



GENDER AND POVERTY REDUCTION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examined the gender question in poverty reduction in Nigeria. Based on desk study, it reviewed selected poverty intervention programs in the country and concluded that poverty reduction programmes and policies have barely touched on women. The paper made a number of recommendations to mainstream women in poverty reduction agenda.

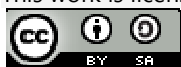
Key Words: *Poverty, Women, gender inequality, culture, MDGs*

Introduction

In recognition of the endemic nature of global poverty and the most vulnerable group(s), the United Nations (UN) developed its eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) between 6th-8th September, 2000 in New York where 189 member countries among which Nigeria was a signatory. However, out of the eight goals set to be achieved with their targets, there were two striking goals that were directly set to address poverty and gender equality (goals 1 & 3, namely; eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, and promote gender equality and women empowerment). In an attempt to achieve goal 1 as an example, targets were set to 'halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day; achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all, including women and young people; and halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger' (United Nations, 2000).

As Alao (2015) argues, the world today is not free from poverty and its effect on the citizenry as well as the economy particularly in Nigeria based on the fact that the population living in poverty in 2010 was 69%, and in 2011, it was 74.2%. For income inequality, it stood at 0.3594 in 2010 and -25.9 in 2011 (Alao, 2015 as cited from Soludo and BOS, 2012). Therefore, the widespread of poverty situations in sub-Saharan Africa and Nigeria in particular suggests a need for drastic measures in addressing poverty and inequality with particular attention to women. This is because, though several programmes directed at addressing poverty in order to improve on the economic well-being of people before and after the implementation of MDGs between 1999 and 2015 in itself, have been floated by successive government(s) (Alao, 2015).

Oshewolo (2010) and Alao (2013), examining the results of the creation of MDGs Office and other poverty alleviation programmes (such as NAPEP, NEEDS among others) as initiated by various administrations in the 4th Nigeria's Republic stated that MDGs programmes 'could have been better than that obtained, but for the fact that programmes' execution was misdirected to urban areas instead of the rural, high-jacked by the political elites, inadequate funding, lacked of control, transparency and accountability as well as improper monitoring of the programmes





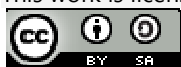
must have contributed to the inability of the government to derive the full benefits of the poverty alleviation programmes.

Moreover, as Alao (2015) argues, by all standards, economic growth is expected to reduce poverty; but contrary to this is the assertion that economic growth does not lead to increased incomes or new jobs, especially as regards women and youth. In the rural areas, women and youth have experienced more of poverty due to the prevailing culture which requires women to stay back and keep home and youth that are not yet of age to help in home chores, and street trading. This disregards the essence of ‘training a girl-child and training a nation’. Many could not go to schools while some drop out due to lack of resources to train them. All these made men to be regarded as breadwinners (Alao, 2015) in most cultures in Nigeria.

However, despite increasing enlightenment of women empowerment in order to contribute their quota to the home and thus improve their status as well as the family as orchestrated by the MDGs in 2000, the effect of poverty is still high on the vulnerable groups, especially the women. And again, because of the prevalence of poverty among women generally, women are mostly affected by emotional, mental and behavioural trauma (Yoshikawa, Aber & Beardslee, 2012). Indeed, given the fact that the women statistics is high in Nigeria, the long run effect is accentuated on the future personality of the individual (BOS, 2010 as cited by Alao, 2015). To Ojo (2011), instead of giving much recognition to women’s contributions towards strengthening economic development of the nation; it is quite unfortunate that women who constituted the larger proportion of Nigeria’s population are still far behind in the stream of the nation development.

Yet the MDG 2015 report has indicated progress in reducing extreme poverty in countries like China and India, halving the number of people without reliable sources of portable water, ameliorating slum dwelling conditions of the people as well as promoting gender equality in terms of education and health. But for the poverty prevalence in Nigeria under the same MDGs and targets, poverty has been reported to be on the increase considerably with about 112 million people affected, according to the World Bank Report, which approximately constitutes 67% of the population in abject poverty. In fact, the Nigerian Economic Report (NER) adding to the poverty situations of Nigeria stated that the rates of decline in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) which fell from 8.60 in 2010 to 7.68 in 2011 has significant impact on poverty prevalence among which women remain the most vulnerable group (The World Bank, 2014).

