

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

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Introduction

In 2012, the United Nations (UN) conducted the largest consultation programme towards the drafting of global development goals aimed at the advancement of its member states called the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

There were over 70 countries represented at the opening of the working group which presented its final draft to the UN General Assembly in September 2015. There are 17 goals listed as the global blueprint sustainable development. They are designed to guide a better and more sustainable development for all states by addressing the global challenges of poverty, gender inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, as well as the promotion of peace and justice. These goals are highly interconnected, and it is often advocated that no nation should be left behind.

As a result of rapid change in the world, globalization has radically reshaped the reality we live in and this has given rise to global issues which can only be solved if all humanity works together. At the UN General Assembly 70th session, the heads of state adopted the new and ambitious agenda as replacement for the previous Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The SDGs have now taken over the centre stage of regional and national development since 2015 with its wide ranging 17 goals and several targets which seek to improve the living condition of people by 2030.

Aims of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Sustainable development has been defined by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) Report as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. While the subject of development has been the focus of many international conferences and meetings since the 1980s, its practice has tilted towards eradication of poverty, inequality, and unemployment.

In this regard, socio-economic improvements are measured, not only by the level of economic growth a country records, but also by the number of alleviated poverty conditions. Hence the SDGs focus on efforts and measures established by states to improve the quality of life of their citizens.

Apparently, all the goals and their respective targets are fundamental to sustainable development but some of the goals are directly related in that meeting one goal could invariably translate to meeting some of the other goals. Among such hydra-headed goal is the elimination of poverty in all its forms which will positively contribute to the meeting of other goals. It is this first SDG that this essay shall discuss, focusing on strategies that will help achieve it.

Strategies for Poverty Eradication
Without a doubt, promoting sustainable agriculture will solve, to a large extent, most food related challenges in Africa. Scientific evidence supports this in the sense that human development requires food security and nutritional improvement. A purposeful policy well implemented on agriculture will

enhance human development and help eradicate poverty. This goal however requires a combination of natural biophysical processes with social and economic processes.

Other factors to be considered under poverty eradication include improved drinking water and sanitation. Since SDGs are not for developing countries alone but also for developed countries, agricultural development strategy will curb global malnutrition and nutrients deficiencies, especially in African countries. It will simultaneously curb obesity as the most common food related problem in the developed countries as well.

Sustainable agricultural development policy which targets large-scale and vulnerable small-

scale farmers will increase food production and employment opportunity at the national and local levels in Africa.

Effective sustainable agricultural practices can be put in place through efficient state agencies equipped with funds to promote

long-term and short-term agricultural schemes as well as soft loans for farmers and young graduates interested in agrobusiness. This would go a long way to reduce and possibly eradicate poverty if such agricultural policies are accompanied by equitable distribution of resources and opportunities among the poor. This will bring about increase in food production, raw materials, and more income for poor people.

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With the increasing investment in agriculture, it is believed that there will be a simultaneous growth in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of African states as the productive activities of farmers and previously unemployed labour will contribute to economic development. It is observed that increase in the GDP of industrial countries usually translates to modest growth in their per capita income but in most developing countries, population growth far exceeds the rate at which GDP increases. As long as population in African states grows faster than their GDP, the welfare of the people is bound to suffer. Therefore, in order to use the increasing population for growth of national GDP in Africa, available labour must be mobilized for productive activities, the best of which is sustainable agriculture.

Since health is wealth, African countries should invest in preventive rather than curative measures for it is better to prevent diseases than to cure them. Government should employ measures that tend to prevent public health problem than those intended to cure them, including the maintenance of clean environment. Public health should be made a priority by policy-makers and leaders in

African nations. Major concern should be to prevent the outbreak of contagious and deadly diseases such as Ebola Virus, HIV/AIDS, and Lassa fever.

Given that these diseases are already prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa, governments should strive to improve public health infrastructure and other health care centres in both rural and urban areas. According to a Pew Research Centre Survey conducted in March 2013 in six African countries of Ghana, Uganda,

Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya and Senegal, broad-based government interventions were recommended for sustainable development. This include building and improving hospitals, preventing, and treating HIV/AIDS patients, increase access to portable water, access to prenatal care, fighting hunger, prevention and fighting of infectious diseases, and increase investment in child immunization. If all these recommendations are implemented, it is believed that the number of healthy labour force will increase since a sick country is not a wealthy country and a healthy country is not a poor country.

There should also be a concerted effort towards investment in capacity building in African states. This could be done through the provision of quality education and lifelong learning for people. According to Albert Einstein, "education is not the learning of facts, but the training of the mind to think". It is this thought that has brought the world to where it is today. Education is a crucial source of knowledge; however, the right to education has remained an inaccessible right for millions of children in Africa. In many countries, the lack of quality education is marginalization, while in other places; it is due to lack of financial resources as government is usually unwilling to invest in the sector.

There needs to be a conscious, intentional, and joint effort between private and public sectors as well as the general citizens to strive for free and inclusive education for all. African leaders need to work together in ensuring that all children have equal access to basic education. Importantly, education of the mind should also be considered in order to eradicate corruption

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and other unwholesome cultural ideologies. In this context, the social system of patriarchy will give way to SDG 5 which is gender equality.

Law plays an important role in achieving sustainable development. Therefore, the role of law and good governance cannot be overemphasized in development planning for poverty eradication. From formulating policies and strategies to assessing progress, poverty eradication requires sound legal framework that would protect poor people and guarantee their access to government assistance. Among others, human right laws protecting the

rights of Africans should be passed in order to compel government to implement poverty eradication policies and programs.

Government authorities must approach poverty with imminent and long term development plan in order to achieve sustainable

development legacy for future generations. It suffices to say that all the seventeen SDGs will require domestication after extensive public consultation for appropriate policies.

Irrespective of whatever financial and material resources invested in the sustainable development of a society, it should be noted that one major impediment to poverty eradication is bad governance. This manifests in form of corruption, nepotism, abuse of human rights, and political instability. Since it is good governance that produces sustainable development and a corresponding economy favourable to productive employment and improved living standards, good governance must

therefore be encouraged. This can be achieved by mobilizing, organizing, empowering, and deepening the socio-political consciousness of the people.

In addition to encouraging good leadership, followership is also a factor intrinsically involved in sustainable development. Followers and citizens must equally cooperate, support, and obey government directives. A bad government will not be supported by citizens and unpatriotic citizens will act as hindrance to the realization of government development plans. Hence, unity of purpose should be cultivated in order to jointly eradicate poverty in Africa.

Conclusion

The global goal of poverty eradication and the suggested strategies above must be taken seriously in Africa. Their implementation must be a shared responsibility between the government and the people. Without significant improvement in governance, Africa may fall behind in meeting the SDGs and their targets, especially poverty eradication. After all, improving governance is not only important for poverty eradication, but it is also a development goal in itself.

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