

THE QUEST FOR POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN NIGERIA: THE NEED FOR A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

The article closely examines the concept and meaning of poverty, being inclusive though not restricted to income poverty, but embracing the wider construct of human poverty, finding expression in the requirements of human development. It situates the fight against poverty across the globe within the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations. In particular, Nigeria appears to be fighting a losing battle against poverty, over the last three decades, despite committal of considerable resources, due to insidious failure to engage beyond mere programmes and strategies. It advocates a shift in conception and implementation on the entire platform of household, civil society, development partners and the apparatus of governance.

I. INTRODUCTION

We will spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty, to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected. We are committed to making the right to development a reality for everyone and to freeing the entire human race from want. We resolve therefore to create an environment—at the national and global levels alike—which is conducive to development and to the elimination of poverty.¹

Poverty has its origin in human existence and it has been with society in various degrees from time immemorial. Its meaning and extent has changed over time with civilization, economic development and human perception of things. For instance, most people in ancient societies were poor, and this was accepted as natural and unavoidable. The current understanding, on the contrary, is that the condition of poverty is unacceptable, and should therefore be eradicated. This is based on the human rights

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1. United Nations Millennium Declaration, General Assembly Resolution 55/2 of 8 September 2000, available at <<http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm>> (accessed 19 June 2008).

notion that all human beings are equal, and should be entitled not only to civil and political rights, but also to social, economic and cultural rights such as food, shelter, education and personal security.²

There appears to be a bewildering ambiguity in the use of the term “poverty.” The term poverty is susceptible to various meanings which may cover a wide range of issues such as lack of adequate income, or human resources, sustainable livelihood, social inclusion, current consumption or future security. Different concepts imply different interventions. Poverty means more than the condition or quality of being poor, in need, indigent, or lacking means of subsistence. The meaning of poverty extends to “deficiency in necessary properties or desirable qualities or in a specific quality, inferiority, or inadequacy.”³ The pertinent questions, therefore, are these: is poverty simply about the level of income obtained by households or individuals? Is it about lack of access to social services? Or, better still, is it more correctly understood as the inability to participate in society, economically, socially, culturally or politically?⁴ These issues are analyzed in this article.

II. THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF POVERTY

It is widely accepted among scholars that the word “poverty” may be defined in many ways; in fact, experts in the field are yet to agree upon a single definition of the term.⁵ Poverty can be defined as an inability to meet basic needs due to lack of resources. It is a condition in which resources are not adequate to meet basic needs.⁶ Poverty is the substantive lack of means or resources.⁷ Broadly speaking, poverty may be conceived both in the sense of income poverty and in the sense of human poverty. Earlier, poverty was understood largely in terms of income poverty. In recent times, however, its scope

2. S. Schwartzman, The Statistical Measurement of Poverty (Summary of the work of the Expert Group on Poverty Statistics, set up by the UN Statistical Commission in 1995), available at <<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/doc99/rio.pdf>>, (accessed 21 June 2008).

3. Culled from Mission Statement of *Journal of Poverty: Innovations on Social, Political & Economic Inequalities*, School of Social Work, Loyola University Chicago, Illinois.

4. Simon Maxwell, The Meaning and Measurement of Poverty (Odi Poverty Briefing No. 3, 1999), available at <<http://www.odi.org.uk/publications/briefing/pov3.html>> (accessed 21 June 2008).

5. M. Mowafi, The Meaning and Measurement of Poverty: A Look into the Global Debate, available at <http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~dludden/Mowafi_Poverty_Measurement_Debate.pdf> (accessed 19 June 2008).

6. P. Saunders, Towards a Credible Poverty Framework: From Income Poverty to Deprivation (SPRC Discussion Paper No. 131, January 2004), available online at <<http://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/media/File/DP131.pdf>>, (accessed 26 February 2011).

7. G. Fajth & K. Holland, Poverty and Children: A Perspective (UNICEF Working Paper, July 2007), at 4–5.

has extended to some other forms beyond lack and deprivation to include inadequate human resources referred to as human poverty. Poverty was treated as a lack of income; this could be on household or individual basis, engendering a failure to meet minimum nutrition or subsistence levels. However, the concept of poverty has broadened to accommodate a wider set of “basic needs”, extending beyond lack of income, to lack of access to health, education and other services.⁸

Human poverty refers to a multidimensional concept of poverty going beyond income poverty and including deprivations in areas of health, knowledge, child mortality, malnutrition, and so on. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defined poverty in its multi-dimensional nature. According to the UNDP, human poverty indicates lack of basic human capabilities, including illiteracy, malnutrition, abbreviated life span, poor maternal health, illness from preventable diseases.⁹ Indirect measures are lack of access to goods, services and infrastructure—energy, sanitation, education, communication, and drinking water—necessary to sustain basic human capabilities.¹⁰

The UNDP Human Development Report, 1997 introduced the concept of human poverty. It argued that if income is not the sum total of well-being, therefore, lack of income cannot be the sum total of poverty. Human poverty does not focus on what people do or do not have, but on what they can or cannot do. It is deprivation in the most essential capabilities of life, including leading a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable, having adequate economic provisioning and participating fully in the life of the community.¹¹

A. Absolute and Relative Poverty

Contemporarily and in universal terms, income poverty is treated under two broad heads. One is the concept of *absolute poverty* understood as the minimum set of resources a person needs to survive. The other is the concept of *relative poverty*, that is, a measurement of the resources and living conditions of parts of the population in relation to others.¹² According to the World Bank, absolute poverty relates to the ability of the individual to provide himself with the basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, portable water, health service, education, public transport, and so on. This type of

8. Maxwell, *supra* note 4.

9. UNDP, OVERCOMING HUMAN POVERTY (2000).

10. *Id.*

11. UNDP, HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT (1997).

12. G.M. Fisher, Is There Such a Thing as an Absolute Poverty Line Over Time? <<http://www.census.gov/hhes/povmeas/publications/povthres/fisher3.html>> (accessed 23 February 2011).

poverty leads to deprivation, non-participation in decision-making affecting one's life.¹³

Absolute poverty is designated as the line below which existence becomes a matter of acute deprivation, hunger, premature death and suffering. In practice, it may be difficult to measure it in a consistent way, since the dividing line between acceptable and unacceptable deprivation is not just biological, and can change from society to society. The consensual understanding, however, is that absolute poverty is an intolerable situation requiring prompt corrective action.¹⁴ In other words, absolute poverty refers to lack of the set of resources a person should acquire in order to maintain a "minimum standard of living."

