

THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGs) AND THE PROBLEM OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Nigeria is one United Nations member state that is increasingly working on achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which took off at the turn of this century. The MDGs are eight goals and targets to be attained within 2015. Giving the available time, it is obvious that it is a major challenge to Nigeria because of its requirements for actualization in the country. Among the requirements is ensuring effective policy implementation. However, poor policy implementation is believed by some analysts to be the bane of development in Nigeria. The paper therefore, seeks to highlight the need for proper and effective policy implementation while identifying some impediments to be tackled if Nigeria is to ensure that policies, particularly those relating to the MDGs, are effectively and timely implemented. These impediments include, among others: corruption, bad leadership, political instability, slow public service structures, ethnicity etc. The paper posits some sustainable development measures for Nigeria, such as effective use of political will, eschewing social vices (like ethnicity, favouritism, nepotism and mediocrity), continuity of policies between governments, eradication of corruption etc.

Key words: Policy, Implementation, Millennium Development Goals, Nigeria

Introduction

The objectives of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are no doubt laudable. The development goals have been widely embraced by many United Nations member states, including Nigeria. These goals are practical targets with definite time limit spanning from inception till 2015. It is obvious that the pace of many of these nations towards attaining the MDGs is being undermined by a number of factors. And for any effective effort to achieving the MDGs between now and 2015 to be actualized, it implies getting rid of these negative factors or at least minimizing their impact considerably. To an extent, this is the case of Nigeria and many other developing countries that are members of the United Nations. The World Bank (2008), Global Monitoring report, stated unequivocally that "looking to the medium term a key challenge is to spur stronger growth in lagging countries that have not shared in the surge in growth witnessed in much of the developing

world over the past several years. The above statement signifies that some member nations of the U.N. are lagging behind when compared with some others who made significant strides towards achieving the MDGs as at mid-term of the time frame i.e. as at middle of 2007.

The question here is: why is it that nations are not pursuing the MDGs with as much momentum as others, which has led them to their 'backbencher' position as at present? Many factors are assumed to contribute to this status-quo and they include bad leadership, political instability, global economic uncertainty, corruption, lack of proper and effective policy implementation, etc. This is where the hub of the paper lies. The question of Nigeria's problem of poor policy implementation even when the country is noted for beautiful policy formulation and wonderful acronyms such as Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), Standard Organization of Nigeria (SON), just to mention but a few. Some analysts have argued that the bane of development in Nigeria is her inability to implement policies and in some cases outright frustration of some individuals' proposals on better ways to move the nation forward. This is the argument of this paper, that poor policy implementation or failed implementation of government policies stands in the way of bringing the MDGs to fruition and for providing socio-economic development in Nigeria.

The paper starts with identifying the MDGs, defining the concept of policy implementation, overviews the problems of policy implementation in Nigeria and how it reflects itself in the failed developmental Plans of governments in Nigeria. It identifies factors such as general lack of political will of the leaders, corruption, political instability, ethnicity, sluggish public service structures, etc as clog to the wheel of effective policy implementation in Nigeria.

The Millennium Declaration of 2000

The United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and targets come from the Millennium Declaration, signed by 189 countries, including 147 Heads of State and Government, in September 2000 (<http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm>), and from further agreement by member states at the 2005 World Summit (Resolution adopted by the General Assembly ó (A/RES/60/1). The goals and targets are interrelated and should be seen as a whole. They represent a partnership between the developed countries and developing countries in an effort to create an enabling environment at the national and global levels alike that can be effective for development and the eradication of poverty. It is believed that the elimination of poverty is central to attaining the other Millennium Development Goals. This is based on the premise that poverty and hunger expose people to illiteracy, disease, conflicts, child and maternal mortality, environmental degradation through deforestation and pipeline vandalization (which causes oil spillage and a host of other problems) etc.

The MDGs are no doubt concrete and laudable goals and targets that nations in the quest for sustainable development must embrace and put in place requirements for its actualization, if not by 2015, at least by 2020. This date coincides with Nigeria's economic development target known as Vision 20:2020. With only three years to go, attaining the MDGs will require all hands to be on deck, particularly the government, who must ensure

among other strategies that policies are followed and implemented to the logical and realistic end. The MDGs are encapsulated below for clear identification.

