



**INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISM FOR POVERTY REDUCTION IN NIGERIA
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Protocols

Introduction

The uneven global distribution of access to the Internet has created a digital divide that separates individuals who are able to access computers and the Internet from those who have no opportunity to do. This has enhanced poverty, the very phenomena which technology seeks to attack. ICT is the mainstay of any successful economy and indeed nations that are unwilling to embrace the dividends of technology will suffer great loss and will be left behind in the comity of nations.

Notwithstanding the numerous benefits of ICT, we must bear in mind that no single segment of an economy holds the solution to poverty. This we have seen with the rise and fall of the oil sector.

Ladies and gentlemen, as we discuss the Institutional Mechanism for Poverty Reduction, I implore us to open our minds to our collective responsibility of ensuring that Nigeria is not left behind in the fight against poverty.

Poverty Defined

In the view of World Bank (1970), “poverty is the inability of certain persons to attain a minimum standard of living. Aluko (1975) sees poverty as “lack of basic necessities of life”. That is, basically not having enough to eat, a high rate of infant mortality, low life expectancy, low educational opportunities, poor water, unemployment, inadequate health care and unfit housing.

However, because of the complexity of poverty, it can no longer be defined in terms of the single index of income alone. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), has categorized poverty into Income Poverty and Human Poverty.

Income Poverty, the UNDP says, occurs when the income level of an individual falls below a nationally defined poverty line, while Human Poverty is seen as denial or deprivation of opportunities and choices that would enable an individual to lead a long healthy creative life and to enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity, self-respect and respect for others. This implies that poverty includes powerlessness, voicelessness, vulnerability and fear.

According to the European Commission therefore, poverty should not be defined merely as a lack of income and financial resources. It should include the deprivation of basic capabilities and lack of access to education, health, natural resources, employment, land and credit, political participation, services and infrastructure (European Commission, 2001). *An even broader definition of poverty sees it as being deprived of the information needed to participate in the wider society, at the local, national or global level (ZEF, 2002).*

Addressing Poverty

The concern with poverty and income distribution among nations goes as far back as the 1970s, when the United Nation’s Committee for Development Planning declared that “...the efforts needed are best characterized by what is sometimes called the necessary ‘**war on poverty**’”

(United Nations 1970, 6). The Committee declared poverty reduction through accelerated development, improved income distribution, and other social changes (including employment, education, health, and housing) as the paramount objective of an appropriate development strategy.

The World Bank (1990) took this concern with poverty further by focusing its *World Development Report* on poverty, which declared that a successful attack on poverty must be mounted simultaneously on three fronts:

- (i) Economic growth that generates employment and incomes for the poor (labour);
- (i) Development of human resources (education, health, and nutrition) of the poor, which allows them to better exploit the opportunities created by economic growth and
- (ii) Establishment of a social safety net for those among the poor who are unable to benefit from growth and human development opportunities owing to physical and mental disabilities, natural disasters, civil conflict, and physical isolation.

For any state and government, a primary prerequisite for poverty reduction is political will and commitment. If governments do not have the political will or commitment to reduce poverty, poverty reduction will either not occur or will occur very slowly. All the factors that cause poverty to decline, such as social development and good governance, are dependent on political will and commitment.

To achieve this strategy for alleviation of poverty therefore, institutional mechanism would necessarily be set up by governments which would, flowing from different sectors, address the objective and achieve reduction in poverty. No single programme, institution or sector can guarantee the viability and the efficiency of any national poverty fighting mechanism.

We are all jointly and severally responsible for the success or otherwise of these efforts. Each institutional arrangement would require precise organization, rules and norms, individual and collective compliance which is applicable with their domain. These requirements have to be guaranteed by other institutional arrangements and market forces.

The Millennium Development Goal (2000) and Sustainable development goals (2015) - Poverty eradication a major thrust

The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Report of July 2016, has reported that the proportion of the world's population living below the extreme poverty line has dropped by more than half between 2002 and 2012. The proportion of stunted children under age 5 declined from 33 per cent in 2000 to 24 per cent in 2014. Between 1990 and 2015, the global maternal mortality ratio declined by 44 per cent and the mortality rate of children under age 5 fell by more than half. In 2015, 6.6 billion people, or 91 per cent of the global population, used an improved drinking water source, compared with 82 per cent in 2000. Official development assistance totaled 131.6 billion US dollars in 2015, which was 6.9 per cent higher in real terms than in 2014 and represents the highest level ever reached.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDG) set for 2015 by international development agencies include reducing by half the proportion of people living in extreme income poverty, or those living on less than US\$1 a day. The figure of US\$1 income per day is widely accepted as a general indicator of extreme poverty within development discourse, but of course there is no absolute cut-off and income is only one indicator of the results of poverty, among many others.

