The Millennium Development Goals and Nigeria's Development: A Preliminary Insight

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Abstract

This paper surveys trends that influence the slow development of Nigeria. The accompanying deterioration in the people's well-being lends credence to the idea that both globalization and domestic agents abort Nigeria's economic recovery programmes and hence poverty alleviation efforts. Clearly, the Nigerian economy is in crisis and that situation requires a crisis response, which has been expressed in the MDGs. The vision of this development strategy is of a prosperous Nigeria that is pro-people in its outlook, manages its affairs transparently and is freed of obstacles to development. Therefore, the MDGs offer a promise to Nigeria and they are also a framework around which the international community should concrete its efforts for the country's development. By employing the political economy approach and the dependency paradigm, we argue that poverty in Nigeria will not go away when the people are excluded from development processes and the country peripherally integrated with the global economy. Happily though, the awareness is growing among Nigerians that determination and ability to get moving is the hallmark of progress. By challenging the architecture of its underdevelopment and dependence, the regeneration of Nigeria could hopefully be effected through the achievement of the MDGs.

Keywords: Millennium, Development Strategy, Recovery Programmes, Nigeria, Globalisation

1. Introduction

The economy of Nigeria has been undergoing profound changes whose components include greater openness to trade and investments, liberalization of the domestic markets and increased participation of the private sector in the provision of goods and services. But alongside these positive changes are appreciable weaknesses that the economy exhibits as globalization proceeds. These weaknesses, which have endured for long despite Nigeria's enormous resources, explain the country's underdevelopment. An inquiry into the underlying causes of these weaknesses reveals that economic and social policies imposed on Nigeria by forces outside the country marginalized the local potential and stifled the initiative and zeal of the people towards development. Investments too are not adequately targeting poverty reduction, and so there is a growing lack of basic needs. Worse still, the structures sustaining Nigeria's underdevelopment frustrate economic and social transformation, thereby solidifying the foundation that regenerates poverty in the country. The imperatives for change are, therefore, overwhelming and this calls for actions that would rekindle development in the country.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are a response to this call for actions. The MDGs are a United Nations development strategy that targets poverty reduction in all its ramifications as against prescriptions usually foisted on Nigeria by its development partners that seek growth at the expense of equity and development. The MDGs share the realism that development is about poverty reduction and once the people notice that development is targeted at them, their commitment will become easy to exploit and sacrifice for its success genuinely assured. And with the right policies and choices, domestic resources can be more effectively mobilized, capital flight minimized and consequentially, the economy can be strengthened as the capabilities of the people are channeled to the cause of development.

This paper advances the argument that underdevelopment and poverty cannot be reduced in Nigeria in the absence of two critical conditions. The first of these conditions is a pro-Nigerian development strategy, whose principle rests on a broad-based and inclusive framework that concentrates poverty reduction efforts in sectors where the poor are concentrated. The second condition is equitable integration of the Nigerian economy into the global economy for the country to successfully exploit the gains of globalization.In organizing the materials presented in his paper, we have to be selective because discussion about development in Nigeria is an extremely large enterprise. Consequently, the paper is adumbrated as follows: Section I deals with the introduction.

In section II, we present some economic problems of Nigeria and their implications for the country's development. The prospects of implementing the Millennium Development Goals for Nigeria's renewal are discussed in section III while the conclusions are contained in section IV.

II. The Nigerian Economy in Perspective

The world economy is growing, but the Nigerian economy is not keeping pace with that growth. For example, as world output grew from 4 per cent in 2000 to 10 per cent in 2005, Nigeria recorded a modest growth rate of 3 per cent in 2005 as against 2.7 per cent in 2000 (African Development Bank, 2006). And while global gross domestic product (GDP) per capita rose from 4,382 million dollars in 1980 to 5,218 million dollars in 2006, Nigeria's share declined from 350 dollars to 300 dollars over the same period (UNCTAD, 2007). Nigeria's failure to achieve convergence with global economic performance is also captured by the declining share of Nigeria's exports to GDP from 60.3 per cent in 1991 to 57.7 per cent in 2004 (Sanni, 2006). In addition, national savings declined from 5.96 per cent of disposable income in 1975 to only 2.31 per cent in the 2004 (Adam and Agba, 2006). The slowdown in gross domestic investment (as a fraction of GDP) has equally been severe as it declined from 21 per cent in the 1990s to 17 per cent in 2004 (World Bank, 2006).

