

The Millennium Development Goals And The Church In Africa: The Nigerian Experience

Obodoegbulam Agi-Otto

Abstract

To institute a just and egalitarian society is one basic challenge that stare humanity in the face. The millennium development goals (MDGs) as initiated by the united nation is a good framework for addressing most challenging problems in the world. Unfortunately, the gap between policy formulation and implementation still remain a threatening obstacle. This paper appreciates the (MDGs) framework as a sure way for addressing this global disgrace. It identifies the parameter for social development. These include provision of electricity, portable drinking water, primary health facilities, basic education, decent accommodation. And gender equality. The paper explores the role of the church in the realization of the MDGs given her track record as a catalyst for social development in Europe and parts of Africa. The paper adopts a Multi-dimensional and comparative approach it opines that if such effort is replicated in Nigeria, 2015 will not only bring Nigeria closer to paradise but demonstrate in practical terms what it looks like.

Introduction

The zest to make the world a better place has been one of the preoccupations of the United Nations. For its different conventions, articles, and resolutions, the world body made a serious effort to fight disease, hunger, poverty, illiteracy and lack of shelter. Well aware that a strong financial base is a sine-qua-none for sustainable development, some international financial agencies were put in place by The United Nations. For instance, the World Bank (1946), the international, monetary fund (1945): The African Development Bank(1964), as well as the London and Paris Club of creditors help to advise, supervise and provide fund to the developing and other poor countries of the world. (Wikipedia, 2013)

In-spite of the above, the world is still polarized into two: the rich and the poor nations. Put in another way, we have the developed and the developing countries or the first world and the third world countries. We also have other regional bodies such as ECOWAS, the European Union, SADEC and OAS to either pursue or protect regional interest or integration. We also have the group of developed nation known as the G8 and a group of developing nations going by the name D12.

Without over stating the obvious, poverty, disease and hunger are global phenomena. According to a popular saying, the poor is awake because he is hungry, the rich man cannot sleep because the poor man is awake. As the gap between the rich and the poor continues to widen, disease, poverty illiteracy and hunger will continue to stare humanity in the face.

According to the United Nations General Assembly, the millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is one sure way of combating some of the world's most challenging programmes. These are outlined as follows:

(i) Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger (ii) Achieving universal primary education (iii) promoting gender equality and empowering women (iv) reducing child mortality rate (v) Improving maternal health (vi) combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other disease. (vii) ensuring environmental sustainability and (viii) developing global partnership for development. (Wikipedia 2013). As a matter of fact, a target date of 2015 was set for the realization of these goals.

From time immemorial, the church has been a partner in human development. Iwe (1980) submits that "In view of its human character, Christianity has in the course of human history, and in various nations demonstrated itself as the custodian and promoter of human values". The intellectual and ethical foundation of Europe, the University of Bologna, Paris, Oxford and Cambridge stand to testify". In Nigeria, the Church at its inception, built schools and hospitals. It encouraged reading and writing and the training of lay preacher and auxiliary teachers who served as instructors in the infant schools, For instance the United native African church school at Oboburu (1958), CMS St. Michael school Omoku (1909), Santa maria high school Omoku (1962) By Roman Catholic among others. The paper adopts the multi-dimensional and comparative approach, and concerns itself with the role of the church in Nigeria in realizing the MDGs .

Theoretical Framework

Development, whether at the micro or macro level, hinges on certain theoretical assumptions. As a visible tangible phenomenon, its effect inevitably impacts on the society. For the purpose of this research, three theoretical perspectives shall be analysed. These include: modernization, structuralism and dependency theories.

Modernization theory analyses the process of modernization in any society. The theory looks at the various aspects of a country's relationship that are beneficial and which ones constitute obstacle to economic development. The perception is that development assistance targeted or channeled towards these specific areas can result in the modernization of transformation of either the traditional or backward societies. Marquis De Condorcet (2013) posits that "technological advancements and economic changes can lead to a change in moral and cultural values of a society". Similarly, the principle of modernization submits that people can develop and change their society themselves, through the concept of "progress".