The UN report on SDG has it that “What we do is not enough to achieve our shared goal of ending hunger by 2030. **We must boldly seek new ideas, tools and solutions that make more food available, accessible and ultimately give every person everywhere the ability to feed her or his own children.**”

Obviously, from a worldwide perspective and flowing from the Development Goals (MDG and SDG) some level of progress has been achieved in the fight against poverty. However, more needs to be done if we are to experience a world of zero poverty. While statistics show that poverty has been halved worldwide, let us put the statistics presented in the table below in perspective as they affect our nation, Nigeria.

WORLD STATISTICS (SDG 2016 Report)	NIGERIA STATISTICS (NBS)
1 in 8 people were living in extreme poverty in 2012	60.9% of Nigerians in 2010 were living in "absolute poverty"
216 women died in childbirth for every 100,000 live births	608 women died in childbirth for every 100,000 live births
In 2013, 59 million children of primary school age were out of school	9 million children have never gone to school

In Nigeria 54 percent of people lived relatively below poverty line of 2/3 of per capita households’ expenditure, while 22% lived below the extreme relative poverty line of 1/3 of per capita household expenditure in the year 2004 (National Bureau of Statistics).

Going by available statistics, the world has made real progress by reducing the number of people suffering from hunger by 200 million since the 1990s. Yet there are still 795 million people who do not receive enough food for an active healthy life. For these people too, poverty and hunger must be eradicated. For Nigeria, statistical results have not been as favorable. Small strides have been made, but great leaps are required for the continued existence of the Nigerian nation and the sustenance of the citizenry.

According to NBS, “Nigeria has been a paradox, as the economy was growing from strength to strength, mainly because of oil production - Nigerians were getting poorer. Despite the fact that the Nigerian economy is growing, the proportion of Nigerians living in poverty is increasing every year, although it declined between 1985 and 1992, and between 1996 and 2004”

POVERTY ERADICATION IN NIGERIA

Our institutions directly or indirectly impact economic growth and consequently serve as vehicles for poverty alleviation. Whatever we do, we must ensure that the goal of poverty eradication is shared and achieved. We must use the advantage of ICT, new technologies and the revolution in big data to ensure that institutions work together, by changing the way and speed at which we serve, to ensure the challenges of hunger and poverty are conquered.

Poverty is multi-dimensional. It is a hydra-headed monster that we must not allow to thrive further. Poverty in Nigeria has reached an alarming level and can be blamed on ambiguous government social policies. Governments all over the world play significant roles to ensure the alleviation of poverty.

In the case of Nigeria, the inability of successive governments to streamline and harness the enormous potentials for improved service delivery in all the existing structures of poverty eradication has resulted in persistent poverty. As we go through this presentation in our various

capacities, we should remember that **as a global phenomenon, poverty is threatening the survival of humanity, including Nigeria.**

Government initiatives to fight poverty

1. *National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP)*: this is a 2001 program aiming at reduction of absolute poverty. It was designed to replace the Poverty Alleviation Program . NAPEP goals include training youths in vocational trades, to support internship, to support micro-credit, create employment in the automobile industry, and help VesicoVaginal Fistula (VVF) patients. According to a 2008 analysis, the program has been able to train 130,000 youths and engaged 216,000 people, **but most of the beneficiaries were non-poor.**
2. *Rural Basin Development Authorities (RBDA)* - created in 1976 to harness the country's water resources and optimise Nigeria's agricultural resources for food self-sufficiency.
3. *Agricultural Development Programme (ADP)* – created in 1974, the ADPs were designed in response to a fall in agricultural productivity, and hence a concern to sustain domestic food supplies, as labour had moved out of agriculture into more remunerative activities that were benefitting from the oil boom
4. *Rural Electrification Scheme (RES)* - created in 2006 to Facilitate the provision of steady and reliable power supply at economic rates for residential, commercial, industrial and social activities in the rural and peri-urban areas of the country
5. *National Directorate of Employment (NDE)* - created in 1986 as an employment agency statutorily charged with the responsibility to design and implement programmes to combat mass unemployment.
6. *Directorate of Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI)* - created in the year 1987 to interlia, identify, involve and support viable local community organisations in the effective mobilisation of the rural population for sustained rural developmental activities,

bearing in mind the need for promoting greater community participation and economic self-reliance of the rural communities.

CONSTRAINTS OF POVERTY REDUCTION PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA

According to Akindiya Babatunde 2001, the following are some of the reasons that contribute to the failure of government's poverty eradication programmes in Nigeria.