Relative poverty, on the other hand, is concerned with how well off an individual is with respect to others in the same society. Relative poverty relates to the inability of a certain section of the community or individuals to satisfy their basic needs.¹⁵ In theory, therefore, while an absolute poverty line is a measure that could, adjusting for price fluxes, remain stable over time, a relative poverty line is one that could be expected to shift with the overall standard of living in a given society.¹⁶

B. Characterization of Poverty

Poverty is "a multifaceted, dynamic and contextualized form of adversity in which material lack interacts with and is mediated and compounded by social exclusion, inequity and powerlessness, with multiple effects."¹⁷ Poverty is hunger, lack of shelter, a state of being sick and not being able to see a doctor, not having access to school and not knowing how to read, not having a job. Poverty is powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom.¹⁸ Poverty erodes or nullifies economic and social rights such as the right to health, adequate housing, food and safe water, and the right to education. The same is also true of civil and political rights, such as the right to a fair trial, political participation and security of the person.¹⁹ It is clear from the above that poverty is widely understood today as a multidimensional phenomenon, where income

13. WORLD BANK, *POVERTY: WORLD DEVELOPMENT REPORT* (1990).

14. Schwartzman, *supra* note 2.

15. B. Bulama, *Economic Growth, Inequality and Poverty in Nigeria*, at 19, available online at <http://www.lulu.com/items/volume_27/429000/429916/1/print/429916.pdf> (accessed 26 July 2008).

16. Mowafi, *supra* note 5.

17. Fajth & Holland, *supra* note 7.

18. *See*, World Bank reports on poverty, available online at <<http://www.worldbank.org/>> (accessed 13 June 2008).

19. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, available at <<http://www.ohchr.org/english/issues/poverty/index.htm>> (accessed 12 June 2008).

or material deprivation—is a very important dimension.²⁰

C. Determining the Poverty Line

“Poverty line” indicates the income level below which poverty exists, thus defining those who are in income (or primary) poverty.²¹ A person is considered poor if his or her consumption or income level falls below some minimum level necessary to meet basic needs.²² This minimum level is usually called the “poverty line”; the most formally recognized being the “Henderson Poverty Line.”²³ Put differently, poverty line is the income level beneath which a person cannot buy goods and services that constitute a socially acceptable minimum standard of living.²⁴ Benjamin Rowntree, who popularized the concept of poverty line, defines it as “a standard of bare subsistence rather than a living.”²⁵ What is necessary to satisfy basic needs varies across time and societies. Therefore, poverty lines vary in time and place, and each country uses lines which are appropriate to its level of development, societal norms and values.²⁶

The concept of a poverty line depicting a global minimum standard for a socially acceptable minimum standard of living for the whole world came into existence only after 1945 when, for the first time, the concept became an object of policy attention.²⁷ In an effort to measure global poverty by the standards of what poverty means in poor countries, the World Bank has adopted a method whereby all persons could be evaluated equally based on a single threshold of real consumption. Rather than accepting national poverty lines that would treat poverty as a relative concept, and

20. Fajth & Holland, *supra* note 7.

21. Saunders, *supra* note 6, at 2.

22. *Id.*, at 7.

23. The Henderson Poverty Line is a measure developed in the early 1970s by Professor Ronald Henderson, while undertaking the Australian Government Commission of Inquiry into Poverty. The poverty line estimates the amount of money people need in order to cover their basic costs and maintain a minimum standard of living. See, Poverty Line Update, available at <http://www.bsl.org.au/pdfs/poverty_line_update_Aug07.pdf> (accessed 26 February 2011); The Poor in Australia: Who Are They and How Many Are There? available online at <<http://www.aph.gov.au/library/intguide/sp/poverty.htm>> (accessed 26 February 2011).

24. Saunders, *supra* note 6, at 5.

25. See, C.L.P. Nunes, The Evolution of the Economic Thought about Poverty Measurement, available online at <<http://www.hull.ac.uk/php/ecskrb/GDP2007/Celso.22647.1177930319/>>, (accessed 13 June 2008).

26. Poverty Net, Overview: Understanding Poverty, available at <<http://web.worldbank.org/...>> (accessed 19 June 2008).

27. Poverty: Elements of Historical Definition, available online at <www.sas.upenn.edu/>, (accessed 5 June 2008).

recognizing the merits of establishing a common measure to evaluate consumption poverty across countries, the Bank devised what is known as the “\$1/day poverty line” in 1990,²⁸ denoting the common international poverty line.

The \$1/day definition reflects what is known as “purchasing power parities” (PPPs), essentially basing the poverty line as the equivalent of what a person could buy with one dollar in the United States. It is important to note, therefore, that the \$1/day definition does not reflect “how far a dollar could go” in local currency, but rather, is an indication of what a dollar could purchase in the United States adjusted for differences in domestic price levels.²⁹ However, in 2008, the World Bank came out with a revised figure of \$1.25 at 2005 purchasing-power parity. This figure is based on the results of the 2005 International Comparison Program (ICP).³⁰

III. THE FACE OF POVERTY IN NIGERIA

The national incidence of relative poverty increased sharply, both between 1980 - 1985, and 1992 - 96 in Nigeria. The national incidence of relative poverty dropped from 65.6 per cent in 1996 to 54.4 per cent in 2004 representing 11.2 per cent decline over the period.³¹ The dollar per day gave a national poverty incidence of 51.6 per cent. The urban poverty incidence was 40.1 per cent compared with rural poverty incidence of 60.6 per cent. The subjective measure of poverty, which is a self-assessment, indicates a national incidence of poverty of 75.5 per cent, which disaggregated into 70.7 per cent for urban areas, and 79.2 per cent for rural areas. This measure generally increased poverty results because it is based on the perception of the people.³²

In clear terms, the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS)³³ stated that “although Nigeria is rich in natural and human

28. Mowafi, *supra* note 5.

29. *Id.*

30. WORLD BANK, 2008 WORLD DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS, POVERTY DATA: A SUPPLEMENT TO WORLD DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS (2008); *New Data Show 1.4 Billion Live on Less than US\$1.25 a Day, But Progress Against Poverty Remains Strong*, available at <<http://web.worldbank.org/>> (accessed 26 February 2011).

31. NATIONAL BUREAU OF STATISTICS, POVERTY PROFILE FOR NIGERIA (2006). The findings of the report cover the magnitude, nature, character and dimensions of poverty in Nigeria in 2004. Noticeably, the report failed to distinguish between absolute poverty and relative poverty. It rather generalized poverty in Nigeria during the period under review as relative poverty. This would be inappropriate considering that during this period, the income of some proportion of Nigerians fell below the “poverty line” of \$1 a day.

32. *Id.*

33. NATIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION OF NIGERIA, NATIONAL ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (NEEDS) (2004).

resources, 7 out of every 10 Nigerians live on less than \$1 a day.”³⁴ Furthermore, “more than two-thirds of the Nigerian people are poor, despite living in a country with vast potential wealth. Although revenues from crude oil have been increasing over the past decades, Nigerians have been falling deeper into poverty. In 1980, an estimated 27 percent of Nigerians lived in poverty. By 1999, 70 percent of the population had income of less than \$1 a day, and the figure has risen since then.”³⁵ With per capita income falling significantly to about \$300 between 1980 and 2000 (well below the sub-Saharan average of \$450), it is noted that approximately, 90 million of Nigeria’s 133 million people are living in absolute poverty, on less than one dollar a day.³⁶

Since 1990, the UNDP in its Human Development Report has been publishing the Human Development Index (HDI) which looks beyond Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to a broader definition of well-being. The HDI measures the average progress of a country in human development with reference to: living a long and healthy life (measured by life expectancy), being educated (measured by adult literacy and enrolment at the primary, secondary and tertiary level) and having a decent standard of living (measured by purchasing power parity, PPP, income). Out of the 177 countries with data, Nigeria is ranked the 158th with HDI of 0.470.³⁷ The Human Poverty Index for developing countries (HPI-1) focuses on the proportion of people below a threshold level in the same dimensions of human development as the human development index—living a long and healthy life, having access to education, and a decent standard of living. By looking beyond income deprivation, the HPI-1 represents a multi-dimensional alternative to the \$1 a day (PPP US\$) poverty measure. Nigeria has HPI-1 value of 37.3, ranking 80th among the 108 developing countries for which the index has been calculated.³⁸

A. Causes of Poverty

The fundamental question about poverty has always been who or what causes it. The Western thinking on this question has oscillated between placing the responsibility for poverty squarely on poor people and locating it in systemic conditions beyond the control of individuals. Poor people are in their unfortunate condition due to circumstances beyond their control. Due to the fact that the source of poverty lies in

34. *Id.*, at ix

35. *Id.*, at xiii.