Little wonder that Nigeria's economic performance has been described in the literature as stagnant, poor and tragic (Easterly and Levine, 1997); World Bank, 2003 and UNDP 2006). These assessments are not exaggerations if we note that in 2006, the per capital GDP of the country stood at 300 dollars. Although, this national average masks significant variations between the states of the federation in that productivity and incomes are higher in Lagos and Port-Harcourt than in Katsina and Yola, the point remains that over 70 per cent of Nigerians lives on less than 1 dollar per person per day (African Development Bank, 2006). With such harrowing experience, it is obvious that Nigeria's poverty is a development problem and that theme is being raised constantly in economic discourse.

Poverty as understood here is multifaceted and there is a large and growing literature on its ramifications and consequences (see, for example, Onokerhoraye, 1995; Onwuka, 2002; Jiboye, 2003; Edem, 2005 and Osagie, 2007). Simply put, poverty is a condition that debases its victims in terms of access to the basic needs of life. What is more, it makes them voiceless on issues that affect their destiny. From these submissions, two questions deserve consideration: the first concerns the driving forces behind Nigeria's underdevelopment and poverty and the second relates to how the two phenomena are reproduced. In answering these questions, it is pertinent to observed that Nigeria is among the richest countries in the world in terms of natural resources, but in human development it ranks among the poorest. This poverty is exacerbated by numerous challenges facing the country, which include urbanization without meaningful industrialization, growing population, environmental deterioration, corruption and poor governance.

Despite the rural-urban drift, the Nigerian economy is still dependent on primary activities, in particular agriculture, which during the 1995 – 2005 period accounted for over 50 per cent of the GDP in the country. The secondary sector lagged behind with an average of 8 per cent, while the tertiary sector contributed about 40 per cent (Odebiyi and Ayodele, 2008). The implication is that secondary and tertiary activities like manufacturing and services are not playing leading roles in the determination of national output, employment generation and income and this partly explains why the majority of the people are living in poverty, the country's huge petroleum resources notwithstanding (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2003).

Nigeria's population trebled from about 50 million persons in 1960 to 140 million people in 2006 (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2007). The real GDP of the country during the same period increased three times, implying that growth merely sustains the expanding population. As the population increases, the carrying capacity of certain important ecosystems is exceeded and this bears heavily on the ecological sanity of the country.

Moreover, the ecological footprint of a given human settlement, defined as the territory, which suffers the impact of settlement in terms of economic processes (for details, see FAO, 2001 and UNEP, 2002) clearly shows that Nigeria is on the fringes of an ecological disaster. For example, the forests in Nigeria are endangered through the proliferation of commercial farms and logging and the poor, hard pressed for survival increasingly abuse the forests. The resulting deforestation has left Nigeria with a forest loss of 3,984 square kilometers between 1990 and 2002 (Millennium Development Goals Report, 2004).

Since forests and woodlands provide food, fuel, medicinal plants, livestock and building materials for people, their depletion means loss of vital economic resources and disruption of socio-economic activities they support.
It is equally noteworthy that domestic distortions and large shifts in economic policies, exemplified by huge government deficits and massive corruption contribute to Nigeria's economic difficulties. And as the global market economy establishes its hegemony over national economic space, inequalities between developed nations and the developing countries have been intensified. As such, wealth and other resources continue to be concentrated in the industrial North, while developing nations, such as Nigeria, continue to fall further behind in living standards.

