich across other sectors have also enjoyed relative comfort in the economic environment especially with the unprecedented over-subscription of 256 percent to the CBN's Treasury Bill running to the tune of N3.1 trillion while the poor are searching for money to eat at least once a day. (Emeka & Nkiru, 2024)

Recommendations and Prospects for Poverty Alleviation

Reviving the economy requires stimulus spending, creating an enabling environment for domestic and foreign investment inflow, and effective security through a devolved law enforcement, adequate power supply and massive support for agriculture, rural infrastructure, mining, start-ups and MSMEs. Also, the following should be initiated and effected.

End and eradicate poverty in all its forms (Goal 1)

The government should implement a national Social Investment Programmes that will focus on providing Social Safety Nets for the poor, welfare, job creation and skills for the unemployed, with a target of creating about 3 million jobs. Likewise, there should be the establishment of institutional frameworks at the national and sub-national levels that will

support the effective implementation of the SDGs as a direct response to address the state of endemic poverty. For example, the Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programmes should provide targeted cash transfers to the poor and vulnerable households in the 774 Local Government Areas with the final goal of lifting them out of poverty and achieving 30 percent success in the first year, 50% in the second year and 20% in the third year.

End Hunger, Achieve Food Security, Improve Nutrition and Promote Sustainable Agriculture (Goal 2)

The impact of Covid-19 pandemic increased hunger and food security, disrupted food supply chains, income losses, widened social inequities, altered the food environment and led to price hikes with the Food Insecurity Experience Scale of Nigeria standing at 26.4 percent showing that there is severe food insecurity within the population. Therefore, to combat these, small scale food producers' resilience and adaptability should be strengthened in order to reverse the trend of rising hunger and reduce the share of people living in extreme poverty.

Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all citizens (Goal 7)

There should be accelerated action on modern renewable energy especially in heating and transport sectors and likewise, optimal supply of electricity

should be duly looked into by the different levels of government and relevant stakeholders.

Wage a decisive war on corruption

Mismanagement, dishonesty, favoritism, poor accountability and public distrust are some of the factors that contributed to the ineffectiveness of most of the previous policies on poverty alleviation. Consequently, this study suggested for the reinforcement of the war against indiscipline and corruption. Prudence would be achieved if public office holders face the wrath of the law.

Promote a sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all citizens (Goal 8)

Ensuring that youths are well educated and able to transition to productive employment through the digital economy can reduce poverty significantly. This can be ensured through the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) which is Nigeria's Medium-Term Plan to restore and sustain growth, build a competitive economy and invest in the citizens. By this initiative, unemployment would drop from 16.2 percent in 2017 to 11.2 percent in 2020 and net job creation will grow by 1.5 million to 5.1 million in 2025.

Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation (Goal 9)

Majority of the Nigerian population is still unable to connect, either through rural roads or cyberspace which should be provided to enable farmers and their families have easy access to markets, along with health and education facilities. This will help to reduce poverty by improving agricultural productivity, business profitability and employment prospects and opportunities.

Promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for Sustainable development (Goal 16)

Nigeria has been confronted with the challenge of Boko Haram Insurgency, Fulani Herdsmen and Farmers crises and kidnappings. In order to curtail this menace, the government should develop and implement a comprehensive action plan for the troubled regions in the country (North-East, Niger Delta) including emergency humanitarian assistance relocation, rehabilitation and resettlement of victims, build peace, security, infrastructure, agriculture, health education and governance. Also, it should establish security partnerships with security agencies in allied countries in order to build capacity and curb border crimes such as terrorism, cybercrimes.

Promotion of Gender Equality through Education (Goal 5)

Education and capacity building are a main driving force in the eradication of poverty and development because they are the key to any process of individual and collective empowerment and in dealing with poverty, gender equality and the empowerment of women is germane and must receive sustained attention. Hence, poverty eradication strategies must address gender issues by examining the differential impact of policies and programmes on women and they must empower women by ensuring that they have access to income earning opportunities in both the rural and informal sector as well as ensuring that they have universal access to basic social services. (United Nations Statement of May, 1998).

Conclusion

A lot of efforts have been made by the United Nations through its MDGs, SDGs, Economic and Financial Aids and Grants, Relief Packages and Programmes in Africa, especially Nigeria with the objective to combat poverty in all its ramifications, yet little progress, results and successes have been recorded so far. This is because there is lack of fiscal transparency, no access to information or data on the progress or success of the SDG programmes by successive governments, lack of anti-corruption laws and penalties, absence of citizenship engagement and empowerment in budget making process, implementation of open contracting in the public sector, and provision of an enabling or easy environment for doing business that

will enable them to contribute their own quota to the realization of these goals. It has been discovered that if Poverty, which is a major obstacle in the pathway of the country's journey to social and economic emancipation and independence is conquered and defeated, its gains will trickle to and permeate other aspects of the society positively in 2023 and beyond.

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