The basic and fundamental questions which this paper will attempt to provide answers for are: Why are Nigeria women still the most vulnerable group in the prevalence of poverty despite the creation of MDGs Office (Oshewolo, 2010) and other poverty alleviation programmes initiated by the successive governments directed towards ameliorating poverty situations among women? And again, to what extent has these programmes (e.g. NAPEP and NEEDS) impacted on the well-being of women, in spite Nigeria remaining one of the leading economic nations in Africa in terms of economic growth, endowed with natural resources and good climate that ought to have been translated into all-inclusive growth to reduce the rate of poverty among Nigerian women in the post 2015 MDG? Attempting to provide answers to these questions, the paper will make a theoretical examination of gender inequality as well as suggesting policy options for the reduction of poverty among women in Nigeria





Theoretical issues of Gender Inequality

Social scientists have developed numerous theories in the explanation of gender inequality. However, the focus of this paper is on the link between gender inequality and persistent poverty in Nigeria. Again, it is also expedient to consider it necessary and fundamentally beneficial to summarize some of the paradigms and to respond with appropriate policy options. This is due to the fact that there are varied schools of thoughts on the subject. Take for instance, there are those who subscribed to the ecclesiastical school of thought that male chauvinism is a divine order from the Almighty God. This position is supported by the myth of creation where the Bible in Genesis 2:23 explained the formation of a woman by God, using only one bone from man that was already in existence. Thereafter, God also commanded that a man must always be the head of the family.

Furthermore, the nature and perspective has also triggered a variety of reasons as to the explanation of gender differences. Those who are within this school of thought that nature (biology) is the major determinant of gender inequality have supported their position by arguing that genetic dispositions are responsible for the various distinctive traits between men and women. In fact, to them, men are physically active, aggressive, athletic, logical and dominant in any social relationship. Conversely, the women are biologically predisposed to docility, passivity, fragility, emotionality and subordination to males.

So also, those within the school of thought of nurture (socialization) argue that irrespective of the biological sex differences that exist between males and females, the issue of superiority is attained through a deliberate process of socialization. They insist that children are acutely aware of and feel pressure to accept the prevailing gender stereotypes even by the age of 4 years (Thompson and Hickey, 1999). The cultural perspective of gender inequality strongly argues that while biological differences are universal in nature, gender inequality is culturally constructed with cultural differences; this is why there is a variety of gender roles in different cultures. The protagonist of the cultural theory of gender inequality concluded that different measures of gender inequality exist in different societies.

However, from the perspective of the Marxists on gender, it is argued that the society is fundamentally constructed on the basis of relations they had formed in the process of social relations as they make attempts to survive. As a result of this, they create and define the social world. Thus, in support of the Marxist perspective of gender issues, the feminist's theorists have pointed out that the molding and expression of sexuality had categorized the society into two sexes, namely women and men, which underlies the totality of social relations. They also noted that throughout history, disparity in account of sex have perpetuated brazen inequality against women.

All these have, however, drawn much attention to the pervasive pattern of subordination, limitation, and confinement that have crippled and hindered the development of female half of mankind as far back as species can remember. Commenting on the social relations that have permeated between men and women in space and time, Keohame, Rosaldo and Gelpi (1982) noted that social relations between the sexes should not restrain or inhibit the prospect of one another to flourish by the imposition of specific gender roles. And again, considering the





fundamental role women play in the development of society at large, the latent consequence of women subjugation may not be in tandem with the main objective of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Women and Poverty

Although the indicators of poverty do not present a uniform application of the defining elements in it globally, yet the poverty question as a problem is lacking universal applicability. As Anikpo (1995) admirably argues, poverty is dimensional and can only be meaningful with the irrelativeness of the reality on ground which could only be peculiar and meaningful as prescribed or necessitated by the very conditions of the people in question. Therefore, attempting to measure poverty, one must put into consideration some vital indicators. Take for example, the United Nations Development Programme (2009) on Human Development Index (HDI) is an approach for measuring poverty which provided a composite qualitative measure of both the economic and social indicators of human development. Thus, it combines a measure of purchasing power with the measure of physical health and educational attainment to indicate progress or retrogression in human life. This approach uses data on longevity, knowledge and income as critical components or indicators of poverty.