These downturns have culminated into unprecedented socio-economic crises in Nigeria since the 1980s. The magnitude and impact of these crises on the economic and political stability of Nigeria have been widely studied (Yahaya, 1991; Evans, 1992; Berry, 1993; Ake, 1996; Bhalla and Lapeyre, 1999; Blackhurst, Lyakurwa and Oyejide, 2000; Ianchovichina, et al, 2001, UNCTAD 2003, Onwuka, 2005 and Onwuka and Eguavoen, 2007) that we do not need to duplicate these efforts. Suffice, however, to note that these crises have been serious, widespread and protracted, which explain the economic reforms being undertaken by successive Nigerian governments at the instance of the International Monetary Fund and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IMF/World Bank).

Arguably, these reforms have yielded improvements in production activities, the testimony being the 3 per cent average growth in the Nigerian economy over the 1990 – 2006 periods (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2007). But the reforms have made little headway in promoting more dynamic changes in production pattern in order to increase consumption in the country. Decline in social expenditures occasioned by the reforms creates social tensions that undermine domestic governance and make it harder for the authorities to maintain political stability in the country. In addition, the reforms are being implemented in a hostile international environment such that the favourable outcomes have been swamped by adverse shocks such as the drain of capital attributable to unfavourable terms of trade of Nigeria's exports and aggressive protectionism against the same exports as they make inroads into the markets of Western nations (South Centre 2002).

In a way, therefore, Nigeria is at a crossroad. Because of the multiplicity of the problems confronting the economy and the lackluster approach in addressing them, it would appear that their resolution is unimaginable. The MDGs offer a lifeline if implemented with determination and herein has the hope for the future.

III. The Millennium Development Goals Implementation in Nigeria

Presently in Nigeria, the economic activities of the state have been scaled back somewhat and controls are being replaced by deregulation, which allows markets to allocate resources. With democratic rule entrenched since 1999, the reconstruction of Nigeria's social fabric has begun, thus creating a climate of confidence for the rejuvenation of the economy. This has also provided a basis upon which the industrialized nations could be persuaded to stand shoulder to shoulder with Nigeria in its development efforts. For Nigeria this is crucial, not because of stronger global partnership that it portends, but because of the higher goal of overcoming the scourge of poverty in the country.

Nevertheless, the prospects of economic revival in Nigeria in order to meet the MDGs adopted by the United Nations in 2000 appear dim. The MDGs envisage among other priorities to halve by 2015 the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day and the proportion of people who suffer from hunger. By the same date, maternal mortality would have been reduced by three quarters and under-five child mortality reduced by two thirds of their current levels, halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other major diseases that affect humanity and ensure that children everywhere will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

Efforts are also to be intensified to achieve by 2020 a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers, integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes, reverse the loss of environmental resources and build a global partnership for development by dealing comprehensively with the development requirements of needy countries (United Nations, 2000). The implementation of the MDGs in Nigeria has been on for about a decade out of its 15 year period. And so, while a thorough assessment of its impact on the development of the country cannot presently be conducted, we would, nevertheless, attempt a provisional judgment.

Eradicating poverty is the main thrust of the MDGs. Indeed, the MDGs is all about people because they are the agents and ultimate beneficiaries of development. But data on the MDGs implementation so far reveal that Nigeria fell short in meeting the objectives on issues such as poverty reduction, child and maternal mortality, environmental sustainability and ability to integrate with the global economy. As it were, the Nigerian economy keeps deteriorating and the social condition of the people worsens, while the remedies for curtailing the menace have come rather slowly.

Little progress has been made to articulate, attain and sustain an annual average growth rate of GDP of 7 per cent required for the MDGs, improve domestic savings and the quality of public resource management, increase capital inflows through the attraction of foreign investments and development assistance and enhance the performance of the country in global trade. The country has also failed to make progress towards fiscal consolidation and budgetary discipline.

Admittedly, the government has initiated several supportive programmes in defence of the poor such as the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), the Social Welfare Services Scheme (SWSS) and the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). But, the facts on ground suggest that these efforts are not accompanied by commitment, transparency and determination. That is why the number of the country's poor has increased from 65 per cent in 1996 to 70 per cent in 2006 (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2006). That is also why in 2005, the expenditure share of the poorest 20 per cent of the population was 5 per cent compared to the 80 per cent expenditure share of the richest 20 per cent, indicating worsening poverty and increasing inequality in the country (Nigerian Economic Summit, 2006).