Goals and Targets from the Millennium Declaration, 2000

Goal 1 Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger

Target 1.A Halve between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day.

Target 1.B Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all including women and young people.

Target 1.C Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.

Goal 2 Achieve Universal Primary Education

Target 2.A Ensure that by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

Goal 3 Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women

Target 3.A Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education. Preferably by 2005, and at all levels of education no later than 2015.

Goal 4 Reduce Child Mortality

Target 4.A Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015. the under-five mortality rate.

Goal 5 Improve Maternal Health

Target 5.A Reduce by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio

Target 5.B Achieve by 2015 universal access to reproductive health, halve by 2015 the spread of HIV/AIDS

Goal 6 Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Disease

Target 6.A Achieve by 2015 universal access to treatment for HIV/AIDS

Target 6.B Half by 2015 and begin to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.

Target 6.C Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs and reverse the loss of environmental resources.

Goal 7 Ensure Environmental Sustainability

Target 7.A Reduce biodiversity loss, achieving by 2010 a significant reduction in the rate of loss.

Target 7.B Halve by 2015 the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation.

Target 7.C Have achieved a significant improvement by 2020 in the lives of at least 100 million slum dweller

Goal 8 Develop a Global Partnership for Development

Target 8.A Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, nondiscriminatory trading and financial system (including a commitment to good governance development and poverty reduction, nationally and internationally).

Target 8.B Address the special needs of the least-developed countries (including tariff- and quota-free access for exports of the least-developed countries; enhanced debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries and cancellation of official bilateral debt; and more generous official development assistance for countries committed to reducing poverty).

Target 8.C Address the special needs of landlocked Countries and Small Island developing states (through the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and the outcome of the 22nd special session of the General Assembly).

Target 8.D Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries through national and international measures to make debt sustainable in the long term.

Target 8.E In Cooperation With pharmaceuticals companies, provide access to affordable, essential drugs in developing countries.

Target 8.F In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communication.

Source: United Nations 2008: Report of the Secretary-General on the indicators for monitoring the Millennium Development Goals. E/CN. 3/2008/29. New York.

Policy Implementation Conceptualized

In Nigeria, we are used to hearing on news or reading from papers about policy reforms, policy formulation, public policy, capital policy, and policy implementation etc. They all relate to policy but policy implementation stands out because it simply refers to the

outcome and successful execution of these policies. Moreover, policy implementation can be conceptualized literarily by considering the definitions below. Funk and Wagnalls Standard Desk Dictionary (1993), defines policy as "any plan of action by government or business administration: a nation's foreign policy, prudence, wisdom, or shrewdness, as in conduct or the management of one's affairs; also any act or plan based on such principles". The same dictionary defines "implement" as "any means or agent for the accomplishment of a purpose, to provide for the accomplishment or carrying into effect of, to accomplish; fulfill". Webster's New Ideal Dictionary (1984), defines policy as "prudence or wisdom in the management of affairs: sagacity, a course of action selected in light of given conditions to guide and determine decisions". The same dictionary defines "implement" as "to carry out; fulfill; especially to give practical effect to by concrete measures".

Any attempt to bring the definitions of the words "policy" and "implementation" together can bring us to the definition of policy implementation as the process of executing, carrying out, bringing to effect or accomplishing any plan of action by government or business organizations etc. It can also refer to process of giving practical effect to the accomplishment of a purpose or in the management of affairs by the application of concrete measures. The above definition of policy implementation captures the concept's essence as a factor that can affect the development of any nation or the attainment of the MDGs. Policies such as foreign policy, social policy, and economic policy etc are made in order to actualize certain goals or targets of governments and organizations. They are plan of action on how to achieve or put to practical effect the wisdom of government on different endeavours of a nation or corporate body. Policies can be seen as strategies to achieving goals and so the implementation i.e. its fulfillment, amounts to realization in practical terms of set goals.