Within the purview of these indicators, longevity is measured by life expectancy, while knowledge is measured by adult literacy rate and mean years of schooling. Income is measured using purchasing power parity (PPP) base on real (GDP) per capita adjusted for local cost of living. In that, the three measures are combined in a 3-step process to arrive at an average index. Indeed, there is a measure of minimum and maximum rate for each element of the measures in HDI. It expresses the ranking of nations in value that ranges between 0 and 1 as measure based on averages. Essentially, its main limitation as a composite socio-economic indicator is the concealment of the wide distribution of inequality within a population.

Interestingly, however, the conditions of women defined by various cultures of different societies express a crucial link with some of the indicators of poverty as described in the HDI approach. Similar to this, is Ekanem (2013) conceptualizing poverty as a state of one who lacks usual socially acceptable amount of money or material possessions. Many poor people define themselves as experiencing poverty as a result of their inability to exercise control over their lives. And in another meaning attached to the definition of poverty, it means a situation where people are forced to make difficult and agonizing choices such as making a choice between feeding the family and sending children to school.

As the World Bank (2004) categorically stated, poverty means hunger, lack of shelter, being sick and not being able to see a doctor or not having access to school and not knowing how to read. In other words, poverty does not necessarily mean someone who does not have a job; rather it means the fear of the future or living only a day at a time, and losing a child to sickness brought about by water borne disease or preventable diseases. It also means a state of powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom of choice (The World Bank, 2004).





The Causes and Impact of Poverty on Women

The causes of poverty are multifarious and have been carefully considered here in relation to the issue of gender. Berta (2004) opines that gender discrimination takes many forms, as such many social practices which are seen as “normal” from a religious or cultural point of view may have deeper historical roots. From Marxian’s School of thought for example, the origins of all inequality are attributed to the private ownership of the means of production by one class against the other. Thus, it is emphasized that the cause of women’s inferior status is as a result of class society and the forms of family organization it produces.

It is, therefore, important to note that once class society is abolished, and the state withers away, the patriarchal family system also disappears (Engels, 1972), the society would remain classless and the disparity between men and women also vanishes away. Engels has to a large extent blamed capitalism for the current separation of the place of reproductive work, and further asserted that capitalist men keep women in a reproductive labour force without pay and also in service as a cheap reserve army of labour. He, therefore, traced the cause of poverty in gender to the private family household which has put women in household work and child care, thus resulting to gender inequality and poverty.

Applying Engel’s point of view on the exploitative tendency of women by men in family organization is an indicator of male chauvinism as it manifests in the patterns of family organization in the Ijo culture, say for example, the people of the Apoi-Bassan-Koluama clan has a tradition where a house wife would be given a particular token which serve as a take-off capital for a petty trade. This, of course, enables the woman to be in the business throughout the whole year. And at the end of that year, the woman in question who prudently managed the business will honestly give an account of her stewardship and surrender everything to the husband. While the husband takes the profit, the wife retains some part of the money so as to continue with the business. The fashioning of the tradition lay emphasis to the fact that the gesture symbolizes love for the woman who happened to be the only favoured one amongst other women in a polygamous setting. This way of exploitation is very hard to perceive and is referred to as shaping the desires as put forward by Steven Lukes (in Haralambos and Haborn, 2002).

Similarly, Rao (2000) taxonomized traditionalism, communalism, casteism, linguism, parochialism, religious and linguistic prejudices as social factors of poverty that is gender related. These have negative effects on a country’s progress by making people dogmatic in their approach, narrow-mindedness and selfish in outlook. These factors are exacerbated by illiteracy and ignorance. The illiteracy and ignorance are supportive of poverty as the defective educational system is incapable of generating employment and there is no guarantee of job for the educated youths. Also, caste system where in practice requires its members to maintain already existed traditions and hereditary occupations of the caste; it does not give members the impetus to take up jobs outside their traditional occupations. This suggests that it is largely an ascribed status quo maintenance system. In the same manner, the communal system of existence which is predominantly rural in feature has put a limit to the capability of young members to take the initiatives of making new adventures in formal employment and economic spheres (Rao, 2000).





The consequences of poverty in relation to gender issues affect individuals and institutions of the society. More often than not, the consequences of poverty in gender affect female than male. This singular act influences several studies on the consequences of poverty in relation to gender focusing more on women. As Berta (2004) submitted, gender discrimination especially against women in the market place reduces the available talent in an economy. This indicates that poverty in gender negatively affects the economic institution of the society as well as individuals' talents as women are often concluded as lacking the potentialities or prospects of improving society. Thus, poverty in relation to gender issues may have profound economic consequences because they limit the capacity of the members of the society to take the advantage of the talents that may be inherent in women (Dako-Gyeke, Iddrisu and Baffoe, 2013).