Education has been identified as the cornerstone of development and the MDGs seek to achieve universal primary education by 2015. But the trend in gross enrolment ratio has been abysmal. According to Odebiyi and Ayodele (2008), the gross enrolment rates for male and females in Nigeria are 85 and 67 respectively with an average of 76. The biggest challenge in this regard is inadequate public spending on education, which on average has been 4 per cent of federal allocation instead of the 26 per cent recommended by UNESCO. There is also a high degree of resource mismanagement in the education sector through corruption. Faced with these challenges, it is unlikely that the education goal can be achieved.

The gender issue is of considerable significance in the Nigerian society and is concerned with the imperatives of equity. No development effort can succeed if the life chances of more than half of the people involved are in jeopardy. Granted that the gender disparity in access to opportunities in Nigeria is rooted in African traditional culture and the values of imposed religions, the consequences have increasingly translated into unequal access to education, health, employment and other areas between the male and female members of the Nigerian society.

Nevertheless, due to government intervention over time, the imbalances in gender ratios on education, for instance, seem to have reduced. Data indicate that the ratio of literate females to males between 15 to 24 years of age in 2004 was 0.95, (NEEDS, 2004), although there exists regional variations in this regard. Women wage employment outside the agricultural sector also increased from 46 per cent in 1996 to 65 per cent in 2006 (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2007). However, women participation in politics is still a great challenge. The 35 per cent political post for women in order to close the political gap has not been met. The need for equity must, therefore, compel government to promote more effective programmes in favour of women in the cultural, political, economic and social sectors for their empowerment to meet the target of the MDGs.

The reduction of child mortality is a daunting task. The number of doctors and hospital beds per 10,000 people at less than 1 in both cases in 2005 (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2006) is outrageous and the trend has not shown any improvement over the years. For sure, the national programme on immunization is on course, but the country's poor health facilities particularly in the rural areas, lack of family planning and unabated teenage pregnancy are indicators that reducing under – five mortality in Nigeria is not in sight.

Closely linked to child mortality is maternal health. The sexual and reproductive health of women is one of the primary concerns of modern governments. But in Nigeria, the maternal mortality rate was 700 per 100,000 live births in 2005. This average figure masks important regional variations because in some Northern parts of the country, the rates were up to 2000 per 100,000 live births. Inaccessibility to adequate facilities and skilled manpower accounts for this tragedy as the proportion of births attended to by medical professionals dropped from 42 per cent in 2000 to 35 per cent in 2006 (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2007). This definitely has its toll on pregnancy outcomes.

As for combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, we note that while policy formulation, political support, organizational structures and education are good, there is a noticeable weakness in the availability of programme resources. In the case of HIV/AIDS, supportive intervention faces tremendous challenge due to conservative social and religious values. The fear of stigmatization prevents millions from access to government funded support programmes for HIV/AIDS victims. In the circumstances, the treatment of AIDS and other opportunistic infections including tuberculosis is impaired with adverse consequences for the health of the citizens and achievement of the MDGs.

On measures to ensure environmental sustainability, we are afraid that the government does not exhibit appropriate concern in terms of the linkage between environmental protection and sustainable development. Despite meager institutional interventions such as the National Policy on Environment, Nigeria is threatened by a plethora of environmental problems including urban decay, soil erosion, desertification and others. The production of oil and gas has considerable consequences ranging from deforestation, land degradation, water and air pollution and loss of biodiversity especially in the Niger Delta region of the country. The emission of Carbon-dioxide from the use of hydrocarbon fuels continues to pollute the environment and is a source of climate change in the country.

The proportion of people without access to clean water supply and adequate sanitation facilities has increased. The rural areas are the worse hit although slums and shanty town continue to emerge in the cities with little commitment to address these problems by government. The limited knowledge by the populace about the health implications of environmental degradations has meant unchallenged and persistent rural and urban decay.
[Equitable global partnership with the rest of the world has been difficult given the attitude of Western nations to the development of weak and dependent states. Be that as it may, the government has continued to encourage the promotion of global partnership through the creation of investment friendly environment in Nigeria, liberalization of trade regimes and tax incentives. In response, the European Union has offered market access and development cooperation under the Cotonou Partnership Agreement (European Union, 2002).