1. Poor policy formulation, coordination and lack of sustainability strategy. This speaks of an absence of policy and institutional framework, and delivery machinery that would guarantee coordination and effective monitoring.
2. Absence of collaboration and complementation among the three tiers of government which gives room for duplication of functions and breeds unhealthy rivalries among institutions and agencies.
3. Lack of involvement of the traditional institutions and community groups in projects selection and implementation; and
4. Lack of involvement or consultation with the poor in poverty policy formulation and implementation

NCC's STRATEGY FOR POVERTY ALLUVIATION

The Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) recognizes that the importance of the saying; "Information is Power" cannot be over emphasized. This is particularly so in our time where it has become very clear that there is an inextricable correlation between the level of poverty experienced by a people and the level of information available to them. This realization continues to spur-on the NCC in the discharge of its mandate of facilitating the telecommunication industry and making information accessible to all.

A critical success factor for the Commission in this regard is the articulation of clear strategies for implementation of our mandate. Strategic planning in the Commission has become a deliberate management practice that ensures we do not lose sight of the advancement in technology, the hunger for and benefits of information while remaining accountable to all stakeholders. The NCC can safely be said to be one of the few government institutions that has adopted the strategic balanced scorecard methodology as a framework for the development and implementation of strategy. As earlier alluded to, one of the greatest challenges we face as a nation is implementation and monitoring of initiatives designed to combat poverty. Our strategic planning process reasonably guarantees the success of the following initiatives driven by the Commission to combat poverty in Nigeria.

Community Resource Centers (CRC): The CRC project promotes the adoption of ICT at community level for social and economic development. The CRC offerings include, but not limited to conflict and disaster warning and management, improving farmers' access to markets, information centre for community development mobilization, small scale businesses, e-agric, and community health.

E- Health Project: Designed to harness ICTs to significantly improve the delivery of healthcare services in public primary and secondary healthcare facilities across the country. It is expected that this initiative would lead to general improvements in the speed, quality, and quantum of healthcare services delivery in public health institutions throughout Nigeria.

E- Accessibility Project: The project is derived from Article 9 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which specifies in its first paragraph: "To enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to

information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems..."

The project provides ICT tools and Assistive Technologies (ATs) to the blind, the deaf, dumb, crippled, cognitively-impaired, and other categories of people living with disabilities. As disadvantaged members of society, the project is designed to assist in improving the quality of life of people living with disability.

Rural Broadband Initiative (RUBI): RUBI delivers broadband services in the rural/semi-urban underserved and unserved areas for the stimulation of demand for ICT at community levels. It facilitates the adoption of ICT by local people for economic and social development.

Advanced Digital Appreciation Programme (ADAPTI): it is aimed eliciting pervasive application of ICT skills in the academia for enhanced staff output, institutional efficiency and student enculturation to e-based learning for sustainable national growth.

Digital Awareness Programme (DAP): this is a special intervention programme to address the digital information knowledge gap in the country, especially among the *teeming youthful population*.

ICT a platform for institutional collaboration

Knowledge gap is an acknowledged indicator of persistent poverty. According to Wikipedia, the **knowledge gap hypothesis** explains that knowledge, like other forms of wealth, is often differentially distributed throughout a social system. Specifically, the hypothesis predicts that "as the infusion of mass media information into a social system increases, higher socioeconomic status segments tend to acquire this information faster than lower socioeconomic-status

population segments so that the gap in knowledge between the two tends to increase rather than decrease".

Nigeria has been identified as being in possession of the knowledge required to guarantee improved standard of living and reduction in poverty. What is required are policies that encourage greater collaboration, communication and information flow between government at all levels and governmental institutions which would drive the penetration and use of ICTs across economic strata.

Access to the internet is skewed in favour of the more developed nations, a direct correlation has been drawn from this access to computers and the internet (ICT) and poverty alleviation. Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, has said: "The new information and communications technologies are among the driving forces of globalisation. They are bringing people together, and bringing decision makers unprecedented new tools for development. At the same time, however, the gap between information 'haves' and 'have-nots' is widening, and there is a real danger that the world's poor will be excluded from the emerging knowledge-based global economy. (Anan, 2002)".

Martin and McKeown suggests that the application of ICTs is not sufficient to address problems of rural areas without adherence to principles of integrated rural development. Unless there is at least minimal infrastructure development in transport, education, health, and social and cultural facilities, it is unlikely that investments from ICTs alone will enable rural areas to cross the threshold from decline to growth (Martin and McKeown, 1993).

I would like to end this presentation by reinforcing the position of the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD):

“It is misguided bureaucratic centralism to plan for the poor; partnerships for poverty reduction, wherever possible, start with the agency of the poor themselves, with their preferences and potentials. But it is naïve to suppose that the poor can make bricks without straw; technologies, information, schools and skills have to be built in conjunction with outsiders.... This requires putting the poor at the center of the [development] process, as full partners in determining the priorities and the directions of change, emancipating them from the constraints that trap them in poverty and empowering them” (IFAD 2001, 214).

Thank you once again for inviting me.

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