

Poverty Reduction and Inequality: Sustaining the Millennium Development Goals Achievements of Selected African Countries

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Abstract

Traditional economics measures development in terms of increase in gross domestic product (GDP) or real per capita GDP. The new economic view of development is that development is a multidimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes, and acceleration of economic growth. Reduction of inequality as well as eradication of poverty is also crucial to the new economic view of development. The achievements of Nigeria and some African countries on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on poverty eradication differ. This paper examines the level of achievements of selected African countries on MGDs on poverty and inequality. It employed descriptive analysis to analyse data on 4 selected countries from 1990-2015. It compares their achievements and suggests an inclusive way to improve and sustain the achievements under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Keywords: Extreme poor, Inequality, Hunger, Sustainable development, Poverty

Introduction

The United Nations introduced a global development agenda in the year 2000 on eradicating poverty and hunger; achieving universal primary education; promoting gender equality and empowerment of women; reducing child mortality; improving maternal health; combating HIV / AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and developing a global partnership for development. These goals are referred to as the “Millennium Development Goals” (MDGs). The MDGs are basically aimed at galvanizing global resources and collective responsibilities towards global economic development. The fifteen-year global agenda wound up in the year 2015, with achievements on the goals at different levels in many countries. The recent economic meltdown suffered by the major developed economies in the face of global economic imbalances, unstable oil and non-oil commodity prices occurred while implementation of the MDGs was in transit. Despite that, some countries were able to record remarkable achievements and meet the targets on the MDGs.

However, it should be noted that the essential implication of the global credit crunch¹ is the threat to the goals which the United Nations’ MDGs were out to achieve. Resulting from this is a rise in food and energy prices and globalization of poverty because some members of the middle classes in many countries are joining the league of the vulnerable, poor and destitute. This has put a serious dent in the fight against extreme poverty, hunger and malnutrition. Poverty and vulnerability lay the foundation for most social vices and corrupt practices in countries with high and low income (Anger, 2010). Sub-Saharan Africa is noted for high poverty prevalence and gender discrimination when statistics on regions are compared. According to reports on the MDGs, people living on less than \$1.25 per day are in the majority in two regions, namely sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia. Poverty prevalence has a bond with hunger. The inability to afford spending up to \$1.25 on a daily basis is an indication that

¹ USA sub-prime mortgage and sub-prime loans led to a global financial crisis in the year 2007. The crisis recession affected both developed and developing economies. Kamil et al. (2010) defines the term, sub-prime lending concisely as “the practice of making loans to borrowers who do not qualify for market interest rates because of problem with their credit history.”

such an individual lacks access to daily basic food needed for good health and survival. The first MDG beamed a good searchlight on poverty and a global effort to combating the menace. The achievements with regard to the MDGs are uneven across borders. This study therefore selects 4 African countries and examines their progress as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) begin. The paper is divided into seven sections; this introduction is followed by the conceptual framework and the underpinning theory; an overview of sub-Saharan Africa's achievements; data and methodology; findings and discussions; sustainability of achievements and inclusive economy and the conclusion.

Conceptual Framework and the Underpinning Theory

The United Nations Millennium Development Goals define what constitute poverty and hunger and set targets for countries to reduce poverty and hunger to a minimum level. This study adopts the UN definition of poverty. The Copenhagen Declaration of 1995 contains the definition of poverty adopted by 117 countries after the World Summit on Social Development. Poverty was defined in absolute and overall terms. Gordon (2005) reported that *absolute poverty* was defined as:

. . . a condition characterised by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. It depends not only on income but also on access to services.

Overall poverty was given a long definition as:

Lack of income and productive resources to ensure sustainable livelihoods; hunger and malnutrition; ill health; limited or lack of access to education and other basic services; increased morbidity and mortality from illness; homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environments; and social discrimination and exclusion. It is also characterised by lack of participation in decision making and in civil, social and cultural life. It occurs in all countries; as mass poverty in many developing countries, pockets of poverty amid wealth in developed countries, loss of livelihoods as a result of economic recession, sudden poverty as a result of disaster or conflict, the poverty of low-wage

workers, and the utter destitution of people who fall outside family support systems, social institutions and safety nets. (UN, 1995 cited in Gordon, 2005)

Furthermore, the UN defines poverty fundamentally without breaking it down into absolute and overall as:

A denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and clothe a family, not having a school or clinic to go to, not having the land on which to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living, and not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It means susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living on marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation. (UN Statement, June 1998 – signed by the heads of all UN agencies)

These definitions, and an array of others in a surfeit of literature such as Adejo (2006), Bradshaw (2006), Niemietz (2011), Uthman and Adesina-Uthman (2012), JRF (2013), and Davis and Sanchez-Martinez (2014), to mention a few, reveal the complexity of poverty. There is no one size fits all when poverty is to be defined. This range of definitions indicates that poverty is not only multi-dimensional but also multi-faceted, diverse and complex in nature. Going by the UN definitions, it can be inferred that MDGs were highly focused on eradication of extreme poverty and hunger and social inclusion. The UN therefore considered anyone living below the poverty line, which is demarcated by the inability to spend \$1.25 or more per day on food and non-food items, as being poor. On the other hand, reduction in gender discrimination was also given a target which is definite in terms of factors that constitute gender inequality. This is to include the excluded, especially womenfolk, by having 50:50 men to women ratio in the parliament and enroll 1:1 ratio of boy to girl at all levels of education (primary, secondary and tertiary).