Still on the consequences of poverty in relation to gender issues, the UNDP's Human Development Report (1995) has revealed that about 70 per cent of those who live in poverty worldwide are women. This data signals an important role women play in the family that maintains a stable home. While men and women play multiple roles in society, women's labour time is much more constrained than men because men are usually able to focus on a single productive role and play other roles sequentially. According to Dako-Gyeke *et al.* (2013), women perform multiple roles simultaneously which must be carried out in a balanced manner within a limited period of time such as child care and cooking.

Apart from child upbringing which is a joint responsibility of the parents, the women in most cultures are also caretakers of their families. According to Okaba (2007), the matrilineal nature of the Ijo culture demands the woman (the mother) as the greater providers to the family survival. He also asserted that the women in family organization within the Ijo culture are obligated to do farming and fishing, indulge in petty trading as a means of providing livelihood for the family. They also engage in the educational sponsoring of their children in most cases. If this is either a major task or supportive exercise of women in family organization, it is significant enough to consider, if the women world remains subjugated into poverty?

One thing about poverty is that it works like a virus which enters into a system and destroys its immunity. Therefore, poverty has the capacity of depriving the women of exercising their obligation of providing food and sending their children to school, etc. At best, they could still be limited to making dangerous choices between feeding the family and sending their children to school. Women inability to perform their cultural obligation is a manifestation of powerlessness resulting from multiple interlocking disadvantages of poverty as is reflected in family circle of poverty which is a critical institution of society.

Culture and Poverty among Women

Africa has its own culture. Emmanuel and Austin (2014) assert that African culture is the totality of the way of life of the African, and which reflects its total worldview in most cases. How then is the African culture incriminated in the aspect of poverty and gender in Africa? According to Adeniran (2007), since the advent of colonialism in Africa, women have been exposed to various forms of discrimination due to their "femaleness". Emmanuel and Austin (2014) in their own view, argue that the 'femaleness' concept attached to women discrimination is based on the fact that most nations in African countries do not have established laws and





policies that would address the tide of gender disparity. Emmanuel and Austin (2014) further explained that the African societies are dotted with common practices that are disgustingly detrimental to gender emancipation. For example, early marriages, forced marriages, wife inheritance, widowhood practices, to mention a few. These common practices in the African culture have continued to fuel the ember of gender poverty and discrimination (Emmanuel and Austin, 2014).

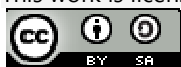
Studies on gender and culture show that there is a deliberate entrenchment of gender stereotyping in some cultural practices. Here, it is believed that the male child belongs to the father, while the female child belongs to the mother. This begins an initial psychological attitude of discrimination, which is termed favouritism, where the male child is given access to education and other good things of life, and the female child becomes the “fetcher of water and firewood” (Emmanuel and Austin, 2014). This leaves the female child to have accepted the roles without question. Consequently, she may be compelled into marriage. This has made the process to perpetuate negative spread of gender poverty and discrimination against women in Africa nations (Emmanuel and Austin, 2014).

In support of these, studies show that in the African culture, women are usually seen as suitable “housekeepers,” which meant that they are seen as those only capable of being home keepers and not for other career opportunities. That is why it is argued that colonization excluded most African women from the formal labour market (Mama, 1997). This also implies that the issue on gender and culture has perpetually limited the female gender in most African culture to a stagnant level where they may not or could not have the opportunity to aspire to greater heights.

Commenting on the consequences of poverty in relation to gender issues, Omolewa (2002) maintains that the colonial rule alienated the women folk from easy access to education, primarily due to their manpower need. The question which remains in our mind is: what are the roles of our present rulers on the place of gender in Africa culture, wherein studies have shown that female poverty is due to the nonchalant attitude placed on female education in Africa (Ojo, 2002). As Mamdani (1996) further submitted, the prevalence of poverty among females in Africa nations is largely due to discrimination against women in educational opportunities. To Sangeetha and Venkat (2002), both women and men are placed in sex-role stereotypes, which have influenced their personality and behaviour patterns. According to them, women are socialized to a large extent not only to be passive or accommodative, but also to be intuitive, while men are socialized to be aggressive, active and dominating in all aspects of the society.

