



# **NIGERIA AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AGENDA: IS ENDING POVERTY IN ALL ITS FORMS POSSIBLE BY 2030?**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Poverty is one of the persistent problems confronting many nations of the world today. In Africa poverty is endemic and the situation of the people is disturbing. For instance, in Nigeria, poverty reduction has become a daunting task. The poverty rate in the country, instead of reducing is increasing by the day. Nigeria failed to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) target of reducing by half extreme poverty by 2015. At the formulation and adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by world leaders in 2015, Nigeria also pledged its commitment to end poverty in all its forms by 2030. However, with the current poverty situation and the challenges to the realisation of this goal (among other Sustainable Development Goals), this study addresses this question, is ending poverty in all its forms possible in Nigeria? This study makes use of documentary research (that is the use of texts and documents as source materials) and also in-depth interviews with purposively selected development/policy experts and academics. Findings reveal that poverty reduction may be possible if adequate and concrete efforts are made by the government and other stakeholders working on poverty eradication. For example, to achieve the target of reducing extreme poverty by half by 2030, challenges such as corruption, infrastructural deficits, conflict, and humanitarian crises must be tackled. In Nigeria, poverty is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon ranging from relative to absolute poverty, lack of income, denial of basic services and total deprivation of needs and fundamental human rights. Thus, ending poverty in all its forms in Nigeria by 2030 is just an illusion and a dream distanced from reality.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Poverty is the oldest and the most resistant virus (cited in Addae-Korankye, 2014) in the world. It is no surprise that governments across the world have for decades realized that poverty is a major obstacle to development. In the year 2000, world leaders at the United Nations Millennium Summit came up with the Millennium Declaration called the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), with poverty eradication as the number one goal, among the 8 goals. While the world governments pledged their commitments to achieve the MDGs at the end of 2015, poverty remained endemic in the world as many countries continue to struggle with poverty reduction. In 2015, when world leaders gathered at the United Nations headquarters in New York in September 2015 to launch the 17

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) also known as Agenda 2030, poverty reduction emerged as a central focus (Asadullah and Savoia 2018). The first Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) captures the urgency of this issue better, which is to end poverty in all its forms everywhere by 2030.

However, in spite of the world's commitments to poverty reduction or ending poverty, progress to this end remains disappointing in many countries. According to Smith (2019), over 700 million people are still living on less than \$1.90 a day, and more than half of them are in Sub-Saharan Africa. In Africa today, poverty is a persistent problem. In fact, it is something many people are born into with little opportunity to escape. Africa is the continent with the largest number of people living in extreme poverty (Max and Esteban, 2018). In a country like Nigeria, the poverty situation is



increasingly worrisome. When in 2012 the National Bureau of Statistics reported that poverty was on the increase to the extent that 1980 to 2010 witnessed a steep rise from 27.2% to 69%, keen observers of the country's socio-economic statistics had expected that new statistics would reveal significant improvement. Regrettably, in June 2018 the Brookings Institution pointed that Nigeria had overtaken India as the poverty capital of the world, with 86.9 million extremely poor people. According to the World Poverty Clock, created by Vienna-based World Data Lab, 91.16 million Nigerians are currently living below one US Dollar a day (Okogba, 2019).

Although Nigeria is Africa's largest economy, more than half of its population still grapples with extreme poverty, while a small group of elites enjoys growing wealth (Mayah et al, 2017). The paradox of growth in Nigeria is that as the country gets richer, only a few benefits and the majority continue to suffer from poverty and deprivation (Mayah et al, 2017). It is ironic that Nigeria is the sixth-largest exporter of oil and at the same time hosts the third-largest number of poor people. Nigeria fares very poorly in all development indices and is among the 20 countries in the world with the largest gap between the rich and the poor (Otiye, 2006). Poverty poses great challenges to the people and to the development of the country in general. Just like other countries of the world, Nigeria keyed into the Millennium Development Goals in year 2000. The Millennium Development Goals have eight goals and the foremost goal of the Millennium Declaration was to eradicate extreme hunger and poverty by 2015. To deal with the problem of poverty, the Nigerian government embarked on different initiatives and also established different agencies/offices mandated to work towards the achievements of the MDG 1. For example, the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) was mandated to ensure the realisation of the MDGs, especially poverty eradication. There was also the office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on MDGs. Regardless of the programmes put in place to achieve MDGs, Nigeria performed below the expectation of the target.

