

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

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Introduction

The problem of poverty in Africa amidst vast human and natural resources has over the years engaged the attention of government and non-governmental agencies. Poverty in most African countries is massive, pervasive, and chronic and it has led to crippling problem of hunger, diseases, and infrastructural decay. In 2015, this problem among others resulted in the creation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are set of global goals for building a better and sustainable future for all.

The blueprint is a resolution made by heads of states and governments to eradicate poverty in all forms as well as other 16 socio-economic problems among member states. By definition, poverty depicts a condition in which people live below a specified income level and are unable to provide themselves with the basic necessities of life.

Poverty in Africa

In a bid to eradicate poverty from African countries and achieve sustainable development, it is paramount that the multidimensional causes of poverty be given special attention. Empirical evidence suggests that poverty in African societies is caused by corruption, overpopulation, poorly-conceived social policies, slow economic growth, environmental degradation, and lack of quality education.

First, corruption is a lethal social evil that threatens the foundation of every society and sadly, has manifested itself in every aspect of African societies. For example, Nigeria is now internationally recognized as

one of the most corrupt countries in the world. While this has worsened the problem of poverty among her citizens, the annual financial loss to corruption in other African states leaves the continent in debt and underdevelopment.

Secondly, the increasing population growth in most African countries, notably Nigeria, without a corresponding economic growth has critically damaged the continent's development prospects. This condition has not only resulted in low standard of living for poor Africans, it has also caused many middle-class Africans untold hardship. The rate of unemployment and the poverty level in the last decade has particularly increased because the large population size continues to place economic strain on the carrying capacity of each nation's resources.

Thirdly, rather than empower people economically, poorly-conceived social policies of governments in most African states make people poorer. Most times, this is due to governments' top-to-bottom approach to development. Even when bottom-up approach is used in social policy articulation, the inadequate commitment to programme implementation is not uncommon among Africa states.

In Nigeria for example, much of the programmes in the country's development plans between 1970 and 1990 were not properly implemented, chief among which was the 1990 structural adjustment programme. This problem of poor policy implementation led to the retrenchment of workers, and general economic hardship which further deepened the level of poverty among Nigerians.

Also, slow economic growth in the face of overpopulation in most African countries has further increased the level of poverty in several states. Some scholars have attributed this poor economic growth to inappropriate macro-economic policies and initiatives which usually result in unwholesome mobility of labour. To cite one example, before the discovery of crude oil in commercial quantity in Nigeria, the country's economy thrived on agricultural production. This provided cheap raw materials for industries and job opportunities for a large number of people, especially the majority Africans in rural areas.

However, the discovery of oil turned the Nigerian economy around by making it depend solely on foreign exchange earnings from oil sales. Since the 1970s, the economy has not only been subjected to shocks in the international market, but it has also caused mass poverty in the rural communities where agriculture is the mainstay. Moreover, the oil-based economy has also engendered rural-urban drift with insanitary living condition on the increase in cities.

Environmental degradation is also a major contributing factor in the increasing level of poverty in many African countries, including Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, and Nigeria. Among others, oil spillage caused by unregulated oil exploration and drilling in many resource-rich communities has resulted in the reduction of good land for agricultural activities. Furthermore, anthropogenic activities such as deforestation have triggered desert encroachment and climate change with serious economic consequence for many

Africans who rely on the environment for survival.

Finally, the lack of quality education as well as the failing standard of education in most Africa society has led to the lack of required skills for employment in the labour market. Since most schools in Africa do not teach vocational and technical skills needed by local industries and employers, a large number of the unemployed youths are not economically empowered for job and wealth creation. This has contributed immensely to the increasing level of poverty in most Africa states.

Eradication Strategies

Since the causes of poverty in Africa are multidimensional, so also are the strategies

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for its effective eradication. Corruption which now serves as a conduit for draining national resources of most African countries should be tackled legally and reduced to its barest minimum. This can be achieved by encouraging the independence of the judiciary as well as the strengthening of law enforcement agencies by

government such as the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) established in Nigeria in 2003. The judiciary and law enforcement agencies saddled with the sole responsibility of combating corruption should also be financially supported in order to shield them from politicians who are likely to corrupt them.

Given the poor funding of public education in Africa, a robust and well-funded public education will take most African states out of poverty and put them on a pathway to prosperity. Free basic education should be provided for all, and the syllabus of secondary and higher educational institutions should be designed to

accommodate vocational and technical training. Furthermore, industrial, and vocational skill acquisition centres should be established in various parts of Africa such as the "industrial skill training centre Ikeja" established in Nigeria in 1997.

These centres will provide people, especially youths with hard and problem-solving skills necessary for self-reliance and wealth creation.

African governments at all levels should also formulated and implement feasible economic policies and initiatives that will encourage economic diversification, promote job creation, and address the problem of environmental degradation.

Most importantly, agricultural production which is the main stay of the poor in most developing nations should be encouraged and financially supported by government. This is because food and cash crops will not only go a long way to alleviate poverty in the continent; it will also help many entrepreneurs in generating income which will aid economic growth.

Furthermore, the government of each African state should target community development and rural improvement. For rural people to lead productive and enjoyable lives as well as participate actively in social-economic activities that will develop African economy, they will require quality education, healthcare, and access to portable water supply. The effect of growth on poverty is measured by the extent to which national growth in income helps to reduce the national measure of poverty. This growth elasticity depends on the ability of the poor to take advantage of expanded economic opportunities offered through growth, which in turn is governed

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by their access to land, credit, education, healthcare, markets etc.

In addition, African states should encourage industrialization which is now the bedrock on which most Asian economy is built. This is particularly important for African states because labour intensive industrialization has the

potential to absorb surplus skilled and unskilled labour in Africa. Moreover, the income that such industrialization will provide for unemployed Africans can play an important role in pulling a significant proportion of the population out of poverty. Rapid population growth which is a characteristic of most African states and a major strain on national resources should be tackled from all angles by government through access to safe and effective contraceptive option for both sexes.

More so, the role of entrepreneurship in poverty alleviation should not be overlooked. Governments in African states should encourage young entrepreneurs who seek to alleviate poverty through their innovative ideas. A notable example is the "Durojaye Mobile Toilet" nicknamed "Mr. Shit" which was established in 1999 in Lagos. This enterprise transformed public hygiene in Nigeria and by extension, Africa through the production, leasing, and maintenance of portable toilets. This not only promotes sanitation, but also creates job opportunities for unemployed youths. Finally, microfinance institutions and credit schemes should be put in place to help small and medium scale enterprises.

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