

A Repitition of History: The Role of SDGs in Nigeria

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Abstract

Any nation that folds its arms and waits for growth or development from outside shall naturally be left in the scheme of things. It is a serious miscalculation on the part of Africa to sit down and wait for ideas, politics and programmes from outside. It has been done in Africa right from the time of its major contact with the outside world. Since then, such policies and principles have continued to manifest themselves in different forms, shapes, and names all gearing towards same goal with serious imbalance. Consequent upon that, the peruses into some of these programmes coming from outside Africa, which, apparently, along the way have failed. Such failed programmes initiated by International Bodies shall serve as a gauge in measuring the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Africa. The paper shall assess the success if there is any failure and or other of SDGs and provide further, some recommendations and suggestions for improvement.

Introduction

In the bid to eradicate poverty and improve the lives of the world's poorest people, leaders of about 189 countries signed the historic millennium declaration at the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000, which gave birth to the creation of the millennium Development Goal (MDG). At the time, eight goals that range from providing universal primary education to avoiding child and maternal mortality were set with a target achievement date of 2015.¹ Following the fading away of year 2015, the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), was adopted by all member states of United Nations in September 2015, which provides a visionary

roadmap for all countries and stakeholders to strive for a world of sustainable prosperity, social inclusion and equality, while at the same time, preserving the whole planet and leaving no one behind.²

However, the position and benefits of African countries from this programme still remain questionable as African nations are still wallowing in abject poverty even after many of such programmes had been introduced in the past years; for instance, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) are two of the most powerful international financial institutions in the world.³ They are the major sources of lending to African countries, and use the loans they provide as a leverage to prescribe policies and dictate major changes in the economies of African countries. This paper therefore, examines the origin of the SDG, its successes and failures, as well as possible means for improvement.

The Origin of Millennium Development Goals (MDGS) Sustainable Development Goals

In attempt to improve the world standard of living and make the world a better and safer place, world leaders adopted the United Nations Millennium Declaration in 2000, which committed the nations of the world to a new global partnership, aimed at reducing poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation, and discrimination against women and other time-bound targets, with a stated deadline of 2015. The MDGs are inter-dependent; all the MDGs influence health, and health influences all the MDGs.⁴ For example, better health enables children to learn and adults to earn. Gender equality is essential to the achievement of better health. Reducing poverty, hunger and environmental degradation positively influences, but also depends on, better health.

As a result of the unfinished works of the MDGs at the time of its deadline in 2015, a new set of development goals was agreed by 193 countries in a special summit at the United Nations (UN). These are called Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that aim to end poverty, achieve gender equality and ensure food security in every corner of the globe by 2030.⁵ These goals and targets (17 Goals and 169 targets) have been debated by civil society and UN member states for a considerable amount of time before finalizing them. Crucially, the SDGs are bold commitment to achieve what the MDGs started, and tackle

some of the more pressing challenges facing the world today. It is a universal agenda, applying to all countries, even the richest have yet to fully ensure women's rights, conquer inequality or safeguard the environment. Also, all the 17 goals interconnect, meaning success in one affects success for others²

For example, dealing with the threat of climate impacts, how we manage our fragile natural resources, achieving gender equality or better health helps eradicate poverty and fostering peace and inclusive societies will reduce inequalities and help economies prosper.⁶

More so, the SDGs coincided with another historic agreement reached in 2015 at the COP21 Paris Climate Conference (COP stands for Conference of the Parties, referring to the countries that have signed up to the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change). The COP in Paris is the 21st such conference. Together with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, signed in Japan in March 2015, these agreements provide a set of common standards and achievable targets to reduce carbon emissions, manage the risks of climate change and natural disasters, and to build back better after a crisis. Furthermore, the SDGs are unique in that they cover issues that affect the world at large. They reaffirm international commitment to end poverty permanently everywhere, ensuring that no one is left behind. More importantly, they involve the whole world to build a more sustainable, safer, more prosperous planet for all humanity³⁷

The Success of Sustainable Development Goals

Nigeria, like most other countries of the world, signed the treaty of the MDGs which later became SDGs and promised to work towards the realization of its goals. To achieve this, a number of steps were taken, including the release of central government funds. Offices were created and individuals appointed to key positions to work towards the MDG target.