With a new set of development goals (SDGs) in existence for roughly five years now, it becomes important to assess the progress of the country towards the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 1 (end poverty in all its forms by 2030). The SDGs are meant to complete the unfinished business of the MDGs and its 15years lifespan (2015-2030) is for countries to put extra efforts in working towards a sustainable world. Thus, the question is, to

what extent is Nigeria committed to the achievement of these goals, especially poverty eradication and is ending poverty in all its forms possible in Nigeria by 2030? This study will address this question. It will also examine poverty eradication efforts in Nigeria and the challenges to the country's actualisation of the goal of ending poverty. This study is structured as follows. Section I captures the introductory statement. Section II is a brief discussion of the concept of Sustainable development and an overview of Sustainable Development Goals. The concept of poverty is briefly explained in Section III. Section IV examines the efforts the country has made or is making towards ending poverty. Section V identifies and explains the challenges standing in the way of Nigeria's poverty reduction/eradication efforts. Section VI addresses the study question, is ending poverty in all its forms possible in Nigeria? Section VII is the conclusion and recommendations.

### **The Concept of Sustainable Development/Overview of the SDGs.**

In a simple dictionary definition, the word sustainable (adjective) refers to something that can be continued or capable of being sustained (see yourdictionary.com). Sustainable also refers to the proper management of the environment/resources. It is characterized by a practice that sustains a given condition, such as economic growth, or a human population without destroying or depleting natural resources and polluting the environment, for example, sustainable agriculture. When something is said to be sustainable it means that it is able to be produced or sustained for an indefinite period without damaging the environment, or without depleting resources. Sustainability (noun) also has to do with the long-term viability of a community, set of social institutions, or societal practices (Meadowcroft and Petruzello, 2019). Sustainability is at the core of concepts such as sustainable yield, sustainable society, and sustainable development. In the contemporary academic debate, sustainability often acts as a synonym for sustainable development.

After the United Nations World Commission Conference on Environment and Development in 1987, the concept of 'sustainable development' spread throughout the United Nations system (Osondu-Oti, 2019). Following the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) report also known as the Brundtland Commission Report, the idea of sustainability rose to prominence with the modern environmental movement, which rebuked the



unsustainable character of contemporary societies where patterns of resource use, growth, and consumption threatened the integrity of ecosystems and the well-being of future generations (Meadowcroft and Petruzello, 2019). The Commission defined sustainable development as the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Osondu-Oti, 2019). In the WCED analysis of the concept of sustainable development, the term development clearly points to the idea of change; of both directional and progressive change. It is a process of directional change by which a system improves through time in a sustainable way (cited in Osondu-Oti, 2019).

Beyond the environmental preservation emphasis on the definition of sustainable development, the concept of sustainable development has assumed an important and new dimension within the United Nations in recent times. The world community has been focusing on countries to adopt strategies and policies that are directed towards overall sustainability or sustainable development. For example, one of the main outcomes of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in 2012 was the international agreement to negotiate a new set of global goals to guide countries on the path of sustainable development. In September 2015, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by the United Nations with 169 targets aimed at shifting the world onto a sustainable and resilient development pathway while ensuring that no important area is left behind. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are also known as the Global Goals, with a universal call to action and also designed to bring the world to several life-changing 'zeros', including zero poverty. The SDGs are 17 in number and these include No Poverty (Goal 1), Zero Hunger (Goal 2); Good-Health and Well-Being (Goal 3); Quality Education (Goal 4); Gender Equality (Goal 5); Clean Water and Sanitation (Goal 6); Affordable and Clean Energy (Goal 7); Decent Work and Economic Growth (Goal 8); Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (Goal 9); Reduced Inequalities (Goal 10); Sustainable Cities and Communities (Goal 11); Responsible Consumption and Production (Goal 12); Climate Action (Goal 13); Life below Water (Goal 14); Life on Land (Goal 15); Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions (Goal 16) and Partnerships for the Goals (Goal 17).