36. WORLD BANK, JIS (2004), at 8-9; *but see also* <<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/nigeria-cap-1-b.pdf>> (accessed 22 July 2008).

37. *See*, UNDP, HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2007/2008 (2008).

38. *Id.*

the socioeconomic system, the solution to it must also be at the societal level: large-scale interventions to rectify systemic inequities. On the other hand, some have insisted that poverty is an individual problem. It is argued that able-bodied poor should take responsibility for their own lives and extricate themselves from poverty by getting and holding a job. Large-scale interventions such as the government programmes of war on poverty only make the situation worse by fostering dependence of poor people on handouts.³⁹

Suggestively, the Nigerian thought seems to align with the attributes of a systemic failure as provocateur for poverty in the land. According to the NEEDS,⁴⁰ one source of poverty is the lack of basic services, such as clean water, education, and health care. Another is the lack of assets, such as land, tools, credit, and supportive networks of friends and family. A third one is the lack of income to enable one access food, shelter, clothing, and empowerment (political power, confidence, dignity, etc). Discrimination on the grounds of gender, race, disability, age, or ill health increases vulnerability to poverty; so do natural or human-caused shocks such as market collapses, conflicts, droughts or floods.⁴¹

It would then appear that the nature of poverty in Nigeria is a combination of income and human poverty. The poor in Nigeria is destitute of virtually every utility for human capabilities, though it could be conceded that there may not necessarily be an aggregation of all the factors in one particular case. Considering that the majority of Nigerians were categorized as living in abject poverty, at that time,⁴² despite the country's great natural wealth, it would not be far-fetched to submit that Nigeria is likely to come within the definition of a failed nation, that is, a nation that has failed its people. There are a number of other factors which have contributed to increased poverty in Nigeria, which are discussed below.

1. Macro-economic Distortions.—Poor macro-economic and monetary policies resulted in low economic growth rate and continuous slide in the value of the naira, which depreciated from one Naira (N1.00) to a Dollar at around June 1986 to one hundred and fifty three Naira (N153.00) to a Dollar in March, 2011 in the parallel market. Similarly, other macroeconomic indicators such as the inflation rate, the interest rate, the GDP growth rate, unemployment and income distribution among

39. F.A. Hanson, *How Poverty Lost Its Meaning*, 17 CATO J. (1997), at 189-209, available at <<http://www.cato.org/pubs/journal/cj17n2/cj17n2-5.pdf>> (accessed 23 June 2008).

40. See *supra* note 33.

41. *Id.*, at xiv.

42. The period until the inception of the NEEDS and thereafter, though there has been gradual amelioration of the situation. By then, about 70 percent of the population had income of less than \$1 a day. See, NATIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION OF NIGERIA, *supra* note 33, at xiii.

others, have continued to show negative trends, which ultimately translated to worsening poverty incidence.

2. *Weak Productive Base.*—The Nigerian economy has experienced some changes since independence, but as of today, it is still characteristically monolithic, depending on one primary product, that is, oil for over 90 per cent of its exports and government revenue. At independence, the Nigerian economy was largely agrarian, until the 1970s, when oil took over. This trend has narrowed down considerably the employment generation capabilities of the economy.

3. *Bad Governance.*—Over many years, Nigeria had been plagued by bad governance, bringing about a failure in harnessing the nation's resources to enhance the welfare of the citizenry. Governance placed little or no premium on openness, transparency and accountability, probity and effective leadership. According to the Department for International Development (DFID), poor governance is a cause of poverty. People suffer when governments do not allow participation in political life, provide access to justice, deliver adequate public services or control corruption. It opines that serious problems with governance still exist in most African countries, including Nigeria.⁴³

4. *Corruption.*—This comes in different forms and differs from country to country. In Africa, illegal take-over of government through military coups, embezzlement, nepotism, looting, bribery, vote buying and abuse of office are very common. The manifestation of corruption in Nigeria progressed marginally among individuals and, thereafter, assumed an institutional and later national dimension. The incidences of corruption had resulted in low inflow of foreign investment, massive capital flight and warped reward system leading to inefficient allocation of scarce resources, and ultimate, worsening poverty incidence. According to the World Bank Africa Regional Vice President, Obiageli Ezekwesili, "corruption is a cancer stunting development of the country [Nigeria]."⁴⁴ She stressed the need to ensure prudent management of financial resources in ways that impact positively on the lives of ordinary Nigerians, especially the majority who live in the rural areas such as the Niger

43. DFID, Nigeria, available at <<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/nigeria-factsheet.pdf>>, (accessed 21 March 2008).

44. World Bank Vice President Praises Nigerian Government for Reforms, available at <<http://web.worldbank.org/wbsite/external/countries/africaext/nigeriaextn/0,,contentmdk:21648598~pagepk:141137~pipk:141127~thesitepk:368896,00.html>> (accessed 21 July 2008).

Delta which is lagging far behind having gone through a number of civil unrest.⁴⁵

5. *Policies of International Institutions.*—Many developing nations are in debt and poverty partly due to the policies of international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Their programmes have been heavily criticized for many years for resulting in poverty. In addition, for developing or third world countries, there has been an increased dependency on the richer nations. This is despite the IMF and World Bank's claim that they will reduce poverty. Following an ideology known as neo-liberalism, and spearheaded by these and other institutions known as the "Washington Consensus" (for being based in Washington D.C.), Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) have been imposed to ensure debt repayment and economic restructuring. However, the way it has happened has required poor countries to reduce spending in sectoral areas like health, education and development, while debt repayment and other economic policies have been made the priority. In effect, the IMF and the World Bank have demanded that poor nations lower the standard of living of their people.⁴⁶

6. *Debt Burden.*—This had been one of the drawbacks to Nigeria's development efforts. The debt portfolio, which was about US\$14.28 billion dollars in 1980, had risen to about US\$32.9 billion in the year 2003.⁴⁷ The debt stock was reduced from US\$46.26 billion in 2004 to US\$20.48 billion in 2005 and to US\$3.54 billion at the end of 2006. In 2005, Nigeria secured a significant debt relief from the Paris Club amounting to US\$18.0 billion. With the payment of the balance of US\$12.4 billion to the creditors, Nigeria exited the Paris Club debt in March 2006. Nigeria also exited the London Club debt on 4th April, 2007 after paying off outstanding Par Bonds and Promissory Notes.⁴⁸