The linear stages of growth model, assumes that economic growth can only be achieved by industrialization. On the other hand, this could only be impeded by the primary factors namely local institutions and social attitude, especially if they are influenced by the savings and investment rates in the economy. According to the linear stages of growth model, the practice of injecting capital in addition to regular financial interventions by the public will stimulate the process of industrialization and economic development of a developing nation. In corroboration, Rosenstein Rodan, Nurkse and Mandelbaum (2013) argue that “A big push model in infrastructure investment and planning was necessary for the stimulation of industrialization and that the private sector would not be able to provide the resources for this on its own”.

Structuralism: This development theory, focuses on structural aspect which impedes the economic growth of developing country. This theory examines those factors which helps a developing economy to transform from mainly a subsistence agriculture to modern urbanize manufacturing and service economy. The main trust of this theory is a major government intervention in the economy to fuel the industrial sector, known as “Impact substitution industrialization”. This structural transformation of developing countries aims at creating an economy supported by a regime of self sustaining growth. This will help to end an over dependence of the developing countries on the export of primary goods. Agricultural and mining products and aspire to explore inward oriented development. This will in effect, discourage the over reliance on the developed economies. Structuralists argue that the only way third world countries can develop is through actions of the state. Third world countries have to push industrialization and have to reduce their dependency on trade with the first worlds, and trade among themselves.

Dependency Theory: Dependency thinking starts from the notion that resources flows from the peripheries of poor and under developed states to a core of wealthy countries, which leads to accumulation of wealth in the rich states to the detriment of the poor states. In sharp contrast with the modernization theory, dependency theory holds that not all states or societies will progress through similar stages of development. According to dependency theory, primitive states have peculiar features, structures and institutions of their own and are the weaker with regard to the world’s market.

In another respect, dependency theory states that poor nations provide natural resources and cheap labour for the developed countries, without which the developed countries could not have the standards of living which they enjoy. Sadly enough, the developed countries will like to maintain this status quo. And try to counter attempts by developing nations to reduce the influence of developed nations. It concludes that the economies of developing countries will ever remain vulnerable unless they reduce their connectedness to the world market.

Fundamental Issues in Development: The eight points agenda in initiated by the United Nations as Millennium Development Goals, sets a minimum development target for all nations of the world body. But what is development. According to

Rodney (2009) "Development in human society is a many sided processes. He goes on to say that at the level of the individual, it implies increased skills and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self discipline responsibility and material well being". At the level of social group, Rodney hold that "Development implies an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships". Mnom (2002) conceptualize development as the "sustained elevation of an entire society or a social system towards a better or more human life". In his view, development is characterized by three basic features, life sustenance, self exteme and freedom. In another respect, Mnom (2002) sees development as "both a physical reality and a state of mind in which society has, through some combination of social, economic and institutional processes, secure the means for obtaining a better life.

In all societies and cultures, development goes with some laid down objectives. Mnom (2002) outlines two basic objectives of development, viz: (a) to increase the availability and widen the distribution of basic and life sustaining goods as well as shelter, health and protection to all members of society. (b) To raise standard of living, in addition to higher income.

As a global phenomenon, Ellah (2008) contend that "Education is perceived in all nations of the world as an instrument of development". It serves as the centrifugal force in the overall development of human society. Education liberates the mind from ignorance, equips man with new skills, gives him the courage to conquer his environment as well as the requisite attitude to cohabit with others. it therefore, makes education central factor in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Aware of the central role education plays in the development of any society, Ellah (2002) records that African leaders met in 1961 at Addis Ababa Ethiopia and adopted a common stand on the issue of education. The conference adopted education as a means of accelerating development in Africa: as in the case with the western world.. According to NNC (1980), "African leaders were encouraged to make education available at the primary levels and to strive to attain universal primary education by the year 1980. This tends to suggest that, African leaders of the 60s, had a broad mind towards development.