This is why effective policy implementation can be very instrumental for achieving the MDGs in Nigeria. When policies relating to the eradication of poverty, education, conflicts, pandemic diseases such as malaria, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis etc are neglected, subverted and not properly implemented, the result is that in practical terms, these problems remain and get worse as days go by. These problems are the issues that goals and targets of the Millennium Declaration are meant to confront. This is why Nigeria's efforts towards achieving the MDGs must be considered within the context of effective policy implementation among other factors required for its accomplishment. Effective policy implementation should therefore drive all other factors necessary for the realization of the MDGs in the country.

The Problem of Policy Implementation in Nigeria

Nigeria is one country that many of her citizens and foreigners watching her development process will agree is not in drought of policies. Nigeria has a number of policies that are meaningful, laudable and capable of bringing about sustainable development to the country. Since independence in 1960, many policies have been made with some of them enshrined in the nation's constitution, thereby giving them the much needed legal backing. Also, policy formulation and the establishment of agencies and parastatals for their implementation have been on the increase over the years.

In Nigeria, policies are quickly made by every successive government, often without any thought of continuity of previous ones. This leads to non-execution or neglect of many laudable policies that could have ensured the manifestation of concrete development around the country. It takes little or nothing for policies to be made in Nigeria but to implement

policies is a whole different issue undermined by some factors that are man-made and perpetuated by Nigerians. These factors frustrate policy implementation in Nigeria and consequently affect the development of the country negatively. The question here is what are these negative factors that inhibit effective policy implementation in Nigeria? It is necessary to identify these factors because their elimination will go a long way to help Nigeria attain huge developmental strides including achieving the MDGs which themselves are core developmental goals necessary for the progress of any society or nation, especially in this millennium of globalized economy and governance.

Eneanya (2010), states that there are two concepts in policy analysis – such concepts as policy statements and policy outputs, especially in this clime where we often celebrate the statements of our governments. But the truth is that there is always a world of difference between intentions and actual outcomes. This statement points to the fact that there is a gap between policy statements and policy implementation in Nigeria. It takes a lot to transform policy statements into policy outputs and subsequent governments in Nigeria have failed to effectively move to the ‘output’ level due to lack of political will of the leadership, corruption, ethnicity, political instability, slow public service structures etc. The argument here is that the inability or partial ability to translate policy statements into policy outputs is simply a failure in policy implementation – and this is one of the major reasons for sluggish development in most developing nations, including Nigeria.

The recent call for implementation of Beijing Declaration by Lagos women clearly shows the level of non-implementation of policies in Nigeria. Adebayo (2010), observes that ‘governments at all levels in the Federation have failed to implement the 15-year old document called the Beijing Declaration on women rights’. Imagine this happening in a country that is pursuing the MDGs. This action directly undermines Nigeria’s efforts towards attaining the third goal of the MDGs which aims at promoting gender equality and empowering women. The 1995 Declaration is aimed at ensuring that every country put in place legislation and policies that preserve the rights of women and children. Obi (2010), also highlights Nigeria’s policy implementation problem in the following words, ‘the recent declaration by the federal government to create a database of unemployed persons is a good idea. The trouble, however, is that Nigerians have heard it several times before, and it has never seemed to be able to transform itself into significant reduction in unemployment and underemployment’. This contradicts Nigerian’s efforts towards achieving the goal number one of the MDGs which aims at the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger.

Any act or policy by a nation that does not help to reduce unemployment rate is equally not helping in poverty reduction, let alone poverty eradication. There can be no doubt that the establishment of a comprehensive database of the unemployed is one of the first concrete steps towards tackling the monster of joblessness and its associated problems such as youth restiveness, crime, violence, terrorism, poverty etc. As experience in other parts of the world such as United States of America, Germany, Britain, Canada and Japan has shown, such databases offer government an invaluable overview of the precise dimensions of unemployment: age ranges, qualifications, location etc, which help to make other important demographics become apparent (Macleans, 2010).