The servicing of the debt had encroached on the volume of resources needed for socioeconomic development. Productive sectors of the economy like agriculture, industry, manufacturing and so on were equally constrained leading to low productivity, low capacity utilization, under-employment and low purchasing power, thereby throwing majority of Nigerians into abject poverty. However, the country has also taken a couple of other loans, for various other projects. The external debt of the

45. *Id.*

46. A. Shah, Structural Adjustment—A Major Cause of Poverty, available online at <<http://www.globalissues.org/TradeRelated/SAP.asp>>, (accessed 9 June 2008)

47. Nigerian Debt Management Office.

48. NIGERIA: POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY PAPER—PROGRESS REPORT (IMF Country Report No. 07/270, August 2007), at 8.

country was US\$3.3 billion at the end 2007, this is largely to multilateral creditors, but external reserves exceeded US\$54 billion at the end of January 2008.⁴⁹ Also, the nation's domestic debt profile increased from ₦4, 229 trillion in September to ₦4.55 trillion in December 2010. However, according to a statement credited to the Director-General, Debt Management Office (DMO), Dr Abraham Nwankwo, the debt to gross domestic product (GDP) of 19 per cent was quite in order when compared with the global acceptable standard of 40 per cent for countries in the same peer group with Nigeria.⁵⁰ Fears have been expressed over the country's rising debt portfolio,⁵¹ with its potential of soon becoming a debt over-hang on the nation.

7. *Unemployment.*—Unemployment in Nigeria assumed crisis levels in the late 1980s and early 1990s especially among primary/secondary school leavers and graduates of tertiary institutions. It should be noted that the high incidence of unemployment has not abated, but compounded by pockets of retrenchment in various sectors. Joblessness engenders lack of income, capable of degenerating into poverty.

8. *Poor Human Resources Development.*—Formal education ensures the full development of human personality and citizenship. Initial training develops a person's skills, and professional competence that enables him to perform in employment. This, when complemented with life long experience would ensure continued appreciation and/or adaptation to changes in the global environment. In developing countries, Nigeria not being an exception, the challenge of human resource training and development should go beyond the need to secure relevance in a modern society to the application of acquired skills for self or paid employment.⁵²

49. *IMF Executive Board Concludes 2007 Article IV Consultation with Nigeria*, Public Information Notice (PIN) No. 08/16, February 15, 2008, at 2.

50. *Nigeria's Debt Profile Healthy – DMO & Nigeria Not Utilizing Opportunities in AfDB*, NIGERIAN TRIBUNE, January 28, 2011, available at <<http://www.tribune.com.ng/index.php/front-page-news/16802-nigerias-debt-profile-healthy-dmo-nigeria-not-utilizing-opportunities-in-afdb>> (accessed 28 February 2011).

51. *Id.*

52. See, G. Buwai, *The Role of the Public Service in Poverty Reduction Strategies: Challenges and the Way Forward* (Country Paper Presentation at the 25th Annual African Association for Public Administration and Management (AAPAM) Round Table Conference, Banjul, Gambia, April 2004), available at <<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/AAPAM/UNPAN025671.pdf>> (accessed 22 June 2008). See also, Anup Shah, *Causes of Poverty*, available online at <<http://www.globalissues.org/TradeRelated/Poverty/Corruption.asp>> (accessed 3 June 2008).

IV. POVERTY AND THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

In September 2000, 189 countries signed the Millennium Declaration which led to the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs are a set of eight goals for which 18 numerical targets have been set and over 40 quantifiable indicators have been identified. The goals are: eradicating extreme poverty and hunger; achieving universal primary education; promoting gender equality and empower women; reducing child mortality; improve maternal health; combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and developing a global partnership for development. The first MGD calls for halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty, and those suffering from hunger, between 1990 and 2015. Coinciding with this commitment, the World Bank focused its 2000/01 World Development Report on exploring best practices for reaching this goal, repositioning poverty alleviation as the single greatest mission guiding the Bank's policies and programs.

There had been various programmes and strategies aimed at poverty alleviation in Nigeria. It is remarkable to note that the budget for Nigeria in 2000 was dubbed as one "to relieve poverty." Indeed, before the National Assembly even passed the 2000 budget, the government got an approval to commit ₦10 billion to poverty alleviation programme. In the 2001 budget, the government had increased the allocation to poverty alleviation programme by 150%.⁵³ The first poverty eradication programme in Nigeria was the National Accelerated Food Production Programme and the Nigerian Agricultural and Co-operative Bank set up by General Yakubu Gowon led government in 1972. In 1976, General Olusegun Obasanjo introduced Operation Feed the Nation. The program delegated university students to the rural areas to teach the rural farmers on how to use modern farming tools. The civilian administration of Alhaji Shehu Shagari introduced the Green Revolution Programme in 1979. The objectives of the programmes were to reduce food importation while boosting local food production. General Muhammadu Buhari later introduced the "Go Back to Land" Programme after coming into office in 1983.

General Ibrahim Babangida took over the reign of government in 1986 and established the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI). The Peoples' Bank of Nigeria and the Community Bank of Nigeria (which were part of the programme) were set up to give out small loans to the rural poor. The wife of the President, Mrs Maryam Babangida came up with her own poverty reduction program, "Better Life Programme," to improve the lives of rural women. General Sani Abacha who took over power from the interim administration of Chief Ernest Shonekan in 1993

53. F.O. Ogwumike, *An Appraisal of Poverty Reduction Strategies in Nigeria*, 39 CBN ECON. & FIN. REV. (2002).

set up the Family Support Programme and the Family Economic Advancement Programme.⁵⁴ The Obasanjo regime also established the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) in 2001 with a start-up grant of 6 billion Naira. Under this, schemes such as Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES), Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS), Social Welfare Services Scheme (SOWESS), Capacity Acquisition Programme (CAP), and Natural Resources Development Conservation Scheme (NRDCS) came up and were expected to rid Nigeria of its perennial and increasing poverty.⁵⁵ The latest poverty reduction strategy in Nigeria is the NEEDS.

A. Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs)

Since the late 1970s, Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) have become an integral part of the conditionalities imposed by the rich donor governments of the West and the International Financial Institutions (IFIs), in particular, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for lending to borrowing nations. SAPs require recipient countries to change their economic policies, generally to encourage greater economic deregulation (“liberalization”) of trade, investment and finances. In 1986, the IMF established its own structural adjustment lending programme.

Usually, SAPs include several basic economic stabilization components geared towards bringing an economy into balance through reducing inflation and decreasing budget deficits while meeting debt payment schedules. They also contain structural and sectoral policies aimed at integrating countries into the global economy by promoting exports, reducing state activity, and liberalizing trade, investment and finance. They

54. Nigeria also had Free and Compulsory Primary Education (FCPE), Low Cost Housing, River Basin Development Authorities (RBDA), National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA), Agricultural Development Programmes (ADP), Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme (ACGS), Strategic Grains Reserves Program (SGRP), Rural Electrification Scheme (RES), and Rural Banking Programme (RBP). These were programmes mostly designed to take care of objectives such as employment generation, enhancing agricultural output and income, and stemming the rural-urban migration tide, which greatly contributed to rising poverty levels.

