

Poverty Reduction as a Tool for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Nigeria

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Abstract

Poverty reduction is of critical concern to developing country such as Nigeria. Because poverty touches other areas that are fundamental to human development, such as hunger, education, social discrimination, gender inequality, etc. Because it is the foundation of the 17 SDGs set by the UN General Assembly in 2015. While the number of people living in absolute poverty is reducing in other parts of the developing world, such as Brazil, India and China, the reverse is the case in Nigeria. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) people living in absolute poverty is increasing at an alarming proportion in Nigeria. It also stated that poverty is massive, pervasive, endemic, and engulfs a large segment of the Nigerian population. This is despite the fact that past and present governments at all levels, (Local, State and Federal) in Nigeria have put in place numerous poverty reduction strategies to reduce the scourge of poverty in the country. The question that comes to any discerning mind is whether the various policies have been effective in combating poverty in Nigeria. Or what else can be done to confront poverty in order for Nigeria to meet UN SDGs by 2030.

Keywords: *Poverty, Sustainable Development Goals, Environment, Education and Development.*

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Background to the Study

Poverty is an age long phenomenon that has ravaged all known societies before the beginning of modern civilization. Consequently, societies have been sharply divided between the rich and the poor, the haves and have not, and it was a defining feature of the earlier civilizations such as the ancient Egypt, the Indus valley of the present day India (Briti) etc (Bri)

Poverty encompasses inadequate income and denial of basic necessities of life, such as education, health services, clean water and sanitation (World Bank, 2007), which are essential for human survival, dignity and realization of one's potential. Abrasive poverty also has serious impact on the environment and it negatively affects the quality of life of the people.

Besides, Gass and Adetumbi (2000) noted that poverty denies its victims the most basic needs for survival, such as water, food, clothing, shelter etc. Therefore, we can safely assert that poverty manifests not only in economic deprivation but also in terms of an individual's inability to access basic social amenities (World Bank, 1999) and constraints individual's ability to actualize his/her potential. But the Marxists contend that poverty is a consequence of the uneven distribution of resources around the world on an international, national and regional scale.

The objective of sustainable development is to reduce over exploitation of natural resources, in order that the future generation can also exploit them. Poverty is one of the main causes of environmental degradation in Nigeria. Various studies have confirmed the high rate of poverty in the delta region of Nigeria is responsible for widespread environmental pollution in the area. Poverty has pushed many youth to undertake unwholesome activities that destroyed the environment, i.e operation of illegal oil refineries.

Also poverty compelled people to over exploit natural resources without considering the implication of their activities on future generation. Poor people without other variable of livelihood tend to over exploit natural resources, thereby degrading the environment. In view of the crushing effect of poverty in the world, the global community through the United Nations General Assembly saw the urgent need to end extreme poverty by adopting Sustainable Development Goals, (SDGs) in 2015. Eradicating extreme poverty was the No. 1 goal. Because it was believed that all other goals revolves around poverty eradication. In this paper, the focus will be on empowering the poor people around the world through education.

Development and Sustainable Development

The concept of development was sequel to the end of the Second World War and the subsequent reconstruction of Europe through the Marshall plan (Onyeiwu and Iwarimie-Jaja, 1991). But like other concepts in the social science lexicon, development as a concept has to a large extent been nebulous. The same is true of its opposite, underdevelopment.

According to Onyeiwu and Iwarimie-Jaja, (1991), after many decades of semantics, rhetoric and research, however, the debate over the conceptual parameters of development and underdevelopment has hardly abated.

In the earlier days of development theorizing up to the 1960s, economic development was defined in terms of economic growth that is yearly increase in the Gross National Product (GNP) or a yearly rise in the per capita output of goods and services. Accordingly, growth was believed to have been attained at the rates of between 5% and 7%. This perspective gave much impetus to the modernization model of development (Onyeiwu and Iwarimie-Jaja,1991).

Development means a far reaching transformation of societies, economic, social and political structure of the dominant organization of production distribution and consumption. It entails, the reduction of the number of people living in abject poverty, such as the world has witnessed in India, China and Brazil in the past two decades. Development is also viewed as the provision of some “Basic Needs”. This must include health services, education, housing, sanitation, water supply and electric power supply. These are some of the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals. It is a perception hinged on the fact that the provision of these basic needs would reduce the rate of poverty in the world across all classes and conserve the environment. In a broader sense, economic development entails equitable distribution of goods and services, regular political participation of a large majority of the citizenry.

Sustainable Development – we note that man and his environment are inseparable. The resources which promote human existence are derived from the environment. Therefore as man affects the quality of the environment so does the environment affect the quality of man's life (Salau, 1993). Consequently, human development is inextricably linked to the continued availability of natural means of support and this implies that any threat to the security of these resources constitutes a direct threat to human survival, development and increased in poverty rate. Thus, according to the United Nations' Stockholm conference on Human Environment (Aja and Emeribe, 2000).