The SDGs were put forward for countries to pursue within a period of 15 years (2015-2030) for a healthier and sustainable world. To ensure sustainability, three aspects of sustainable development

are often considered. These are economic; social, and environmental sustainability. An economically sustainable system, for example, must be able to produce goods and services on a continuing basis, to maintain manageable levels of government and external debt, and to avoid extreme sectoral imbalances, which damage agricultural or industrial production (Osondu-Oti, 2019). A socially sustainable system must achieve distributional equity, adequate provision of social services including health and education, gender equity, and political accountability and participation. Also, an environmentally sustainable system must maintain a stable resource base, avoiding over-exploitation of renewable resource systems or environment sink functions, and depleting non-renewable resources only to the extent that investment is made in adequate substitutes (Osondu-Oti, 2019).

The 17 SDGs are integrated in such a way that they recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. For the SDG 1, the UN has 7 Targets and 14 Indicators. Targets specify the goals and the indicators represent the metrics by which the world aims to track whether these targets are achieved. For example, some of the targets for SDG 1 are to eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere (poverty is currently measured as people living on less than \$1.90 a day); to reduce poverty by at least 50% for all men, women, and children; to implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all; to ensure equal rights to ownership, basic services, technology, and economic resources; to build resilience to environmental, economic and social disasters, among others. All these targets are to be reached by the year 2030. Achieving sustainable development goals requires that countries move towards ensuring both economic, social and environmental sustainability now in order to secure the future. The SDGs are only blueprints guiding countries, which are also used to appraise the development performance of countries and progress towards the sustainable development agenda.

### **The Concept of Poverty**

The term poverty is a poly-semantic phrase. There are various interpretations of what poverty is and what it is not. In other words, poverty has been conceptualised in various ways. The most analysis follows the conventional view of poverty as something that occurs as a result of insufficient income for securing basic goods and services. However, poverty has been defined in complex and interconnecting ways,



moving beyond measures of income or finance. According to the United Nations Human Development Report (1998) poverty is defined as a complex phenomenon that generally refers to the inadequacy of resources and deprivation of choices that would enable people to enjoy decent living conditions (cited in Addae-Korankye, 2014). A state of poverty is seen as a state of being deprived of those goods, services and pleasures which others around us take for granted (cited in Addae-Korankye, 2014). Poverty is equal to deprivation, lack, and denial. It is a multidimensional phenomenon. Based on its multi-dimensional nature, numerous attempts have been made in defining poverty, each definition capturing the author's perception of the concept. For instance, Narayan and Petesch (2002) posited that poverty can only be seen through the eyes of the poor.

Poverty has been categorised as either relative or absolute. Relative poverty according to Aliyu (2003) is a situation where an individual or group of people can be said to have access to his/her basic needs but is comparatively poor among persons or the generality of the community. This means that what is considered as the lowest level of poverty in one region or society may be considered as the highest level of well-being in another region or society. Poverty, whether defined in absolute or relative terms, focuses only on those whose standard of living falls below an appropriate threshold level (such as a poverty line) (cited in Oluwashakin and Osondu-Oti, 2018). Poverty is currently measured as people living on less than \$1.90 a day.

Absolute poverty is concerned with when people's income is so low that they cannot obtain the minimum needed to survive (Oluwashakin and Osondu-Oti, 2018). In other words, people experience absolute poverty when their income is insufficient to obtain the basic needs to survive. Relative poverty is when people's income is well below average, to the extent that they are poor, compared with others in their society and they cannot afford to have the general standard of living that most other people in their society enjoy (Oluwashakin and Osondu-Oti, 2018). For example, increased inequality in income will usually imply higher levels of both absolute and relative deprivation. Relative poverty is more closely related to inequality in that what it means to be poor reflects prevailing living conditions in the whole population in comparison to others.