55. See generally, V.E. Dike, *The Global Economy and Poverty in Nigeria*, available online at <http://www.nigerdeltacongress.com/garticles/global_economy_and_poverty_in_ni.htm> (accessed 16 June 2008); N. Jonah, *Alleviating Poverty in Nigeria—The CDD Initiative*, available online at <<http://povertynewsblog.blogspot.com/2007/11/alleviating-poverty-in-nigeria-cdd.html>> (accessed 22 June 2008); Buwai, *supra* note 52; A. Garba, *Alleviating Poverty in Northern Nigeria* (Paper presented at the Zumunta Association Annual Convention, Minneapolis, USA, July 28-29, 2006); D.O. Elumilade, T.O. Asaolu & S. A. Adereti, *Appraising the Institutional Framework for Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Nigeria*, 3 INT’L RESEARCH J. FIN. & ECON. (2006), available online at <<http://www.eurojournals.com/IRJFE%203%207%20asaolu.pdf>>, (accessed 22 June 2008); Ogwumike, *supra* note 53.

generally entail reductions in government spending and employment, higher interest rates, currency devaluation, sale of government enterprises, reduction of tariffs and other trade barriers, and liberalization of foreign investment regulations and labour laws.⁵⁶

The IMF had been variously criticized for its SAPs, which allegedly worsened the poverty profile in many countries. Supposedly, in response, the IMF renamed its structural adjustment facility as the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF). In 2000, borrowing countries began preparing Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) as a prerequisite for a World Bank/IMF adjustment loan. These PRSPs could then serve as a framework for all IFIs and bilateral donor lending. Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) are prepared by member countries in broad consultation with stakeholders and development partners, including the staffs of the World Bank and the IMF. Updated every three years with annual progress reports, they describe the country's macroeconomic, structural, and social policies in support of growth and poverty reduction, as well as associated external financing needs and major sources of financing.⁵⁷ Governments across the continent have developed Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP), which attempt to comprehensively address the problem of poverty, through close collaboration with development partners.⁵⁸

B. National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS)

The NEEDS document, which is the bedrock of the reform programmes of the Federal Government of Nigeria, was launched on May 29, 2002.⁵⁹ NEEDS is Nigeria's plan for prosperity, its development plan inspired by current challenges for change and vigorous growth. Functionally, NEEDS is Nigeria's Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers

56. C. Welch, Structural Adjustment Programs and Poverty Reduction Strategy, available online at <<http://www.fpif.org/>>, (accessed 3 June 2008).

57. IMF, NIGERIA: POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY PAPER—PROGRESS REPORT (IMF Country Report No. 07/270, August 2007), available at <<http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2007/cr07270.pdf>> (accessed 19 June 2008).

58. F. Pamacheche & B. Koma, *Privatization in Sub-Saharan Africa—An Essential Route to Poverty Alleviation*, 1 AFR. INTEGRATION REV. 3 (2007).

59. Thereafter, the 36 States of the Nigerian federation, including the Federal Capital Territory, were invited to develop a broad, state-owned and led strategy for growth and poverty reduction, within the NEEDS and MDG framework in the form of the State's Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (SEEDS). The states were encouraged to document their entire medium term development plans, based on their peculiar local situations in the SEEDS. This has since been done. Subsequently, there has been the Local Government Economic Empowerment & Development Strategy (LEEDS), in Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Nigeria.

(PRSP).⁶⁰ It is the people's way of letting the government know what kind of Nigeria they wish to live in, now and in the future. It is also the government's way of letting the people know how it plans to overcome the deep and pervasive obstacles to progress that the government and the people have identified. It is also seen as a way of letting the international community know where Nigeria stands in the West African sub-region and in the world and how it wishes to be supported.

The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) 2004-2007 is Nigeria's reform based medium-term plan for economic recovery, growth and development. NEEDS was conceptualized in 2003 and launched in 2004, as a response to the numerous challenges facing the nation one of which was the high level of poverty (about 70%).⁶¹ It was inaugurated with the aim of reforming the government, growing the private sector and empowering the people, with the national aspiration to be in the league of the 20 leading economies in the world by the year 2020. NEEDS was conceptualized to serve as a catalyst for the attainment of the goal. It was first implemented as NEEDS-1 from 2004-2007. NEEDS-1 was based on four goals which were poverty reduction, wealth creation, employment generation and value re-orientation. NEEDS-2 (2008-2011), whose preparation process was commenced, was to take care of the gaps in NEEDS 2004-2007. The strategic framework for NEEDS-2 has been developed and a drafting team of relevant stakeholders constituted.

From the onset, NEEDS was conceived as a living document that may continue to be modified as lessons of implementation emerge. In particular, the document will be reviewed and updated after every presidential election,⁶² hence NEEDS-2. Curiously and perhaps sadly too, indications have emerged as to the confusion in government circles over the status of NEEDS-2. The Minister of Finance was reported to have said that the programme (NEEDS) had been reviewed to accommodate the seven-point agenda of the current administration. However, this claim was contradicted by some sources within the Presidency, who took it as an indication that NEEDS, as a whole, had been abandoned.⁶³ It is worrisome that even a suggestion (even if not real or merely misplaced) of such an atmosphere of confusion exists within government circles. In the least, it portends an inability to fully grasp the content and intent of the document by those saddled with the responsibility, in different capacities, to implement the programme. If this suspicion has any basis at all, it may have endangered the success of the programme itself.

60. See, C.C. Soludo, *Preface to NATIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION OF NIGERIA*, *supra* note 33.

61. See, *supra* note 57.

62. NATIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION OF NIGERIA, *supra* note 33, at vi – vii

63. *Controversy over NEEDS 2 Status*, THE GUARDIAN, July 8, 2008 at 1-2.

V. NEED FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT?

Admittedly, programmes and strategies for poverty reduction and alleviation implemented by various governments in Nigeria had accomplished very little, if anything at all. The NEEDS document professes that “despite great natural wealth, Nigeria [and by extension, Nigerians] is poor and social development is limited. If present trends continue, the country is not likely to meet the Millennium Development Goals.”⁶⁴ It identified three main problems: not all of the people enjoy the same chance of prosperity; past governments in Nigeria, instead of focusing on delivering essential public services, assumed control of major sources of national income, thereby precipitating and facilitating corruption; and existence of many challenges in the way of private enterprise.⁶⁵

No doubt, appreciable progress seemed to have been made in fostering economic development under the aegis of NEEDS. Regrettably, this has not seemingly translated into prosperity and well-being for the majority of the Nigerian people since the incidence of poverty is still pervasive and palpable in the country. It is submitted that the programmes that had been designed for poverty alleviation, in themselves, are not efficient. The same goes for NEEDS. However, much more needs to be done if the goals of poverty alleviation must be achieved. This will require a shift in concept, approach and implementation of poverty alleviation programmes.