Explanations on Nigeria’s situation still remain in our mind. Below is the report on Nigeria’s gender and culture issues. According to Gender in Nigeria Report (2012):

- Nigeria ranks 118 of 134 countries in the Gender Equality Index.
- Women make up only 21% of the non-agricultural paid labour force.
- At every educational level, women earn less than their male counterparts and in some situations men with less education earn more than better educated female peers.
- Nigeria has one of the lowest rates of female entrepreneurship in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Thus, the majority of women are concentrated in casual, low-skilled, low paid informal sector employment.





- Only 7.2% of women own the land they farm, which limits their access to credit and constrains entrepreneurship and business activity.
- Only 15% of women have a bank account.
- A gender bias in allocation of tax allowances means that women taxpayers are taxed disproportionately.
- In eight Northern States, over 80% of women are unable to read (compared with 54% for men). In Jigawa State, 94% of women (42% of men) are illiterate.
- Nigerian girls who enrol in school leave school earlier than their male counterparts.
- More than two-thirds of 15–19 year old girls in Northern Nigeria are unable to read a sentence compared to less than 10% in the South.
- Only 4% of females complete secondary school in the Northern zones.
- Over half of all women in the North are married by the age of 16 and are expected to bear a child within the first year of marriage.
- About 94% of 15-24 year olds in Kebbi have no knowledge of contraception.
- Girls from poorer families are more likely to marry young and have worse health outcomes.
- Nigeria has 2% of the world's population but 10% of global maternal deaths.
- Each day 144 Nigerian women die in childbirth, which is equivalent to one death every 10 minutes.
- A third of 15-19 year olds in Northern Nigeria have delivered a child without the help of a health professional, traditional birth attendant or even a friend or relative.
- Poorer girls and women are particularly disadvantaged. Only 7% of women in the poorest quintile deliver in a health facility, compared to 56% in the highest quintile.
- Women are politically under represented. Their upper and lower house representation fell from 7% in 2007 to 6% in the 2011 election (the African average is 19%). Only 7 of 109 Senators and 25 of 360 Representatives are women.
- Most 15-24 year old women in Nigeria think it is reasonable for a husband to beat his wife if she burns the food, refuses sex or goes out without his permission.
- Nearly half of unmarried women in parts of Southern Nigeria have experienced physical violence.

Table 1: Nigeria Gender Development and Empowerment Measures, 2008

Zones	Gender Development Measure	Gender Empowerment Measure
North-Central	0.478	0.244
North-West	0.376	0.117
North-East	0.250	0.118
South-West	0.507	0.285
South-East	0.455	0.315
South-South	0.575	0.251

Source: UNDP Report 2011





As indicated on table 1, in general Nigeria has both low gender development and gender empowerment as almost all the Zones score below an average of 0.5. The report also in particular reveals that the North lags in both gender development and empowerment than other Zone.

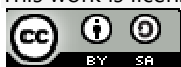
Pre-MDGs and MDGs Poverty Reduction Strategies: Successes and Failure

The most difficult and challenging issues to confront among the developing nations where on the average a large majority of the population is poor is poverty reduction (Ogwumike, 2002). Records show that in Nigeria, the number of those in poverty has never remained continually in a linear decreased direction, rather it decreases in one time and increases in another. For instance, the number of people living in poverty increased from 27 per cent in 1980 to 46 per cent in 1985. Thus, in 1992, it declined slightly to 42 per cent, and increased very sharply to 67 per cent in 1996. Currently, the World Bank in 2014 cuts Nigeria's poverty rate to 33.1 per cent (ThisDay, 2014). More so, the Nigeria's poverty alleviation measures which have been implemented so far had focused more on growth, basic needs and rural development approaches. The measures are presented according to the Pre-SAP era, the SAP era and the MDGs/Democratic era.

i) The Pre-Structural Adjustment Programme Era

In the pre-SAP era, poverty reduction was never the direct focus of development planning and management. Poverty reduction was indirectly showed concern by the federal government. For instance, the objectives of the first National Development Plan in Nigeria which included the development of opportunities in health, employment and education as well as improvement of access to these opportunities would have been achieved if these objectives had led to poverty alleviation. However, in the 4th National Development Plan which appeared to be more precise in the specification of objectives with certain elements of poverty reduction, yet emphasis was laid more on the increase of income of the average citizen as well as reduction of income inequality, among other things. During this era of national development plans, many of the programmes in Nigeria were either in part association with international agencies or wholly associated with international agencies for execution. Although it had positive effects on poverty reduction, yet the target population of some of the programmes was not specified explicitly as its name implies for the poor communities of people (Ogwumike, 2002).