In 2015, the SDGs came on board and its 17 goals are integrated; that is, they recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and the development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. Since the adoption of the SDGs, Nigeria has continued to demonstrate its commitment through leadership and ownership of the implementation process. Nigeria is also contributing to the United Nations Development Programs (UNDP), through

provision of technical support to the Office of the Senior Special Advisor to the President on SDGs and in an effort to ensure that planning and budgeting for development activities in the country are done within the framework of the SDGs⁴⁸. Obinna

O. Oleribe and Simon D. Taylor-Robinson, *Before Sustainable Development Goals (SDG): why Nigeria failed to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)*,

Generally, according to the United Nations, the number of people living in extreme poverty declined worldwide by more than half, falling 1.9 billion in 1990 to 836 million in 2015; primary school enrolment rate has increased and the number of out of school children of primary school age worldwide has fallen by almost half, to an estimated 57 million in 2015, from 100 million in 2000 across the world.⁹ There has been significant improvement in gender equality with empowerment of women as more girls are in school, more women are in paid employment and many more women are now government around the world. Global under-five year mortality rate has declined by more than half, dropping from 90 to 43 deaths per 1,000 live birth between 1990 and 2015.¹⁰

In addition, maternal mortality ratio has declined by 45 percent worldwide since 1990 with an improvement in contraceptive prevalence; and new malaria and HIV cases have declined, with new HIV infections falling by approximately 40 percent between 2000 and 2013, from an estimated 3.5 million cases to 2.1 million.¹¹

Also, Tuberculosis (TB) related deaths in people with HIV has fallen by 36% since 2004 and over 6.2 million deaths have been averted between 2000 and 2015.¹² The global malaria incidence rate has fallen by an estimated 37% and the mortality rates by 58%. Between 2000 and 2013, TB prevention, diagnosis and treatment intervention saved an estimated 37 million lives. The TB mortality rate fell by 45% and the prevalence rate by 41% between 1990 and 2013⁵¹³

The Challenges of Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria

Considering the population of Nigeria as the most populous black nation in the world, a lot of factors had militated to the achievement of the MDGs (SDGs), among which are: the assumptions on which the

MDGs were predicated were fundamentally wrong. It was believed that the poor health indices in Nigeria were as a result of poverty and lack of resources. Because of this, central funds were released and injected into the 'healthcare system' to overcome these inequalities. It was also assumed that individuals appointed to manage the funds had the requisite qualifications, the interest of the nation and the programme at heart, as well as the capacity to manage funds successfully towards the achievement of the MDS targets.¹⁴ It was also assumed that the systems were in place to support the activities towards the achievement of the MDGs, but this was not the case. The outcomes were far from what was expected.

More so, sequential healthcare worker's industrial actions in Nigeria: the rate of subsequent strikes among different healthcare workers in Nigeria is a big challenge to the realization of SDGs objective towards healthcare. These paralyzed the healthcare industry, resulting in avoidable mortality and morbidities, as well as catastrophic health expenditure and resultant outgoing medical tourism. Children and pregnant women were the worst victims of the healthcare worker industrial actions. Without access to affordable healthcare services, deaths were inevitable. Claiming to have reduced mortality and morbidity in Nigeria, therefore, needs detailed and verifiable epidemiological data to the country.¹⁵

Boko Haram insurgency, armed banditry, cattle rustling, kidnapping, communal and herdsmen/farmers clashes, among others in the north, and kidnapping, oil pipeline vandalization, cultism in the south are other challenges of the SDGs: the upscale of social discord, killings and bombings in the northern part of Nigeria; and kidnapping in southern Nigeria reversed the gains of so many years of investments in healthcare in Nigeria, especially in affected communities. Today, there are several hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons who are current victims of communicable diseases, malnutrition and several other social problems. This figure was estimated to be 1,538,983 as of April 2015 by the internally-displaced monitoring centre⁶¹⁶ The figure, no doubt has tremendously increased since then. As these people live on charity, they have limited access to healthcare services, school enrolment and healthy shelter, their health and emotional conditions are far from ideal. These people are also denied access to quality care, even when they could afford it. Sexual exploitation and harassment has led to several

unwanted pregnancies and maternal deaths. Fear of attacks has led to mass exodus of healthcare workers, closure of healthcare facilities and deserted communities, resulting in difficulties in accessing healthcare during emergencies, outbreak of communicable diseases, and many avoidable deaths and complications.¹⁷

Furthermore, there is absence of true and validated baseline data, as big data could only be use if they are collected intelligently and interpreted meaningfully. If it is not known how many people are impoverished or which group is the most vulnerable to economic adversity, it is not possible to act effectively against poverty. Furthermore, it would not be possible to know how much progress í made over time and, more importantly, which policies worked. This is not the most obvious challenge of the sustainable development goals, yet a surprisingly large one. Proof for this is the statement of the Director of the World Bank's Innovation Labs, Aleem Walji, who wrote in 2015, that out of the 155 countries that the World Bank observed and monitored, half of the countries lacked recent poverty estimates⁷¹⁸

The lack of reliable poverty data makes it impossible to design and implement appropriate policies. Nigeria, among other African countries severely deprived of timely data, represents the dramatic case, since this country was pronounced as the largest economy of the continent only by calculating its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) with inadequate information, revealing that decades of policy-making was based on outdated data.¹⁹ MDGs cannot succeed in Nigeria when there are no real baseline data with which to compare progress.