A. Adoption of a Human Rights-based Approach

The strategy that has been most traditionally used as a tool in the fight against poverty has not proved to be effective. There is the need to develop a much broader vision more closely tied to human rights so as to acquire a first-rate legal dimension.⁶⁶ This implies that poverty should no more be regarded as merely a governance issue but a denial of human rights. States, as primary duty-bearers, are obliged to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights entitlements of individuals, or rights-holders. This necessitates greater accountability of public institutions to all citizens. A human rights-based approach helps with a shift away from a needs approach based on “charity” to recognition of the rights of poor people to entitlements and the obligations on the part of others that are enshrined in law.

64. NATIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION OF NIGERIA, *supra* note 33, at xiii.

65. *Id.*

66. E.G. Salmon, *The Long Road in the Fight Against Poverty and Its Promising Encounter with Human Rights*, 4 SUR INT’L J. HUM. RTS (2007), at 150-65.

It is contended that successful poverty reduction depends on providing opportunities for the poor people to contest their rights through normative changes, including through legal frameworks. Civil and political rights empower poor people not only to claim their economic and social rights but also to demand accountability for good public services, pro-poor public policies and a transparent participatory process open to hearing their views.⁶⁷ It would then mean that as there is a right in the claimants—those caught in the throes of poverty—so is there a duty on government, for instance, to provide an enabling environment for poor people to get out of poverty.⁶⁸ According to the UNDP, poverty eradication is a major human rights challenge of the 21st century. A decent standard of living, adequate nutrition, health care, education, decent work and protection against calamities are not just development goals, they are also human rights.⁶⁹

On the other hand, the poor must not only be heard but must be empowered. In recognition of giving the poor a voice and its potential in the fight against poverty, the World Bank at the outset of this millennium initiated the *Voices of the Poor* project. In that study, the World Bank collected the voices of more than 60,000 poor men and women from around the world in an unprecedented effort to understand poverty from the perspective of the poor themselves. This work was to form the fulcrum of the 2000/2001 World Development Report entitled: *Attacking Poverty*. Advisedly, each country ought to build on the revelations in the Report, in formulating strategies to alleviate poverty and promoting the empowerment and capabilities of the poor.⁷⁰

B. Integration of Freedom from Poverty into Fundamental Rights

Under the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999⁷¹ certain rights are designated as fundamental rights. These rights are regarded as sacrosanct. Derogation from them, or an attempt to do so, except where justified under the Constitution itself, is amenable to judicial action.⁷² These rights include: right to life; right to dignity of

67. C. Luttrell & S. Quiroz, Linkages Between Human Rights-Based Approaches and Empowerment, <<http://www.poverty-wellbeing.net/en/Home/Empowerment/document.php>> (accessed 21 July 2008).

68. S. Jahan, Human Rights-Based Approach to Poverty Reduction—Analytical Linkages, Practical Work and UNDP, <www.undp.org/poverty/docs/employment/HRPR.doc> (accessed 19 June 2008).

69. UNDP, HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 8 (2000).

70. See e.g., WORLD DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2000/2001, NIGERIA: VOICE OF THE POOR (Country Synthesis Report on Consultation with the Poor: Nigeria, 2000/2001).

71. Cap. C23, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004.

72. *Id.*, § 46.

human person; right to personal liberty; right to fair hearing; right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; right to freedom of expression, right to property and so on.⁷³

It is submitted that the freedom from poverty is inexorably linked with the aforementioned rights. Indeed, in real terms, the so-called fundamental rights may be only nominal in the absence of freedom from poverty. In both the narrow and enlarged sense, involving income poverty and the concept of human poverty, poverty could be tantamount to a denial of many, or most if not all of these rights. In other words, if there must be real value to the fundamental rights, there must be freedom from poverty. It is, therefore, suggested that freedom from want should be included in the category of fundamental rights.

C. Rigorous Observance of the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy in the Constitution

A symbiotic component of assimilation of freedom from poverty into fundamental rights is the rigorous observance of the fundamental objectives and directive principles of State policy which are contained in Chapter II of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution.⁷⁴ The Constitution provides, *inter alia*, that the State shall harness the resources of the nation and promote national prosperity and an efficient, a dynamic and self-reliant economy. Furthermore, it requires that the State shall direct its policy towards ensuring the promotion of a planned and balanced economic development; that the material resources of the nation are harnessed and distributed as best as possible to serve the common good; that the economic system is not operated in such a manner as to permit the concentration of wealth or the means of production and exchange in the hands of few individuals or of a group; and that suitable and adequate shelter, suitable and adequate food, reasonable national minimum living wage, old age care and pensions, and unemployment, sick benefits and welfare of the disabled are provided for all citizens.⁷⁵

In addition, the Constitution states that the State shall direct its policy towards ensuring that all citizens, without discrimination whatsoever, have the opportunity for securing adequate means of livelihood as well as adequate opportunity to secure suitable employment; that there are adequate medical and health facilities for all persons; children, young persons and the aged are protected against any exploitation whatsoever, and against moral and material neglect; and that there are equal and

73. *Id.*, §§ 33-46.

74. *Id.*, Ch. II & §§ 13-24.

75. *Id.*, § 16 (1) & (2).

adequate educational opportunities at all levels. Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy.⁷⁶

Without more, the foregoing provisions of the Constitution impose positive duties on the government and its agencies to seek the utmost good of the generality of the populace. In consonance with poverty eradication, the State is to make provision to ensure that a citizen lives a meaningful life by guaranteeing avenues for his/her self realization and actualization. In support of this position, section 13 of the Constitution declares: “it shall be the duty and responsibility of all organs of government, and of all authorities and persons, exercising legislative, executive or judicial powers, to conform to, observe and apply the provisions of this Chapter of this Constitution.” It is, therefore, submitted that it will amount to a breach of the Constitution for a State to actively or perceptibly derogate from the citizens’ freedom from poverty or failing to do enough to alleviate poverty in the country.

D. Requirements of a Pro-active Judiciary

Under the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, the judicial powers of the federation are vested in the courts,⁷⁷ covering the whole gamut of inherent powers and sanctions of a court of law.⁷⁸ The Constitution also guarantees access to courts as well as the independence, impartiality and integrity of the judiciary.⁷⁹ It states, however, the judicial powers of the courts shall not extend to matters contained in the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy set out in Chapter II of the Constitution.⁸⁰ Thus, the courts may not inquire into whether or not the act or omission by any authority or person or whether any law or any judicial decision is in conformity with the fundamental objectives. On the basis of this provision, it is contended that the provisions of the Constitution under its Chapter II is non-justiciable.⁸¹

Historically, the Nigerian provisions on the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy were borrowed from the Indian experience in constitution-making.⁸² Although explicitly declared non-justiciable in terms of the Constitution, however, the same Constitution places a “paramount duty of observance”

76. *Id.*, §§ 17 (3) & 18 (1) & (3).

77. *Id.*, § 6.

78. *Id.*, § 6 (6) (a).

79. *Id.*, § 17 (2) (e).

80. *Id.*, § 6 (6) (c).

81. It is not within the purview of this article to go into any details on the dialectics surrounding the non justiciability of the provisions in the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy.