In 1990, a world conference to discuss the need for universal primary education held at Jomitein. At the conference, it was stressed that "education should be made accessible, equity, efficiency, literacy, numeracy and life skills.

In the spirit of the Jomitein Conference (1990), the Nigerian Government on Sept. 1999, launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) and restructured the 6,3,3,4 system of education to 9,3,4, making basic education free and compulsory in the country. Unfortunately, the spirit and manner with which this policy is being implemented, leaves much to be desired. The Government has been accused of not having the political will to implement this policy, given the little percentage of our Federal and state budget for the Education sector.

Factors of Underdevelopment: The term underdevelopment is rather difficult to define, however, some characteristics are associated with it. These include: poverty,

disease, by misdistribution of the national income, by administration incompetence, by social disorganization and lot more Mnom, (2002). Basically, underdevelopment is one of the factors threatening humanity today. From the North pole to the South, Atlantic, pacific to Indian ocean, no continent or country is free from the vestiges of the phenomenon. At both the rural and urban centers of different countries, underdevelopment manifests in various ways. Nwaenyi (2008) identifies the following as problem areas of rural development.

(a) Misplace project priority (b) lack of basic social amenities (c) land tenureship arrangement (d) Moral decay (e) crude implement (f) inadequate knowledge of the people by policy planers among others.

The high level of corruption among the people and government of developing nations supports underdevelopment. A situation where resources meant for the development of the poor countries are starched away in foreign banks no doubt encourages underdevelopment. For instance, many African leaders steal public fund and lodge then in European and American banks,. Unfortunately, these foreign banks and governments rejoice concerning these loots because it helps to strengthen their economy and by extension government. the effect of this is that provision of more jobs, better education and more attention to cultural and humanistic values are hampered.

Time without number economic analysts from developing countries complain that the World Bank and the International Monitory fund have never drawn up policies favourable to the developing countries. The policy of structural adjustment demanded by the IMF for developing countries, are seem as practically not workable in developing countries. Rather than aid the development of those countries, it further contributed to worsen their harsh economic predicament. In Nigeria, both the “Austerity measures of Shagari administration and the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of Babangida” further helped to impoverish Nigeria. In Zimbabwe and other African countries where these policy were tried, the story remains the same.

Worsestill are the various loans obtained by developing countries from these international financial institutions. Most of the loans are tied to elephant project supervised by official of these banks which never see the light of day, developing countries are perpetually tied to a string of debt repayment without a corresponding development project. Idoko (2006) identified some factors which encourage heavy financial indebtness by the third world countries to include. “Fiscal indiscipline, mismanagement and inefficient investment of costly external loans, a high proportion of short term loans, a high proportion of private loans, import dependent, structural imbalance and fallen price of crude oil in the international market”.

Poverty, disease and hunger are factors of underdevelopment, (Obodoegbulam, 2008). From global perspectives, the poor are those who live in the society without any means of livelihood and without any social, political or economic dignity. According to Nebechukwu (1992) this class of individuals suffers

cost, the consequences of socio-economic, religion, cultural, and political injustice in their society. They are the most vulnerable group and are often regarded as the dreg of society.

In all societies, women and children are the most affected class. More often than not women are made to bear the cross for men's happiness (Obodoegbulam 2008). They are denied, dispossessed, deprived and treated as second class citizens. Women are most times used as tool for making the male folk happy not minding whether they themselves are happy or not.

To demonstrate his concern for ill treatment against the female folk, Aluku* (2006) quoting Pope John Paul II, writes "We need only think of how the plight of motherhood is often penalized than rewarded, even though, humanity owes its very survival to this gift". In terms of war, women and children are the worst affected. During war situation, some are raped and impregnated against their wish or concert. In many countries, their education is considered secondary. Many parents see the education of the girl child as a waste. This is irrespective of their social and psychological effect on the girl child.