..... man's environment is that which gives him physical substance and affords him the opportunity for intellectual, spiritual and social growthBoth aspects of the man's environment, the natural and the man made are essential for his well being and enjoyment.

In addition, Ibaba, (2005) asserted that the activities of man indeed impacted negatively on the quality of the environment, that man has through his activities either through consciously or not induced environment challenges, thereby creating imbalance, which has invariably reduced the quality of the environment and apparently distorted development in the long-run, leading to increase in poverty rate.

It is obvious that the protection of the environment is a veritable part of development and that without environmental protection; development is hampered and consequently exacerbates poverty. Thus, declining quality of the environment and its resources base tend to create a crisis of development.

Apparently, this explains the position of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) Wikipedia, 2007) which asserted that:

Environment and development are not separate challenges; they are inexorably linked. Development cannot subsist upon deteriorating environment of resources base. The environment cannot be protected when growth leaves out of account the cost of environmental destruction.

Sustainable development was espoused with its attendant strategies to ensure that human and physical development will be in conformity with the demand for the protection of the environment. In retrospect, the term was first brought to common use by the World Commission on Environment and Development otherwise known as the Brundti Commission, in its 1987 landmark proclamation titled “our common future”. The Brundti Commission was formerly known as the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) but later changed and named after the Chairman Glo Horken Brunti (Uchegbu, 1998). A definition of the commission explains sustainable development as:

A process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional changes are in harmony, and enhance both current and future potential to meet human aspirations.

The above postulation confirmed the existence of harmonious requirement for sustainable development. The implication is that where such harmonious relation is lacking, pervasive poverty can push people to undertake activities that despoils the environment, thereby hindering sustainable development and further poverty. In its report, WCED defined sustainable development as the “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs” (Wikipedia, 2007).

Similarly, Olaolu, (2008) defined sustainable development as the development that is channeled towards the enhancement of the human environment which meets the present, but yet makes allowances for the future generation to meet theirs too. Bearing in mind the present precarious state of the environment, it is obvious that it is not the same as was the case five decades ago. Apparently, the environment has been despoiled beyond redemption as a result of pervasive poverty.

Corroborating further on this path of thought, WCED, stressed that if human needs are to be met on a sustainable basis, the earth natural resources base must be conserved and enhanced. Thus Ropetto (Pearce, 1990) stated that:

Sustainable development rejects policies and practices that support current living standard by depleting the productive base including natural resources that leaves future generation with poorer prospects and risks

Therefore, it can be said that sustainable development is multidimensional, economic, political, social and cultural and seeks to maximize the benefits and contribution of the enduring exploitation of natural resources. Consequently, if sustainable development is to be achieved, it requires the attainment of three basic objectives; the creation of wealth, environment protection and enhancement of production. All these objectives are preconditions for development to occur in the society.

Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Poverty reduction is one of the most pressing challenges facing the global community. In view of the fact that poverty reduction is an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, the global community has made many attempts to eradicate extreme poverty in all ramifications.

In spite of the gains recorded during the implementation of the MDGs, the number of poor people around the world is increasing. Although it helped to lift more than one billion people out of extreme poverty, inequities have persisted and progress around the world has been uneven (Wikipedia, 2016). Therefore, the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and its set of SDGs have been committed as stated in the declaration of the Agenda to build upon the achievement of the MDGs. The Sustainable Development Goals otherwise known as transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development is a set of 17 “global goals” with 169 targets.

On 17th July, 2015, the United Nations General Assembly's Open Working Group (OWG) on SDGs forwarded a proposal for Sustainable Development Goals to the General Assembly. It contained 17 goals with 169 targets, covering a broad range of sustainable development issues. These are ending poverty and hungers, improving health and making cities more sustainable, combating climate change etc. Following a protracted negotiations, 194 countries of the General Assembly adopted the 2030 Development Agenda title: Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015. The first sustainable development goal aims to end poverty in all forms.

Ending extreme poverty was the No. 1 goals of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), because all the other goals revolve around poverty eradication. Eradicating poverty is also achieving sustainable development. It was also agreed that poverty is a threat to sustainable development, therefore without tackling the issue of poverty, sustainable development cannot be achieved and other SDGs cannot be realized. Because of the importance attached to poverty eradication, all the other 16 goals are geared towards poverty reduction.

It has 7 associated targets which aimed to eradicate abject poverty for all people everywhere, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in extreme poverty and implement nationally appropriate social protection system and achieve sustainable coverage of the poor and the vulnerable.

In addition, areas of Priority to focus attention include the following (Second UN Decades for Eradication of Poverty, 2015)

1. Improving access to sustainable livelihoods, entrepreneur's opportunities and productive resources.
2. Providing universal access to basic social services.
3. Progressively developing social systems to support those who cannot support themselves.
4. Empowering people living in poverty and their organizations.
5. Address the disproportionate impact of poverty on women.
6. Working with interested donors and recipients to allocate increased share of ODA to poverty eradication and
7. Intensifying international support for poverty eradication.