Ikejiaku (2009) distinguished relative poverty and absolute poverty using what he called "poverty qua poverty." Poverty qua poverty (PQP) is the term coined to describe the practical absolute poverty of Africa,

particularly Sub-Saharan Africa where the majority finds life very excruciating because it is difficult to meet or satisfy their basic needs. Those in poverty qua poverty are the people who experience such persistent poverty that it is almost impossible to break free of it using their own resources (Ikejiaku, 2009). While relative poverty may be used to characterise all countries, whether developed or developing, absolute poverty (poverty qua poverty) is a major feature of developing countries (Ikejiaku, 2009). Poverty has also been linked to vulnerability (Philip and Rayhan, 2004). Vulnerability refers to exposure to contingencies and stress, and difficulty in coping with them (Philip and Rayhan, 2004). No doubt, poor people strive to get basic needs and as a result, become either vulnerable or face human security threats. Poverty was also understood as a human rights issue (Women Budget Group, 2008). Thus, poverty is a complex phenomenon that includes lack of income, deprivation, lack of access to basic services, increased vulnerability, et cetera and it could also be relative or absolute depending on the individual, communities/regions in question.

### **Ending poverty in all its forms: Nigeria's Efforts and Progress**

Following their adoption in 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) became the global goals that require practical efforts and commitments of countries to its realisation by 2030. To show its commitment towards achieving these goals, there are several general and goal-specific programmes Nigeria has embarked upon. This is essential because successful implementation of the SDGs, which replaced the Millennium Development Goals (2000-2015), would mean successful attainment of citizens' aspirations for prosperity, peace, and wellbeing, as well as the preservation of the Earth's biodiversity and equitable distribution of natural resources (Odogwu, 2018). As part of the general commitment to the SDGs actualisation, the Federal government from 2016 to date has taken several steps. It established the office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on SDGs (OSSAP-SDGs) which is a carry-over from the former MDGs under the presidency (Odogwu, 2018) to oversee the implementation of poverty reduction programmes. To enhance the legislative and oversight roles of lawmakers on the SDGs implementation process, two select committees on SDGs have been established in the National Assembly. There is a House Committee on SDGs at the lower chamber and counterpart Senate Committee in the upper chamber to provide oversight function and ensure appropriate appropriation of funds



for SDGs. There is also an Inter-Ministerial Committee on the SDGs established to guide the coordinated engagement with Ministries, Departments and Agencies. Also, a Private Sector Advisory Group on SDGs and the Civil Society Strategy Group on SDGs (Odogwu, 2018) were formed. A Donors Forum on the SDGs was also inaugurated. To assist in the SDGs advocacy and campaign programme, the OSSAP-SDGs entered into a partnership with the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) to train graduating youths to become SDGs champions in their local communities and areas of national service they are deployed upon graduation.

For the goal-specific programmes and in line with poverty reduction, the Federal Government has put in place various strategies to help in the fight against poverty in the country. For example, the Government in 2016 established the National Social Investments Programmes (NSIP) to tackle poverty and hunger across the country. The expectation was that the poorest and most vulnerable Nigerians will get access to social safety nets by 2021 through a US\$500 million International Development Assistance credit approved in June 2016 by the World Bank Group's Board of Executive Directors (Ibraheem, 2018). The Nigerian government's contribution of \$1.3 billion of its own budget to the program laid the foundation for the establishment of the country's first national social safety nets system. The suite of the programme under the NSIP focuses on ensuring a more equitable distribution of resources to vulnerable populations, including children, youth and women. The NSIP programmes include the N-Power program, the Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP), the Home Grown School Feeding programme and the Conditional Cash Transfer program. For instance, the Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programme, directly supports those within the lowest poverty bracket by improving nutrition, increasing household consumption and supporting the development of human capital through cash benefits to various categories of the poor and vulnerable. The Cash Transfer Office in Abuja has established a National Social Register for the poor and vulnerable households. The CCT also is known as Household Uplifting Program targets the poorest homes and those at the bottom of the poor. It is different from the other programs such as the N-Power and the GEEP empowerment programs, in which eligible Nigerians will have to apply for them to be considered for funding any project.