Finally, the absence of formative, midcourse and proper end-line evaluation: while a lot of resources were invested into the management of MDGs, little was done in terms of progress (formative), midcourse and end-line (summative) evaluations to effectively and scientifically look at the progress ò the roll-out of the MDGs program. If these had been done, it would have given the managers early warning signs that the delivery of the MDG program was off-course, and thus, would midcourse corrections. These evaluations, audits and consequent corrections were never carried out. Rather, the program depended on oral reports, informal ad-hoc data from program managers designed to make the National President and the world happy, as well as positive newspaper reports of opening of new healthcare centres, donation of medical equipment and increased employment of healthcare workers.²⁰

Way Forward to the Success of Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria

The legacy, operation and challenges encountered by the MDGs in Nigeria can serve as a great lesson and foundation to build upon by the SDGs in order to achieve positive results in its goals. For the SDGs to achieve this maximum success by year 2030, many factors must be put into consideration, among which are: firstly, there must be appropriate training and capacity building programs to be developed and delivered to staff to enhance their productivity and efficiency in implementing SDGs programmes and projects. The Office of the Head of Service of the Federal Government and international aid agencies will need to be engaged to support the design and funding of such capacity building programmes.⁸²¹ Training tools and knowledge of management materials also need to be produced with which trained staff can use to internally train other staff in turn. Of particular importance for achieving the SDGs will be providing a deep understanding among staff of the new implementation standards embedded in the SDGs, such as concepts of social inclusions, justice, equity and sustainability.

Secondly, there must be provision of equipments and conducive working environments: an inadequacy of the MDGs programming has been the lack of appropriate equipment (computer hardware and software) and tools for effective working of staff involved in delivering the MDGs. These will have to be provided for under the SDGs programme period.²²

Thirdly, provision of innovative funding of some technical posts: given the interests of particular donors in specific sectors, negotiations need to be conducted with donors to fund some specialized and technical posts, through secondments for substantial periods of time (at least 12-24 months). This will allow the capacity of internal staff to be built gradually without the quality of delivery against targets being compromised. Other aspects of human resource management that need to be strengthened include the review of the terms and conditions of employment of staff to see how public service can be made attractive for specialist professionals; and carrying a value reorientation exercise to improve staff attitude towards work⁹²³

In addition, there must be a permanent Intergovernmental Collaboration. Ensuring coordination towards the SDGs will depend more than ever on the joint actions of federal and state governments.

To ensure continuity in this relationship, there must be a permanent against the SDGs. To achieve this, state-level Project Support Units should be institutionalized as the coordinating offices for the SDGs within state planning organizations, as reaffirmed by the Strategic Options for the post-2015 Conditional Grants Scheme (CGS) report.²⁴

Lastly, the Local Governments should be repositioned as the SDGs tier of government: Local Government is pivotal to the achievement of the SDGs because it is the only tier of Government that can feasibly understand, monitor and react to the millions of activities that will collectively add up to the SDGs. Local Governments needs to be re-energized and repositioned solely around the SDGs. All of their activities contribute directly to the SDGs. Thus, the Office of the Chairman of the Local Government should be provided with the mandate and responsibility for pursuing and coordinating progress towards the SDGs within their LGA. Not only will this make available the full local resources and knowledge of the LGA for SDGs implementation, it will also place a new layer of accountability on the actions of the Local Governments, catalyzing improvements in performance.²⁵

Conclusion

Like many other countries of the world, Nigeria also endorsed the United Nations Millennium Declaration in New York in September 2000, which led to the adoption of the eight time-bound Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with several targets and indicators to be achieved by 2015. While the Millennium Development Goals focused attention on selected social and human development priorities, the world today witnesses emerging new challenges, aggravated by multiple financial, economic, food and energy crises, which have threatened the ability of all countries to achieve sustainable development. However, at the end of the MDGs in 2015, where is Nigeria in all this as a nation? It could be debated that at the end of the MDGs in 2015, Nigeria, like most sub-Saharan African nations, has failed to meet any of the targets due to a multiplicity of health system-related, political and systematic challenges, as well as corruption and bad leadership.

Nevertheless, the SDGs are built on the foundations of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which seek to complete the unfinished business of the MDGs, as well as respond to new challenges. The objective was to produce a set of universal goals that meet the

urgent environmental, political and economic challenges facing the Nigeria and the world at large. For Nigeria to properly key into these set of goals, proper and measurable process (formative) evaluations are critical at key intervals and should be built into the implementation plans. This will help keep the implementation of the SDGs program on course, and when deviations occur, make corrections early enough to achieve the goals as at 2030. Systems should be developed and put in place in all segments of the health system – including fund management systems.

Finally, individuals should be trained and retrained to ensure proper reorientation with a new integrated care mentality. These trainings should also be aimed at building transparency into the system, developing skilled data managers and excellent evaluators who will conduct both the process and summative evaluations. Positive change is a choice, and not a change occurrence. Change results from choices made, not a product of what is happening. It is triggered by purpose, passion, focus, sacrifices, and discipline. Nigeria must take positive changes to achieve the SDGs come 2030.

Footnotes

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