82. Upendra Baxi, *The Rule of Law in India*, 4 SUR INT’L J. HUM. RTS 16 (2007).

in the making of law and policy to ensure the justiciability of the fundamental objectives on the government.⁸³ In this regard, the Indian judiciary has successfully used the power of constitutional interpretation to favour interpretation that *fosters*, rather than *frustrates* the directives principles and fundamental objectives. This “indirect” justiciability has contributed a great deal towards fructification of the substantive “thick” versions of the Indian Rule of Law.⁸⁴

As a corollary, and quite significant too, the Indian Supreme Court has begun to *translate* some Directives into rights. An example is the judicial insistence that the Directive prescribing free and compulsory education for young persons in the age group 6-14 is a fundamental right.⁸⁵ The Court generated a constitutional interpretation enshrining this right as an integral aspect of Article 21, rights to life and liberty.⁸⁶ It is requisite that the courts in Nigeria be decisively pro-active in constitutional interpretation, to forge a harmony in its provisions. One way of doing this is to construe the Directive Principles in the light of the fundamental rights.

E. Pro-active Civil Society

In its over fifty years of existence as an independent State, Nigeria has witnessed for the larger part of its history, military rule, bearing rule by prescriptive imperatives of decrees and fiats. There had been little tolerance of moderating contributions of the civil society. In 1999, the country returned to democratic governance. Despite this, there has been very little improvement in the life of the common man given the government’s insensitivity to the needs of its citizenry. The concept of checks and balances, a concomitant of the doctrine of separation of powers, is lacking in view of the overly powerful and overbearing executive with a controlling influence over other arms of government. This is the pattern with which Nigeria has been governed for the larger part of its nascent democracy.

However, the National Assembly has begun to play a more constructive role, while the media, policy think-tanks, academic institutions, faith-based organizations, and trade unions all function but are yet to play a critical role in reforms⁸⁷ which could

83. See in particular s. 13 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, *supra* note 71.

84. Baxi, *supra* note 82.

85. § 18, CONST. FEDERAL REP. NIGERIA (1999), *supra* note 69 For a comparable provision, see s. 18 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, *supra* note 71.

86. Baxi, *supra* note 82; Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, *supra* note 71, §§ 33 & 35.

87. Nigeria’s Poverty Reduction Strategy—NEEDS and SEEDS, available online at <<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/nigeria-cap-1-b.pdf>>, (accessed 21 March 2008).

lead to creating a better environment for the people, particularly the poor. For a nation that parades credence for lack of accountability and responsiveness of government, misallocation of state resources, corruption related to weak governance and patronage-based politics, among others, it is desirable to have an aware, virile and active civil society.

F. Legal Status of the NEEDS Document

NEEDS is conceived as a kind of pact between the people and the government of Nigeria. According to the NEEDS document,

NEEDS is ... the people's way of letting the government know what kind of Nigeria they wish to live in, now and in the future. It is the government's way of letting the people know how it plans to overcome the deep and pervasive obstacles to progress that the government and the people have identified.⁸⁸

It is submitted that this declaration sounds grandiose; it does not portend stronger than a social pact. It is not a legal pact. At the highest, NEEDS is only a policy declaration: a policy directive indicating the direction and aptitude of a willing government. Its implementation is at the pleasure of the government. NEEDS is not a legally enforceable document. No judicial action can be taken against the government on it. In view of this, it is suggested that the government should enact or adapt the NEEDS document into law. After all, "NEEDS is a feasible plan ... the targets for progress are realistic, not 'pie in the sky' objectives that will never be achieved."⁸⁹

G. Poverty Reduction beyond Programmatic Agenda and Strategies

The government and all stakeholders in the fight against poverty must realize that the contest goes beyond mere conceptualization of programmes, agenda and strategies. If this is the case, the poverty fact sheets of Nigeria would have by now looked very promising and positive in view of the huge sums of money which had been committed to eradicating poverty in the country. There is a need for sincerity, transparency, political will, doggedness, focus and sustained genuine interest, among others, by the Nigerian government in its determination to reduce poverty and redress inequality in the polity.

88. NATIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION OF NIGERIA, *supra* note 33, at viii.

89. *Id.*, at xiii.

It is observed that past administrations in the country have engaged in glorifying poverty alleviation on the pages of newspapers and news conferences without any meaningful impact on the poor and downtrodden in Nigeria. The story has been the same: empty promises of poverty alleviation through accelerated and improved practices, which only ended up in making the policy formulators richer and the poor masses poorer.⁹⁰ In most cases, poverty alleviation programmes are geared towards scoring cheap political points or as a populist programme designed to confuse the existing situation. For example, the Green Revolution of the Second Republic turned out to be a ploy to favour politicians of the ruling party. Fertilizer procurement and distribution became political patronage with beneficiaries being mainly politicians of the ruling party. The actual farmers were left to depend on the emergency farmers—the politicians.⁹¹

In the same vein, the Better Life Programme, ostensibly designed to enhance the quality of life of rural women, among other objectives, ended up a caricature of itself, as “Better Life for Better Women.” Direct beneficiaries were the wives of the office holders, self-styled First Ladies, their cronies, and influential women politicians. The real targets went away with cheap clothing, having the images of the First Lady (wife of the Governor of the State or the President’s wife, as the case may be) printed on it, some “hand-outs” (little sums of money shared amongst them) at gatherings, grand receptions and rallies, eulogizing the acclaimed virtues of the First Lady and other functionaries of the Programme.⁹² Several other programmes suffered a similar fate. Authentic human development can never be achieved when the ultimate is the amassing of wealth and material goods, creating an unquenchable thirst for more power, profits and possessions. On the larger scale, poverty alleviation programmes rather than creating private wealth should promote and facilitate the creation of public wealth.⁹³

90. Jonah, *supra* note 55.

91. A. Garuba, Adult Education and Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Nigeria: A Case for Harmonisation, <http://www.gla.ac.uk/centres/cradall/docs/Botswana-papers/Garubafinal_30.pdf> (accessed 21 July 2008).

92. According to Erap, the “Better Life for Rural Women” programme was hijacked by the urban female elite. The programme created a few urban women millionaires but had no impact on the lives of the rural women for which it was meant. In the same category today, are the various programmes being run by first ladies and wives of political leaders, across Nigeria. Without exception, these programmes are better known to urban television viewers than to the poor for whom they are meant. See, G. Erap, Poverty Alleviation or Poverty Propagation, available online at <<http://www.businessdayonline.co/analysis/comments/1418.html>> (accessed 22 March 2008).

93. K.V. Mofuoa, Poverty Reduction Through Wealth Creation: A Business Ethics Approach (Paper delivered at the 26th African Association for Public Administration and Management Annual Round Table Conference, Whitesands Hotel, Mombasa, Kenya, 7–11 March, 2005), available at <<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/AAPAM/UNPAN025723.pdf>>, (accessed 21 July 2008).