As stated by the Nigerian government, the Cash Transfer programme is strictly based on community approval, and not on the government coordinating office approval. Thus, it is left for the communities in the States that have keyed into the program to approve the poor persons who need assistance. Afterward, the National Cash Transfer Office (NCTO), which was mandated by the Nigerian government to coordinate the cash transfer programme engages the poor persons by transferring the government-approved cash with other capacity-building programmes. This includes a monthly conditional cash transfer of five thousand naira (N5, 000) to households as part of a national social safety net programme. While the government has presented its various initiatives such as the social investments programme as the largest in the history of the country and has maintained that they are yielding results, the reality is different. The efforts of the country have not resulted in significant progress on poverty reduction.

### **Challenges to Achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal 1 in Nigeria**

Eradicating poverty in all its forms remains one of the greatest challenges facing humanity. While the number of people living in extreme poverty dropped by more than half between 1990 and 2015, too many are still struggling for the most basic human needs (United Nations Development Programme, 2019). About 736 million people still live in extreme poverty; 1.3 billion people live in multidimensional poverty; half of the people living in poverty are under 18 and 80 percent of the people living on less than \$1.90 a day are in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa (United Nations Development Programme, 2019). Although rapid growth in countries such as China and India has lifted millions out of poverty, progress has been uneven. In Africa, eradicating poverty has been a daunting task. Issues such as climate change, conflict, terrorism, bad governance, corruption, food insecurity, and environmental poverty are challenging for Africa countries such as Nigeria.

Despite the poverty eradication programmes that were introduced by various Nigerian governments, the country failed to meet almost all the MDGs including poverty reduction. Since 2016 more initiatives have been put in place in a bid to end poverty in all its forms by 2030 but in the midst of the country's efforts, Nigeria recently emerged as the poverty capital of the world. There are various obstacles/roadblocks to achieving the Sustainable Development Goal I in Nigeria that must be looked into. These include among others, corruption and lack of accountability, poorly



articulated policies, lack of proper infrastructure, policy instability and increasing conflict in the country. These challenges are briefly discussed below:

### ***Corruption and Lack of Accountability***

Corruption is a major challenge frustrating the efforts towards poverty eradication. Although Nigeria has the largest economy in Africa and has enjoyed oil wealth as well as experienced economic growth in years past but the period of economic growth due to oil exports has not sufficiently trickled down to the poor (Freedom House, 2012). It is widely accepted that the misappropriation of public funds and assets by corrupt elites have been the major cause of Nigeria's poverty (Global Witness, 2012). The struggle to lift more Nigerians out of extreme poverty is an indictment on successive Nigerian governments which have mismanaged the country's vast oil riches through corruption. Poverty and inequality in Nigeria are not due to lack of resources but due to ill-use, misallocation and misappropriation of such resources. At the root, there is a culture of corruption and rent-seeking combined with a political elite out of touch with the daily struggles of average Nigerians (Mayah et al, 2017). Funds meant for development have at many times been embezzled by corrupt officials.

There is also a lack of accountability. Most times, the individuals that are given the responsibility of overseeing certain poverty eradication programs do not give feedback on their actions. They are not accountable and as a result of this, it has become difficult for the Nigerian government to track the progress or failures of poverty eradication programmes (Personal Interview, 5 December 2019). At other times, when reports are given by those responsible for any project, their reports may be usually falsified. Corruption and lack of accountability in Nigeria are areas of serious concern. The duo has succeeded in neutralizing the efforts of stakeholders working on eradication of poverty and hunger in Nigeria (Personal Interview, 11 December 2019). Most of the funds committed to poverty eradication programmes hardly get to the target audience and the campaign for poverty eradication has also been without the needed political will (Akinbi, 2003). According to Oshewolo (2011), public officers who are supposed to be responsible multi-millionaires have become emergency multi-millionaires by diverting public funds to feather their nest. Although the present Muhammadu Buhari government has declared a war on corruption and is making strides shown in the jailing of corrupt officials, his efforts seem like a drop of water in the ocean.