Culturally, many societies see women as agents of impurity, (Obodoegbulam, 1996), various prohibitive rules are placed on them. In keeping with cultural prescription, women in some cultures are disfigured with a very flimsy explanation. Infact, most of the world religions, have no positive role for women including Christianity. This explains why women ordination as priest is still a matter of debate. All in all, the world faces a serious challenge of underdevelopment despite various effort by the United Nations.

The Church and MDGs: For those who care, the church has come to stay as one of the development agents of human society. From its inception, the church has concerned itself with the salvation of humankind which includes deliverance from sin, sickness, poverty, oppression and all other tendencies which hinder good relationship with the creator.

At its inception in Africa including Nigeria, Christian Missions built churches, schools and hospitals any where they established. (Nduka 1964, Adjayi, (1979), Iwe, (1980) these were intended to liberate the people from disease, illiteracy and above all, spiritual damnation. In this regard, various biblical positions were used to support its position. For instance, Third John 2. "Beloved, I wish above all things, that thou mayst prosper and be in health ever as thy soul prospereth". Concerning healing, spiritual upliftment and prosperity, they use Mathew 6.33 "seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you".

Supporting the above, Ibeneme (2012) writes that "Christianity is the greatest single force that influence the minds of men for creative and productive as well as individual and positive accomplishment". In corroboration, Iwe (1980) holds that Christianity in its institutional and social form and manifestations is a human and moral, spiritual and cultural, national and international form to be reckoned with. Without mincing words, Christianity has helped to build bridges

across oceans especially in the heart of men. A good example being , the slave trade era.

Early enough in its history, the church had taken a bold step in the provision of good health care. Adjayi (1979) observed that as far back as the second half of the nineteenth century, Crowther and Hope Waddel took interest in the vaccination of the people against small pox and other communicable diseases. Again, its strong position against pre-marital sex and faithfulness to one's partner remain one of the best ways to check the spread of HIV/AIDs. Since the pandemic has no cure, world health organization (WHO) as cited by Iyere and Anerua, (2006); abstinence is the best solution.

Some Short Coming: In the first half of the twentieth century, the church proved itself as the beckon of hope for the disadvantaged class in the Nigerian society. Unfortunately, this initial gain could not be sustained owing to the life style of some Christian Missionaries or their ministers. Adjayi (1979) writes “the fact that the missionaries message included such item as: God’s love, the brotherhood of man, equality before God, salvation through faith, the supreme value of the individual soul, heaven and hell, hardly mitigated the revolutionary demand of the missionaries”. This simply suggest that they have know genuine concern for the people.

Greed, avaries and exploitation have crept into the church today. Ibeneme (2012) argues that “A good number of the Nigerian ministers of the gospel are in the ministry because of interest or material gain”. Continuing, he says “remove offering, tithes and other collections from our pulpit, many ministers of the gospel will call it quit to the work of the ministry’. These ministers exploit their congregation without recourse to conscience. Some emphasize the practice of sowing of seeds to the point that they even force some members to sow seed. They forget that not all seeds are good as many do not germinate. However Johnson (2010) do not see any thing wrong in prosperity gospel. These day, churches no longer build hospitals. A few that try to build schools, charge very high fees that only the children of very rich parent can afford for instance Maldonald university, Covenant university and Babcock.. Unfortunately, the poor members of the church whose offerings, tithes, seeds and other levies were used to build the school, will hardly be admitted.

Recommendations owing to the fact that the church represents Jesus Christ on earth, wherever it sets its foot, people expects change in their life. While the church had performed creditably in some areas in the past ,those initial achievements seems to be fading away in recent times in any case, it could still be a good partner to Government in delivering the MDGs hence I make the following recommendations:

- (i) the church should make the benefit of basic education primary health and environmental hygiene a talking point to their members
- (ii) ministers of the gospel should endeavor to live a moderate lifestyle that will be inspiring to their members

- (iii) the church should set up skill acquisition centers for their indigent members as a way of elevating poverty among them.
- (iv) Wealthy church members should build factories and industries to generate employment opportunities instead of buying expensive cars and building castles.
- (v) The church should take advantage of its population and go to commercial farming as a way of providing food for the people and raw materials for the industries.
- (vi) The church should partner with government to formulate people oriented policies and where the government makes unpopular policies or decisions should be bold enough to make constructive criticisms.
- (vii) The church should not only preach what is right but ensure that the right and dignity of the human person is protected including that of women to be seen heard and given the opportunity to express and explore their potentials.