In the pre-SAP era, specific programmes embarked upon includes the River Basin Development Authorities, RBDA; the Agricultural Development Programmes, ADP; the Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme, ACGS; the Rural Electrification Scheme, RES; and the Rural Banking Programme, RBP which were all designed to take care of objectives such as employment generation, enhancement of agricultural output and income, and stemming of the tide of rural – urban migration. Ogwumike (1998) opined that despite the degree of successes made by some of the programmes, their sustainability was ill-fated. In fact, with time, many of them failed as a result of diversion from the original focus. For example, the Rural Banking and the Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme at many stages experienced colossal failure to give the desired credit facilities for agricultural and rural transformation because a lot of savings were





mobilized in the rural areas, but no fewer than later found diverted to urban centres in form of credits/investments (Ogwumike, 2002).

Other notable poverty reduction related programmes that were designed and implemented before the advent of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in Nigeria included Operation Feed the Nation, OFN of 1977; Free and Compulsory primary Education, FCPE of 1977; the Green Revolution in 1980; and the Low Cost Housing Scheme, LCHS. Both OFN and Green Revolution were set up to boost agricultural production and improve the general performance of the agricultural sector among other things. These programmes impacted significantly on the people thereby enhancing the quality of life of many Nigerians. But some of the programmes experienced difficulties at sustaining its successes largely due to lack of government commitment and political will, policy or political instability as well as insufficient involvement of beneficiaries in some of the programmes (CBN Enugu Zone, 1998).

ii) The Structural Adjustment Programme Era

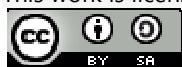
The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) era kicked off government’s policy effort towards poverty alleviation in Nigeria. This was evident in the fact that severe economic crisis was experienced in the early 80s where most Nigerians experienced low quality of life as it would be best described as poverty era. To find a palliative measure to end the unbearable economic era, the government led by General Ibrahim Babangida (Rtd.) resorted to adopt the Structural Adjustment Programme. A number of poverty reduction programmes which were set up by the government of the federation between 1986 and 1997 are indicated on table 2.

Table 2: Anti-Poverty Programmes of the Government of Nigeria (1986-1997)

Programme	Year Established	Target Group	Nature of Intervention
Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI)	1986	Rural Areas	water supply and rural electrification
National Directorate of Employment (NDE)	1986	Unemployed youths	Training, finance and guidance.
Better Life Programme (BLP)	1987	Rural women	Self – help and rural development programmes, skill acquisition and health care.
People’s Bank of Nigeria (PBN)	1989	Underprivileged in rural and urban areas	Encouraging savings and credit facilities
Community Banks (CB)	1990	Rural residents, micro enterprises in urban areas	Banking facilities
Family Support Programme (FSP)	1994	Families in rural Areas	Health care delivery, child welfare, youth development, etc.
Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP)	1997	Rural areas	Credit facilities to support the establishment of cottage industries.

Source: Oladeji and Abiola (1998)

Consequent upon the implementation of SAP, the situation of the vulnerable groups (the poor) worsened. This propelled the government to design and implement many other poverty





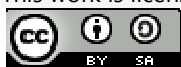
alleviation programmes during the period of 1986 and 1993. Again, under the guided deregulation that spanned from 1993 to 1998, more poverty alleviation programmes were introduced by the Government of Federal Republic of Nigeria (Ogwumike, 2002).

iii) The MDGs/Democratic Era Poverty Reduction Strategies

At the inception of Nigeria's current democratic dispensation which coincided with MDGs 2000, the federal government initiated a number of developmental projects towards eradicating extreme poverty which aimed at creating jobs for the people such as poverty alleviation programmes (PAP), vision 2010, NEEDS – [SEEDS and LEEDS], NAPEP, the 7-Point Agenda, Vision 20: 2020, SURE-P among others, within the framework of MDGs to serve as driving forces to achieve a wide array of laudable projects. In fact, between 2006 and 2009; Nigeria MDGs Office spent £1.23 billion (N305 billion) towards meeting its targets 2015 (United Nations - MDG Report, 2015).