Nigeria recently in January 2020 is named West Africa's most corrupt country.

### ***Poorly Articulated Policies***

A problem that impedes the actualization of poverty-related programs in Nigeria is the inability of Nigerian policy-makers to bring forth properly articulated policies. The policymakers in Nigeria always want to formulate policies and programs with some inbuilt flexibilities to allow them loopholes to make personal gains. This is the reason why most poverty eradication programs do not get to the people at the grassroots who experience poverty firsthand (Chukwuemeka, 2008).

### ***Lack of Proper Infrastructure***

Kanayo (2014) stated that the state of infrastructural facilities in the country is embarrassing. Infrastructures, which are known to enhance industrialization, provide employment especially in the small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) sector and eradicate poverty, are grossly inadequate in the country. This stands as one of the prominent challenges to the achievement of the eradication of poverty and hunger. Inadequate infrastructure such as lack of good roads also hinders stakeholders' from getting to the grassroots where poverty is at the extreme. Most roads in Nigeria are in need of rehabilitation. Roads across the nation, whether Trunk A roads which are federal, or Trunk B which are state roads or Trunk C roads which are local government roads, are in a decadent state, and there is hardly any part of the country that can boast of all decent motorable roads. The infrastructural deficit, as well as technology gaps, which hinder service provision and application of science, technology, and innovation in many spheres of life, has a role to play in actualising the SDGs in Nigeria.

### ***Policy Instability and Increasing Conflict***

Frequent policy changes have interrupted the progress of initiated programmes (Taiwo and Agwu, 2016). Change in government often leads to halting of already existing programmes by the new government. Every government wants to impose its own programmes rather than working on existing programmes. Moreover, the personal interests of the leaders often result in bringing new policies that will benefit the leadership too. New policies mean the appointment of new officials that would work according to the dictates of the leader. In fact, today, the argument across the country is that the new government's appointment into key positions went to the northerners



and might affect how other regions will benefit from the dividends of democracy. While there is little evidence to support such an argument in line with who benefits during changed policies/offices, policy instability is known to impact on the efficiency of any programme.

Also, the country has been bedeviled with conflicts such as militancy in Niger Delta, Boko Haram insurgency and farmer-herder conflict in the last two decades, thereby creating more internally displaced persons and communities that have lost their means of livelihood. This invariably leads to an increase in the number of poor and create high unemployment. Conflict has also created insecurity in many regions/communities making it difficult for the government to address the needs of the poor adequately.

### ***Reliance on Oil and Gas sector and Limited Value addition in the Agricultural sector***

Nigeria's earning from oil represents more than 70 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). Fluctuation in oil prices in the international market often impacts on funds' availability since oil is the major source of revenue for the government. The 2016 economic recession in the country due to fluctuating oil prices in the international market plunged many citizens into extreme poverty with high inflation. There is also limited value addition in the agricultural sector to grow the economy, create jobs, ensure food security and address poverty. Agricultural productivity has also dwindled in some regions such as the Niger Delta where oil has polluted the rivers and lands. Also, dwindling in agricultural productivity in many areas is attributed to climate change; desertification; natural and manmade disasters; the incessant conflict between farmers and herdsmen, unresponsive land tenure and general low utilization of mechanized farming. These are areas critical to poverty reduction.