What is to be Done to Eradicate Extreme Poverty in-order to Engender Sustainable Development

Various models have been suggested by experts, stakeholders, opinion leaders etc as the panacea to reducing the high rate of poverty in the country, such as infrastructural development, community assistance, programme aids, venture capital etc. However, all the models have been tried previously and have failed to reduce the scourge of poverty in the country. The paper notes that the best model at the disposal of authorities in tackling the alarming rate of poverty lies in empowering the youth through education.

Educating the youth is a gateway to reducing abject poverty and engendering sustainable development. When youth are better educated, they will be more conscious on the dangers of over exploitation of natural resources. It is on record that better educated people depend less on nature resources for livelihood.

Therefore in combating the scourge of poverty in Nigeria through the instrumentality of sustainable development goal in Nigeria, the focus should be human centre that is developing human capital (education) because no country has succeeded in reducing poverty and the conserving its environment without educating its youth.

A lot have been written to highlight the correlation between poverty reduction and education worldwide. That quality education plays a major role in sustainable development, reducing poverty and enduring development through the well rounded development of the human being. Contributing further on the essence of educating youth to promote sustainable development as a receipt for poverty reduction, Fagerlind and Saha (1989) explained that it is based on the assumption that both societies and individuals have innate biological, psychological and sociological capacities which can

be evaluated in terms of their levels of actualization Societies can be judged as efficient or inefficient in making possible the actualization of conserving their environment.

In addition, Nduka (2006) stressed the imperative of education in mitigating poverty. The totality of the concerted effort made by individual societies (Nations) to overcome weaknesses by acquiring increasing control over the forces of nature thereby progressively eliminating the centuries old scourge of poverty, ignorance and disease and making life on earth more worth living. Therefore man is the center of all focus of development and the purpose of education is to develop man so that he "create or recreate" himself and the society according to his desires in the attempt to break the yoke of poverty that has engulfed him.

According to Okoresaye-Orubite (2008), education is believed to exercise some modern influence on the values, belief and behaviour pattern of people, which are necessary to break the cycle of poverty. It will be pertinent to assert that these values, belief and behaviour pattern also relate to awareness on conservation of the environment.

Similarly, during the world Education Forum held in Dakar in April 2000, the international community underscores the urgent need to eradicate extreme poverty and expressed its collective commitment to work toward this through education. (International workshop on education and poverty Eradication, 2) A commitment to reduce abject poverty was also one of the major outcomes of the World Summit for social Development held in Copenhagen in 1985, where abject poverty was considered a severe injustice and abuse of human right as the case in Nigeria.

Therefore, it proposes an action programme to support livelihood programmes and acquiring skills to keep poor people to combat scourge of poverty through education. It was believed that when people are educated they would rely less on the environment for sustenance, thus the environment would be conserved. Subsequently, the United Nations General Assembly, declared the period 1997-2006 as the First United Nations Decade for the eradication of poverty through access to Universal Primary education (International Workshop on Education and Poverty Eradication 3).

It would be pertinent to highlight the relationship between education and wealth creation. Wealth creation, which is one of the pillars of sustainable development is a significant aspect in education programme intended to contribute to poverty reduction. The question that comes to mind is how can education assist children to create wealth? This can be achieved through the integration of school curriculum within the economic activities of a community. For instance, in a predominately fishing and farming communities in the Niger Delta Area, children can be taught on the practical aspect of Fishing and farming.

In this way, school education would help children to improve traditional skills of the village alongside other curricular contents. This would also ensure their future employment possibilities, which could be self-employment, and contributes immensely to the socio-economic wellbeing of the people, thus contributing to poverty reduction. Educating the youth is gateway to reducing abject poverty and engendering sustainable development. When the youths are better educated, they will be more conscious on the danger of over exploitation of nature resources, and the risk of engaging in unwholesome activities that destroys the eco-system. It has been established that educated people will depend less on natural resources for livelihood.

Therefore, in bid to eradicate the scourge of poverty in Nigeria, through the instrumentality of sustainable development goals in Nigeria, the focus should be human centred, there is developing human capital (education), because no country has succeeded in reducing poverty without educating its youths. In Nigeria, no government,(federal, Senate and local) has made a frontal attacked on the educational development of the sector with a view to reducing poverty.

Conclusion

As been noted in this paper that poverty eradication is the most pressing challenge facing the global community. However, the world cannot achieve poverty reduction without sustainable development. Similarly, there cannot be sustainable development without poverty eradication, the two are inseparable.

This paper has argued that the most potent tool to eradicate poverty in the World is to give attention to the empowerment of the youth through qualitative education. Because education of the youth is the gateway to achieving sustainable development in the world.

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