Although according to the UN 2015 MDGs Report, extreme poverty declined significantly because, in 1990, nearly half of the population of the developing world lived on less than \$ 1.25 a day, but the proportion dropped to 14% in 2015. Similarly, the number of people living in extreme poverty also declined by more than half, falling from 1.9 billion in 1990 to 836 million in 2015 with most progress occurring in 2000 globally. Also, with the number of people in the middle class living on more than \$4 a day has almost tripled between 1991 and 2015. This group of people now makes up half the work force in the developing regions up from just 18% in 1991. And again, the proportion of undernourished people in the developing regions has fallen by almost half since 1990, from 23.3% in 1990 -1992 to 12.9% in 2014 -2016 (UN MDG Report, 2015).

In terms of women representation in the parliament across the globe, nearly 90% of the 174 countries with data over the past two decades were represented. The average proportion of women in the parliament has nearly doubled during the same period. In Nigeria, the level of poverty has taken a declining trend over the last one decade whereas the economic growth especially in agriculture has reasonably reduced the proportion of underweight children, from 5.7% in 1990 to 23.1% in 2008 (UNDP, 2011). Despite these, the implementation of the poverty alleviating programmes directed towards poverty reduction, the successes of these programmes seemed to record limited successes till the end of 2015 relative to women in rural areas that constitute the larger percentage of women in Nigeria. In fact, majority of the most vulnerable groups such as the women are yet to feel the impact of some the poverty alleviation programmes put in place based on some form of financial challenges, indiscipline and endemic corruption, inadequate and unreliable data system, lack of human capacity and implementation. Indeed, as the prevalence of poverty remains exponentially high among women, no specific programmes were made to be directed towards women unlike Better Life for Rural Women during the SAP era. This shows that though the gap between women and men in the prevalence of poverty has reduced but the gap is still much wide due to the cultural interplay and political cum economic challenges of the nation. It was based on this Ogwumike (2002) describes this era as one of the things that has defied the efforts of the current regime.





The Way Forward: Post 2015 MDGs Poverty Reduction Policy in Nigeria

It should be noteworthy that gender and poverty reduction in Nigeria can only be achieved when gender equality is given considerable concern as enshrined in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Specifically, the following issues need to be visited through a policy framework. The plans, procedures and programmes of such policy framework must be pragmatic and effectively operationalize MDGs programmes in Nigeria, as well as very pervasive in combatting the existing socio-cultural impediments. Discrimination against women, especially in formal employment should be avoided. The mitigation against discrimination by consciously conceding to women on educational and employment opportunities through stipulated quotas in “Affirmative Action” should be strengthened.

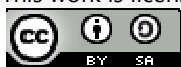
In addition, all forms of indiscipline, gross misconduct, embezzlement, misappropriation or corruption on the part of the government should be strongly fought against. This will help to fast track the achievement of post-2015 MDGs poverty alleviation programmes especially those directed towards women. Also, as a way of reducing poverty to the barest minimum among women in the Post-2015 MDGs era, women should be projected, not subjected. This means that any poverty reduction programmes aimed at alleviating the culturally disadvantaged position of women should be made sustainable. In fact, there should be specific poverty alleviation programmes designed for women for the purpose of actualizing goal one and two of the MDGs.

Similarly, the United Nations should also focus on post-2015 era and the sustainability of the MDGs thereby coming up with new goals that will sustain the initial ones within which women would be well incorporated than the former. The challenge of ineffective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for all MDGs programmes should be provided with a solution in the post-2015 MDGs. This will not only help to make adjustments in the course of execution of the programmes, but also helps to identify the exact group of women to be focused on (rural or urban women), including the state that needs more attention through reliable data gathering and information management system.

Furthermore, as a way of providing for accurate data for the sake of monitoring and evaluation of every poverty alleviation programmes, there is a need to establish research and development that will help to facilitate and fast track the achievement of MDGs, especially for women programmes of the MDGs. Finally, with the Nigeria level of cultural diversity, the post-2015 MDGs poverty alleviation programmes should be domesticated to reflect women at grass roots throughout the states in the federation.

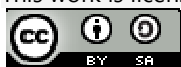
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