Conclusion

The church in Nigeria and by extension Africa has very little if anything to contribute towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. In the face of secularism, the church does not exercise any control on those resources which radiate development. Even among its members, the competition for nominal members robbed it of effective grip of her leadership.

From the political perspectives, the political leadership in Nigeria lacked the moral will to translate policies into action. Everything in Nigeria is seen as more political promise. On this basis, achieving the MDGs by 2015 appears unattainable.

References

- Ade Adjayi, J.F. (1979) *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841-1891 The Making of a New Elite*. Hong Kong, Longman Group Limited.
- Aloko, T. (2006) "Womanhood in Per Versed Setting, The Lessing from Luke 21.1-4, Matthew 26:19 and the Need for Women Empowerment" *African Journal of Biblical Studies, International Journal for Biblical Studies*. Nigerian Association of Biblical Studies.
- Asiyai, R. I. (2009) "Problems Affecting the Effective Implementation of the Universal Basic Education in Delta State of Nigeria" *Multi-disciplinary Journal of Research Development*. Makurdi, National Association for Research Development. Benue State University.

- Ellah, I.I. (2008) "The Politics of Free Education in Nigeria" *Journal. Of business and contemporary research in education*. School of business education, F.C. E (T) Omoku.
- Folarin, G. (2006) "Prosperity Gospel in Nigeria" *African Journal of Biblical Studies, International Journal of Biblical Studies*. Nigerian Association for the Biblical Studies.
- Ibeneme, J.E. (2012) *The Major Problems with Nigerian Christianity*. Lagos. Limitless Success Company.
- Idoko, E.I. (2006) "External Debt Relief and Its Economic Implication in our Economy" *Knowledge Review*. National Association for the Advancement of Knowledge.
- Israel, J.N. (2012) *Prosperity Gospel. An Aberration or Pentecost is Brand*. Port Harcourt. Decarritas Pub.
- Iwe, N.S.S. (1980) *Christianity, Culture and Colonialism*. Port Harcourt. R.S.N.C.
- Iyere, F.O. and F.A. Anerua, (2006) "HIV/AIDS Among Adolescent. The Need for Good Nutrition" *African Journal of Biblical Studies, International Journal of Biblical Studies*. Nigerian Association of Biblical Studies.
- Journal of Contemporary Business and Educational Research. Omoku. School of Business Education F.C.E. (T. Omoku).
- Nduka, O. (1964) *Western Education and the Nigerian Cultural Background* Ibadan. University Press.
- Nebechukwu, U. A. (1992) *Liberation Theology and the poor in Nigeria*. Sna Enugu. Snap Press.
- Nmom, N.O. (2002) *Issues in Development*. Port Harcourt. Pearls Pub.
- Nwaenyi, K.E.O. (2010) *Elements of Rural Societies and Development Studies*. Owerri. Cape Publishers.
- Obodoegbulam A.O (1996) "the concept of purity in ogba religious life and analytical survey" M.A. thesis submitted to the dept. of philosophy and religious studies UNIPORT
- Obodoegbulam, A.O. (2006) "Cultural Issues in Gender Equity and Sustainable Development" *Journal of International gender studies* international Association for Gender Equity and sustainable Development. Journal of International Gender Studies.
- Obodoegbulam, A.O. (2006) "Women Education, Issues and Insight" *Knowledge Review*. National Association for the Advancement of Knowledge.
- Rodney, W. (2009) *How Europe underdevelopment Africa*. Lagos, Panaf Publishers.
- Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia