ACHIEVING THE UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS): STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE POVERTY REDUCTION IN AFRICA

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Introduction

The United Nations (UN) 2030 agenda for sustainable development and its comprehensive set of 17 interlinking Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS) gives unique opportunity to all nations to achieve a better future. The following are some of the goals outlined by the UN to serve as blueprint for national development globally:

- Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
- Eradication of poverty.
- Eradication of hunger.
- Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all.
- Reduce inequality within and among countries. Etc.

According to the African National congress (1994:5), no political democracy can survive and flourish if the majority of the people remain in poverty, without their basic needs being met and without tangible prospects for a better life. Attacking poverty and deprivation will, therefore, be the first priority of the democratic government.

Poverty and Development in Africa

By definition, poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon that has different meanings for different people irrespective of whether it is being examined within the same subject area or not. On the one hand, poverty can be viewed as absolute or relative, as a lack of income or failure to attain capabilities. On the other hand, poverty can be chronic or temporary, it is sometimes closely associated with inequality, and is often correlated with vulnerabilities, underdevelopment, and economic exclusion.

According to President Thabo Mbeki (2004) "endemic and widespread poverty continues to disfigure the face of our country, it will always be impossible for us to say that we have fully restored the dignity of all our people as long as this situation persists. For this reason, the struggle to eradicate poverty has been, and will continue to be, a central part of the national effort to build the new South Africa." Based on this reflection, it is important for government to focus certain areas of the economy in order to reduce poverty in Africa. Such areas include: Infrastructure development, power supply, access to quality education and health, improved water supply, irrigation for poor farmers, and access to telecommunications.

For Alcock (1997:36), once we recognize that poverty exists, then we know that it must have a cause (or causes), and if we can identify the cause of poverty, then that should give us a basis to develop social policies as response to it. Since the cause(s) that perpetuate poverty has already been indicated above, it will be of great help to many people in terms of devising strategies

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that would effectively deal with this phenomenon. In this regard, the United Nations Economics Commission for Africa (UNECA) identified, in 1999, eight factors as key to reducing poverty in Africa. These include:

- Integrating Africans, their environment, as well as science and technology policies into national development strategies.
- Promoting investments in the social sectors, including investment into education, health, and job creation programmes that would target and reach the poor.
- Addressing gender bias and inequalities in wealth distribution.
- Building the capacity of Africans to apply information and communications technology (ICT) to the domesticated development goals and targets.
- Integrating regions in Africa and promoting African unity in order to gain a competitive edge in the global arena.
- Improving governance and participatory democracy at all levels of government.
- Establishing public health measures that will stop the continuous increase in HIV/AIDS cases given the economic consequences of epidemic diseases on micro and macro-economic growth.

In addition, Oxfam proposes that there should be more emphasis on creating employment and business opportunities for the poor within the economy of African states. Furthermore, the poor should be protected from being exploited by the rich, equitable healthcare and education

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should be provided, the welfare of children should be taken seriously; good governance should be encouraged and practiced by political leaders, gender equality should be guaranteed, while food and human security should be prioritized by government. The various religious organizations in African states should also be supported through donations. Since these organizations have great influence on people, worship centres should be encouraged to provide material and financial support for their poor members.

On its part, the World Bank proposes a three-pronged strategy for attacking poverty, namely: promoting economic opportunities for the poor; facilitating their political engagement and empowerment, and enhancing their economic security. Interestingly, there are common elements that were found to be espoused by each of these institutions. In an attempt to directly increase the ability of the poor to increase their income, the government should initiate policies that will among others:

- Enable poor citizens to access good land for production purpose as well as financial aid/subsidies from government.
- Foster sustainable natural resource utilization by encouraging recycling and prevent waste or overexploitation or natural resources, and
- Build rural infrastructure, especially roads and sustainable power supply which are necessary for economic development and better living condition of Africans.

In the area of education and capacity building, the government of various African

states should make basic (primary) education compulsory and free for all.

In order to further improve the quality of life of the poor, basic healthcare services should be free for low income earners while adult literacy should be provided for those interested. Empirical evidence suggests that most African criminal offenders are impoverished, come from poor families, or associated with some characteristics of poverty, such as low levels of education and lack of access to employment opportunities (Mpuang, 2000:7). If this is not properly managed, Khan (2001) suggests that persistent poverty of a substantial portion of a population can damage the economic prospects of any nation.

Given the aforementioned, the need for poverty eradication cannot be overemphasized. At the individual level or household level, poverty can translate into untold hardship and suffering among those that are engulfed by it. To cite one example, a poor woman who lost her child to poverty was reported by the Sunday Times (2002) to have said "I try everything I can to feed my children but it's never enough. I have nothing. Now my pain is doubled because I have lost my beloved child. And I cannot even afford to bury her" (cited in Desai, 2005:32).

This quote shows how poverty can prevent sustainable development and, in some cases, increase crime. What is even more of a concern is that if it becomes endemic at the macro level, this phenomenon can give rise to a number of socio-economic ills which include but not limited to widespread corruption and political instability.

Conclusion
For African countries to effectively reduce the increasing level of poverty in the continent, governments at all levels should put the suggestions above into consideration and initiate social policies that will alleviate poverty. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals are necessary to end poverty as well as ensure that people enjoy peace and prosperity in their respective countries. Though these goals are global blueprints, regional and national governments should domesticate them and through genuine commitment, the goals and their targets should be transformed into effective policies. Importantly, these policies and their accompanying projects should focus mostly on poor children, elderly, and those with disabilities.

Refugees, migrants, and internally displaced persons should also be included in the development plan. If these strategies are well implemented by the government, NGO's and private establishment would have successfully tackled or reduced poverty in its country.

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