A journey to Singapore may be instructive at this juncture. Not too long ago, Singapore was rated by the Transparency International as the most corrupt country in the world. At that time, poverty and underdevelopment was evident in the country due to corruption. However, the assumption of office as President by Lee kwan Yaw brought a

change. He introduced the rule of law as the official watchword of his administration. Singapore within ten years came out of doldrums to emerge as one of the fastest growing and solid economies of the world. The success story of Singapore came through because a visionary leader came with the policy of rule of law which the government implemented strictly in all its affairs. If Singapore that is not richly populated like Nigeria and has little natural resources, and not as large as Nigeria, could achieve this in a matter of a decade, then Nigeria, giving her endowments, can become a 'first world' country within a space of five years if we all say no to corruption and our leaders ensure adherence to rule of law and prompt policy implementation at all levels of governance. This is imperative if the MDGs are to be met on time.

Some failed policies (Development Plans) in Nigeria

The failure of policy implementation is vivid when one considers some of the development plans of past governments in Nigeria. Past experiences at policy making in Nigeria were incorporated in a series of development plans. Although Nigeria made initial efforts at development planning during the colonial era in 1946 and between 1955 and 1960, the 1962 - 1968 plan is regarded as its first comprehensive plan for purposes of policy formulation. Subsequent Development Plans were 5-yearly plans for the periods 1970-74, 1975-79 and 1980-84 (Onyi, 1985). Most of these development plans which were expected to roll over the years were interrupted, manipulated or abandoned leading to non implementation or partial implementation. This contributed to the poor state of infrastructural development in Nigeria today.

With the inception of democratic rule in May, 1999, a number of policy documents such as National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) and the State equivalent, State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (SEEDS), and the Seven Point Agenda etc, were initiated. Okongwo (2009), states that 'while NEEDS is struggling to position itself towards attaining certain goals through supporting small and medium scale enterprises across the country, some of its state counterparts (SEEDS) are merely existing on paper'. Between 2009 and now, the Nigerian government's development agenda are basically encapsulated in the Vision 20:2020 (Usman, 2010). This document articulates policies and programmes for the development of the Nigerian economy with the hopeful view that Nigeria emerges as one of the twenty biggest world economies by 2020.

In a calculated appraisal of these documents, one will notice duplication of policies, programmes, and strategies resulting in limited success in effective implementation. Institutions such as Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), Nigerian Sports Commission (NSC) and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) etc, were established to pursue certain government policies that will help to provide the enabling environment for speedy socio-economic development in Nigeria. However, many Nigerians believe that these commissions are not carrying out their functions appreciably and therefore contributing to policy failure because the purpose for which they were established are not being met. Njoku (2011), stresses that 'several institutions have been created to foster policy implementation but with limited achievements in terms of concrete results. These institutions have been working at across purposes with considerable duplication of efforts and attendant waste of resource'.

Some Impediments to Effective Policy Implementation in Nigeria: The MDGs in Focus

- **Corruption/Criminality** In Nigeria, corruption has been so institutionalized that many Nigerians have come to see corruption as a way of life (Iheriohanma, 2009). This is with the effect that corruption has grown deep into the fabric of our nation's socio-economic and political strata. The issue of policy implementation is not left out as corruption affects it negatively. Many Nigerians do things under the influence of greed and selfishness and not for the collective interest of all Nigerians. Njoku (2011), opines that "Nigerians generally lack the necessary sense of patriotism and discipline required for effective and successful policy implementation". The MDGs cannot be actualized under this condition because it requires selfless commitment by individuals, groups and institutions (the government and private sector) etc, to be realized.
- **Bad Leadership/Poor Governance** Achebe (2001), states that "the trouble with Nigerian is simply and squarely a failure of leadership". The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility of the challenge of personal example which are the hallmark of true leadership. Any good government will ensure among other things, the implementation of its policies in order to succeed. Bad leadership in Nigeria, affects policy implementation negatively because of the lack of political will to implement policies according to plan for reasons that may be more political than social or economic. This in turn affects Nigeria's pursuit of the MDGs because its actualization requires firm commitment to the implementation of certain policies by people in government.
- **Political Instability** Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has been under many governments, from Military to Civilian and this has not helped matters in the realm of policy implementation. The frequent change of government mitigates policy implementation because of apathy and distrust between governments. It is important to state here that the Nigerian military that was in power for more years than the civilians is not trained for governance and does not apply or conform to rule of law. They believe in the use of decrees, force and aggression and many of their policies were undemocratic. For the MDGs to be actualized in Nigeria, stable socio-political atmosphere must be sustained up to 2015 and afterwards, because it is in that condition that policies can be effectively implemented.
- **Ethnicity/Nepotism** Nigeria is a country with many citizens that are ethnocentric in perception and behaviour. Nigeria is a creation of British government for its own selfish economic interest and the seed of ethnicity was planted as the colonial masters sought after this interest. The problem of tribalism and ethnic distrust has been a source of obstacle to effective implementation of policies in Nigeria. Public office holders block the implementation of policies they envisage as not beneficial to their people or part of the country. By so doing interfere with the purposes for which these policies were made in the first place. Projects are abandoned or relocated to places that are not viable for their purpose and sustenance. The MDGs are goals that should be pursued without interruptions or manipulations of projects aimed at their actualization.