### ***Is Ending Poverty in all its Forms in Nigeria Possible by 2030?***

The current statistics on the poverty rate in Nigeria is alarming. According to the Brookings Institution report that came out at the end of May 2018, Nigeria has over 87 million poor people, compared with India's 73 million. The report also specified that six Nigerians fall into poverty every minute, which meant that in 2017 alone, 3,153,600 Nigerians were added to an already overcrowded poor population (Vanguard, 2018). The United Nations Development Programmes (2019) pointed out that 62 percent of Nigerians live below \$2 a day. To address the question is ending

poverty possible in Nigeria by 2030, this study will assess the progress of Nigeria towards eradicating poverty using the first five targets of the Sustainable Development Goal 1.

The first target of the SDG 1 is "to eradicate extreme poverty for all peoples everywhere by 2030." Achieving this target does not look feasible. The indicator for this target looks at the proportion of the population below the international poverty line, by sex, age, employment status and geographical location (urban/rural). The international poverty line today is \$1.90 per day and this was updated from the previous poverty line of \$1.25 to \$1.90 in 2015. For Nigeria, more than half of the population still struggles to survive on less than \$1.90 per day. Issues of conflict resulting in internal displacement, hunger, and security threats have left many people or communities vulnerable to poverty. In rural communities, poverty is endemic. There is also increasing inequality. According to Mayah et al (2017), although the gap between the rich and the poor may be a worldwide problem, the scale of inequality is extreme in Nigeria. The disparity is such that the amount of money that the richest Nigerian man can earn annually from his wealth is sufficient to lift 2 million people out of poverty for one year (Mayah et al, 2017). The Gender in Nigeria Report (2012) categorised Nigeria among the 30 most unequal countries in the world (cited in Mayah et al, 2017).

The second target of the SDG 1 is "to 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 by 2030". In Nigeria, instead of the number of the poor decreasing, the country continues to swim in poverty as shown in the current statistics. Unemployment and underemployment are high and these include those that are not employed at all and those that are employed but are receiving salaries that cannot take care of their basic needs, an example is where a University graduate is having a monthly salary of 20 thousand naira a month (Personal Interview with David Onyenekwe, a researcher with a Civil Society Organisation in Abuja, 5 November 2019). Good employment will to a great extent guarantee the protection of other human rights such as health and education, and also save the society from social unrest, which exacerbates poverty.

The third target is "to implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable." While Nigeria has social safety net programmes, its impacts are not yet to be significantly felt. The target indicator involves



implementing social protection system shown through the percentage of the population covered by social insurance programs which provide old-age pensions, social security, and health insurance benefits. The National Social Investment Programmes of the Federal Government is a social protection system. Also, there is the National Pension Scheme and National Health Insurance Scheme but these programmes have been criticised for their inability to attend to the basic needs of the people. For example, the areas of the health coverage of the NHIS are few as the poor struggles to pay for higher medical expenses, for example, those that might involve surgery.

The third target of SDG 1 is “to ensure significant mobilization of resources from a variety of sources, including through enhanced development cooperation, in order to provide adequate and predictable means for developing countries, in particular, least developed countries, to implement programmes and policies to end poverty in all its dimensions by 2030.” In Nigeria, development agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme, an arm of the United Nations, among other governmental, non-governmental and civil society groups have been contributing through funds and empowerment programmes to assist the poor, vulnerable and displaced in the society.

The fourth target of the SDG 1 is “to ensure that all men and women, in particular, the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology, and financial services, including microfinance by 2030.” This target looks at the world population with access to basic services, including improved drinking water, sanitation, electricity, and clean cooking fuels. The two metrics (indicators) by which the world aims to track whether this target is achieved is by identifying the proportion of population living in households with access to basic services and the proportion of total adult population with secure tenure rights to land, (a) with legally recognized documentation, and (b) who perceive their rights to land as secure, by sex and type of tenure. Concerning this target, basic services such as good sanitation and drinking water are still lacking in many rural areas, and some cities too. With regard to inheritance, men still have significant access to land and inheritance in many communities. In other words, inheritance rights are reserved mainly for the male child and often denied the female child in various communities in the country.