The United States African Growth and Opportunity Act of 2000 is being exploited (USTR, 2002). The country's debt has been drastically reduced, thereby reducing the debt service burden. And with the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), Nigeria has accepted responsibility for its development with foreign assistance being an additional complement. Despite all these, Nigeria at the present rate would fail to achieve the MDGs because the country is currently off track to meet the goals. Except for access of women to education, it is doubtful if the other goals would be achieved by 2015. Nevertheless, tremendous gains towards meeting the goals are possible if the existing commitments are translated unto deliverables. And so, with sound policies and courage to simply implement commitments backed up by strong support promised by development partners, there could be some array of hope.

IV. Summary and Concluding Remarks

The main arguments advanced in this paper can now be summarized with concluding remarks. The frail pace of Nigeria's development has resulted from a confluence of negative factors, and that marks a setback to the achievement of the MDGs and hence poverty reduction in the country. Despite adjustment reforms, the Nigerian economy still exhibits weaknesses that point to defects in the approach to and expose the flaws in the reform policies. In addition, growth impulses from abroad are obstructed by the hegemony of global market forces. It is, therefore, imperative that Nigeria's development should be sought in the MDGs, though concerted intervention at the global level would be a welcome complement.

The prospects of achieving the MDGs by 2015 appear bleak, but happily the awareness is growing among Nigerians that ability to get moving is the hallmark of progress. With people centred economic policies, best practices in political engineering and good governance, Nigeria can substantially increase its savings so as to considerably invest in the MDGs and ultimately improve the social conditions of its peoples. Creating a propitious external environment is a major challenge for the MDGs. Along this line, the industrialized nations must choose between a global market driven only by calculations of profit and one, which offers prosperity to all nations through the instrumentality of global economic solidarity. Nigerian exports need to enjoy comparative advantage in Western markets as foreign investments are encouraged to make inroads into the country. Therefore, better focused developmental assistant is needed in Nigeria; otherwise the achievement of the MDGs even after 2015 would be a mirage.

Above all, to meet the MDGs requires more than the stimulation of growth in the Nigerian economy, the sustainability environmental resources, the reduction of gender inequality, provision of social services and the income generating activities to sustain them. The Nigerian values need to be rediscovered and repositioned to effectively contribute to development.

The self-confidence of the people and their faith in their capabilities impaired over the years by poor governance, we believe, could be regenerated through the equitable philosophy of the MDGs that puts people first.

Having come to the determination to change the nature and architecture of Nigeria's underdevelopment and dependency, the achievement of the MDGs would certainly be a matter of time. It is obvious from the discussion in this paper that the Nigerian development status is dismay relative to its chances of achieving the MDGs. This situation calls for measure that would ensure economic rejuvenation, social justice, good governance and self sufficiency. These elements are required in the reform process to alter and re-align aggregate domestic production pattern to achieve steady and balance growth, in line with the spirit and characteristics of SAP, Vision 2010, NEP, NEEDS, and NEPAD.

In view of the above, reforms re-enforcement to achieve MDGs would need to consider policy objectives such as:

a. Privatization and rationalization of public enterprises
b. Trade and payment liberalization
c. Demand management strategies
d. Diversification of Nigeria's economy
e. Attainment of realistic exchange rate
f. Appropriate prices of goods and services

Embarking on the aforementioned reform measures would help in so small measure to alter Nigeria's structure of production and consumption activities in other to diversify the economic base, reduce Nigeria's dependence on crude oil as the most viable source of revenue create wealth and job opportunities and put the economy on a path of self sustaining and non-inflationary growth thereby reducing or totally eradicating poverty.

In conclusion, we argue that this is what the economy require if it is to attain at least, much of the MDGs at the stipulated period of 2015.

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