- **Slow Public Service Structure** There are public service structures which unduly delay or completely stagnate policy implementation in Nigeria. Idachaba (1980), notes that "problems of management for results within a civil service framework are simply monumental". For instance, for many years, the nation's annual budget comes out late, sometimes at the end of the first quarter of the year. This trend of late budgeting has been noted by some Economists as having negative influence on policy implementation. They argue that when budget is delayed, policy implementation is equally delayed. Delay in policy implementation in Nigeria today will no doubt mean delay in the actualization of the MDGs in Nigeria which have the deadline of 2015.
- **Lack of Continuity of Policies** There seem to be conscious and deliberate discontinuity of policies from one government to another in Nigeria and this is part of the reason for our poor state of development. Each successive government wants to be identified with its own policies and so quickly abandons the laudable policies of the predecessors. The instability in policies disrupts the complete implementation of existing policies in the country. The sustenance of government policies will help ensure that government's Development Plans are executed and this will lead to realizing strong social and economic returns for Nigeria. Policies, particularly those that are related to MDGs must enjoy continuity even when there is change in government. This is apt and imperative for the MDGs to be attained in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Nigeria cannot achieve the MDGs whether on time or later if it continues to have problems with policy implementation which to some extent is contributing to underdevelopment in Nigeria. Since policy implementation is mainly in the domain of the leaders, they owe themselves and the entire citizenry of the country immediate change of political attitude by continually pursuing development policies that will materialize in the much pronounced democracy dividends that up till now seem elusive. The MDGs are democratic goals that the route to attainment is embedded in the implementation of people-oriented policies that are allowed to manifest in concrete and physical terms. Nigeria and her quest for the actualization of the MDGs and socio-economic development take root from the application of sustainable development measures outlined below.

Sustainable Development Measures for Attaining MDGs in Nigeria

Nigeria should quickly rise above the challenges of policy implementation that are evident today in the country. As a democratic country pursuing the MDGs with a time frame in mind, Nigeria can no longer continue to be found in the realm of failed or poor policy regime. This is a matter that requires immediate action, particularly on the path of our leaders. Nigerian leaders should ensure that the nation does not continue to suffer non-implementation of policies which is what some policy analysts believe has been contributing to our poor development status. They should begin to acquire the guts and political will to ensure that government policies, which are Development Plans, are effectively discharged to the intended meaningful and laudable socio-economic ends. They should rise above tribalism, favouritism nepotism and mediocrity etc if policies must survive and yield their

purposes. Policies should not be discontinued just because there is change of government, reshuffle of portfolio or redeployment in ministries and agencies of government etc. The problem of corruption which is on top of the entire crisis in Nigeria is also fueling policy failure in the country. Nigerians must eschew corruption in all its ramifications. Nigeria must develop the necessary sense of patriotism and commitment for her policies to translate to significant developmental strides.

Government should apply these measures that allow for swift and better implementation of policies. The MDGs are goals that are being pursued by the government of the nations that were signatory to the United Nations Millennium Declaration in 2000 with the expected support of their civil societies. And so the bulk of the work lies on government's shoulders. If Nigeria actually desires MDGs success on time, then it must activate government's outfits with a reform template that will help bring about proper policy implementation.

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