The fifth target of the SDG 1 is “to build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters by 2030.” To track the progress on this fifth target, there are four indicators. The first indicator looks at the number of deaths, missing persons and directly affected persons attributed to disasters in the country. Second, has to do with the direct economic loss attributed to disasters in relation to the global gross domestic product (GDP) in a country. Third has to do with the number of countries that adopt and implement national disaster risk reduction strategies in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030. Fourth, is the proportion of local governments that adopt and implement local disaster risk reduction strategies in line with national disaster risk reduction strategies. For the first and second indicators, although natural disasters do not occur regularly, the country has known no peace since its return to democracy. Conflicts have been devastating with a high number of deaths and internally displaced people. For example, the United Nations’ refugee agency estimates that conflict in Nigeria has displaced 2.4 million people and put more than seven million at risk of starvation (cited in Campbell and Harwood, 2018). For the third and fourth indicators, the country’s National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) has been responding to conflict as well as disasters in various states of the Federation although lack of good infrastructure such as roads sometimes delay/deny immediate response to disasters (Personal Interview, 5 December 2019). The road sector accounts for about 90 percent of all freight and passenger movements in the country but unfortunately, roads are in deplorable condition.

Overall, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) to end poverty in all forms by 2030 is not possible. Poverty in Nigeria is multidimensional and there is no single target among the five targets that are receiving adequate attention. According to Yomi (2018), to end poverty globally by 2030, 90 people need to leave poverty every minute; in Africa, 57 people have to leave every minute; and in Nigeria, 12 people every minute.

Based on the current realities in Nigeria, it is clear that as the poverty level is increasing, more births are witnessed every minute adding to the number of poor people in the country. At the moment, Nigeria’s population is put at almost 200 million and has continued to increase. Thus, as Nigeria faces population boom, it has been predicted that the country is likely to





become the world's third-largest country by 2050 and without a proper mechanism in place to manage the increasing population, it will invariably mean an increase in the number of the poor. Although the SDGs have only been in place for five years now, available evidence shows that it is unlikely there will be a significant transformation in the remaining 10 years. Ending poverty in all its forms by 2030 in Nigeria is an illusion. Significant poverty reduction in the next 50 years may be possible if concrete and genuine efforts are made by the government and other stakeholders, but ending all forms of poverty is a dream.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Poverty has been an issue of international concern. The United Nations in a bid to find a solution came up with the MDGs but the goals were not achieved by some developing countries including Nigeria. As a follow-up to the MDGs, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals were put forward in 2015 with the deadline for achievement in 2030. Ending poverty in all its forms remained the number one goal (just as the MDGs). Nigeria has keyed into the SDGs just like many other countries of the world. However, tackling poverty has been challenging for the country. Despite the various programmes and government initiatives such as the National Social Investment Programme and the establishment of many offices and committees saddled with the responsibility of poverty eradication in the country, poverty is a persistent problem. The study identified the various challenges standing in the way of the country's efforts to end poverty. Some of these challenges are corruption and lack of accountability, poor infrastructure, increasing conflict, among others. The study asserted that ending poverty in all forms is not possible as the reality on the ground does not show any significant progress to end poverty in Nigeria. While the efforts made by the government, those efforts look like a drop of water in the ocean of poverty. Nigeria has become the poverty capital of the world.

This study then recommends that there should be true commitment by government agencies/persons saddled with the responsibility of ending poverty in the country such as the Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on SDGs and the National Assemblies Committees both the upper and lower chambers, among others. Also, the activities of the Government agencies/units that are working towards the eradication of poverty in the country should be

properly monitored to ensure accountability and proper implementation of programmes at all levels of governments. Poverty alleviation should be made an explicit constitutional matter so that successive administrations can meaningfully bind its successor to poverty eradication programmes. Ending poverty should be incorporated into the nation's overall development framework and made part of the national interests' agenda. This is because poverty has become a cankerworm that has eaten deep into society, and there is, therefore, a need to adopt drastic measures to lift the people out of it.

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