H. Poverty and Household Size

Poverty incidence, gap and severity seem to be positively correlated to the size of households,⁹⁴ seemingly validating the conception among the Yoruba (one of the indigenous tribes in Nigeria) that “*omo beere, osi beere*,” meaning literally, “many children, much poverty.”⁹⁵ The population of Nigeria is currently put at about 140 million people.⁹⁶ Nigeria is essentially a polygamous state, cutting across the entire tribes and peoples as well as the entire social strata. Arguably, the country is over populated; an average household size ranging between 8 and 12. The total fertility rate in Nigeria is as high as 6 per woman with teenage mothers contributing 10% of the births.⁹⁷ The thrust here is that there is the need for individual responsibility in the efforts to curb the spiraling effects of poverty in the land. Despite that the nature of poverty in Nigeria appears to be systemic, the inordinate procreation tendencies have only exacerbated the condition.

Of course, the proclivity to have large families is steeped in cultural and social behaviours. Among the Yorubas of the Southern part of Nigeria, for example, large family size is treated as an asset, as the wives and many children contribute significantly to the labour force, for the purposes of farming. Also, the size of the family accentuates the social status of the family head. A saying goes: “*Olomo lo l’aye*,” that is, “the world belongs to those who have children.” Another is: “*Olomola*,” meaning, “the one with children is wealthy.” Another says: “*Omo eni laso eni*,” loosely translated, “one’s children are his covering, even as clothes cover a person’s nakedness or frailties.” Similar conceptions prevail amongst other groups in the country.

This cultural conception partly explains the reluctance or the lack of political will of successive governments to legislate on the family size. Previous attempts to do so failed. Various regulations pay only a lip service to any legal family size. For example, under the income tax law, tax deductions of ₦2, 500 per child are allowed a tax payer subject to a maximum of four children; such children must be receiving some form of educational instruction and be below 16 years.⁹⁸ Also, under the National

2008).

94. Ogwumike, *supra* note 55.

95. O. Obilade & O. Mejiuni, Poverty Alleviation through Reproductive Health in Nigeria: Exploring Other Non-Formal Alternatives, <http://www.gla.ac.uk/centres/cradall/docs/Botswana-papers/Obiladefinal_63.pdf>, (accessed 23 July 2008).

96. National Population Commission Census, 2006.

97. Obilade & Mejiuni, *supra* note 95.

98. See, Personal Income Tax Act, Cap. P8, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004, § 33 (3)

(b) (i).

Health Insurance Scheme,⁹⁹ the health insurance cover is limited to “the spouse and four biological children of the participant,” provided that such children are below the age of 18.¹⁰⁰ The participant would be required to make additional contributions if more children are to benefit under the scheme.¹⁰¹ However, there are no compellations not to have more than four children. When the debate was on, as to the prescription of four children per family, jocularly it was asked if this meant the prescribed number of children per woman. This implies that the man is at liberty to father as many children as he desires from his many wives. In other words, the family size could hardly be prescribed, as a matter of law.

I. Correlation of Human Poverty and Human Development

On one hand, human poverty is the lack of basic human capabilities, a deprivation in the most essential capabilities of life, including leading a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable, having adequate economic provisioning and participating fully in the life of the community.¹⁰² On the other hand, human development is a process of enhancing human capabilities, to expand choices and opportunities so that each person can lead a life of respect and value.¹⁰³ However, the realm of human development extends further: other areas of choice highly valued by people include participation, security, sustainability, guaranteed human rights—all needed for being creative and productive and for enjoying self respect, empowerment and a sense of belonging to a community. In the ultimate analysis, human development is development of the people, for the people and by the people.¹⁰⁴

In other words, human development is about creating an environment in which people can develop their full potential and lead productive, and creative lives in accordance with their needs and interests. People are the real wealth of nations. Development thus, is expanding the choices people have to lead the lives they value. Fundamental to enlarging these choices is building human capabilities—the range of things that people can do or be in life. The most basic capabilities for human development are to lead long and healthy lives, to be knowledgeable, to have access to the resources needed for a decent standard of living and be able to participate in the life of the community. Without these, many choices are simply not available, and many

99. Cap. N42, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004.

100. Operational Guidelines of the National Health Insurance Scheme, 2005, at 8.

101. *Id.*

102. UNDP, OVERCOMING HUMAN POVERTY (2000); UNDP, HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT (2000), at 17.

103. *Id.*, at 2.

104. *Id.*, at 17.

opportunities in life remain inaccessible.¹⁰⁵

It is not surprising, therefore, that the efforts by successive Nigerian governments to alleviate or eradicate poverty had failed. Pockets of programmes targeted at the poor, in the form of loan here and there, provision of some kind of skeletal facilities now and then, serials of activities, and so on, failed to address the core issues namely, the development of the person; removal of barriers to self realization and actualization; deficiencies in infrastructure; hostile economic environment; pre-disposition to systemic inequalities and lopsided reward system and so on. The propensity for failure was further compounded by gross inefficiencies in the implementation of those programmes.

The goal of poverty alleviation mechanics, particularly in the Nigerian context, should not merely to be to improve the nutrition, medical care and sanitary conditions of the poor (even though they are desirable), but also to make it possible that the citizens can as well effectively defend and realize their basic interests. This capacity presupposes that they are free from bondage and dependence; that they are able to read and write and to learn a profession or vocation; that they can participate as equals in politics and in the labour market; and that their status is protected by appropriate legal rights which are enforceable through an open and fair legal system.¹⁰⁶ Thus, there is the need for a holistic approach to poverty alleviation in Nigeria. This should not be by a selective policy intervention, but as well targeted at empowering the entire citizenry. Specifically, the poor should be empowered to get out of poverty. It is only when this is done that Nigeria can stand up tall to say that poverty is reduced in the country.

VI. CONCLUSION

In Nigeria, the poverty trend has continued to decline progressively from 70 per cent in 1999 to 54 percent in 2005. The outcome of the 2004 Core Welfare Indicators Survey (NBS) shows that the proportion of the population living in relative poverty reduced to 54 per cent, while 35 percent out of the 54 per cent of the poor people are considered extremely poor.¹⁰⁷ Eradicating poverty is regarded as the most important goal of human development. Indeed, it is widely believed that at its core, development must be about improvement of human well-being, removal of hunger, disease and productive employment for all. The first goal of a nation that aspires to have great

105. The Human Development Concept, <<http://hdr.undp.org/en/humandev/>> (accessed 3 June 2008).

106. T.W. Pogge, *Eradicating Systemic Poverty: Brief for a Global Resources Dividend*, 4 SUR INT'L J. HUM. RTS (2007), at 137-38.

107. IMF, *supra* note 57, at 34.

development should be the eradication of poverty. Government as a matter of priority should strive to end poverty and get its priority right by ensuring that all its citizenry are not jeopardized in terms of achieving the MGDs on schedule.

Certainly, NEEDS is an important road map not only in the bid to eradicate poverty, but also as a manifesto for political, social, cultural and economic turnaround of the Nigerian nation. In itself, NEEDS is transparently honest and appealing. It is no more a question of strategy but downright implementation. Given a redoubling of genuine and well directed efforts, the Millennium Goal 1 of halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty and those suffering from hunger between 1990 and 2015 is still achievable if government is sincere in its efforts in eradicating poverty and commits adequate economic resources and the required political will to the various poverty alleviation programmes in the country. The task of minimizing the poverty level in Nigeria is a task that all and sundry must be ready to perform if we are to have a just society.