That said, theoretically, the study is based on Oscar Lewis' (1966) theory on sub-culture of poverty. Lewis saw the concept of poverty as one that is multi-dimensional, with its complexity and manifestation from

anthropological, sociological and eugenic studies. He opines that poverty is intergenerational and could be passed on from one generation to another. He explains the anthropology and economic viewpoint on poverty. This paper is closely related to his economic viewpoint on poverty which he breaks down as:

“ . . . a miscellany of unskilled occupations, child labour, the absence of savings, a chronic shortage of cash, the absence of food reserves in the home, the pattern of frequent buying of small quantities of food many times a day as the need arises, the pawning of personal goods, borrowing from local money lenders at usurious rates of interest, spontaneous informal credit devices organized by neighbours, and the use of second-hand clothing and furniture” .

Lewis culture of poverty is a social theory that explains the cyclical nature of poverty. Although, his theory is controversial, the fundamental definitions of poverty and the UN gauge for food poverty or hunger are embedded in it. Unlike the situational theory of poverty that locates poverty in economic and social structures, Lewis culture of poverty locates poverty in the value orientations of individuals or a group of people. This is applicable to the global goals on eradication of extreme poverty that can be intergenerational and subsequently reduction in hunger. The manifestation of poverty in the African region closely reflects Lewis' view of poverty. A similar view to that of Lewis in recent times is that of Sen (1989) who also locates the concept of poverty in economic, political, social, cultural and environmental dimensions.

Overview of Sub-Saharan Africa's MDGs Achievements

Poverty can only be efficiently dealt with when the have-nots are identified. Also, knowing where the poor actually reside can enhance the efforts toward solving the poverty menace. It has been established that extremely poor people live in six countries of the world. India and China have a percentage of extreme poor that is higher than the combination of extreme poor percentages in the world after excluding 3 countries with notable percentages. Combined, they have 45.7 percent of the world extreme poor while the other countries excluding Nigeria, Congo and Bangladesh have 35.5 percent (Figure 1). As at 2014, India had the largest percentage as it was home to 32.9 percent of the world extreme poor while China had 12.8

percent. Nigeria was third with 8.9 percent of the extreme poor followed by Bangladesh (5.3%) and then Congo (4.6%).

Figure 1 reveals that the majority of the poor are basically located in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia. Sub-Saharan Africa showed limited progress on poverty rate reduction with a slight reduction from the 1990 rate of population living on less than \$1.25 a day that stood at 57 percent to 41 per cent in 2015; ditto for hunger reduction. The MDGs target for hunger reduction was 11.8 percent. Figure 2 confirms that sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia met the target while Eastern and South-East and Western Asia surpassed the target. Meanwhile, Latin America and the Caribbean; Caucasus and Central Asia, West Asia and North Africa all missed the target of 11.8 percent. However, sub-Saharan Africa has the highest percentage of level of reduction in hunger when compared with the other continents despite the small significant reduction from 33 percent to 25 percent.

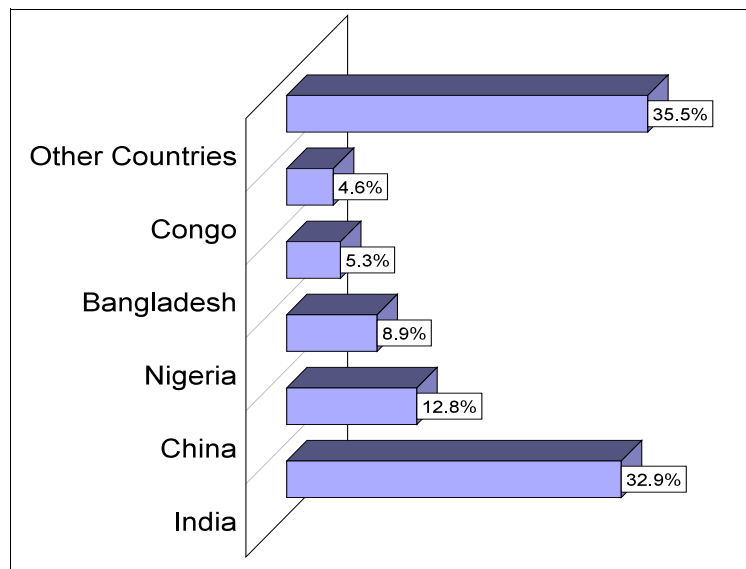


Figure 1. Countries with extreme poor as at 2014.

Source: Author's Extraction from Countries with Notable Percentage of Extreme Poor (MGD Report, 2014).

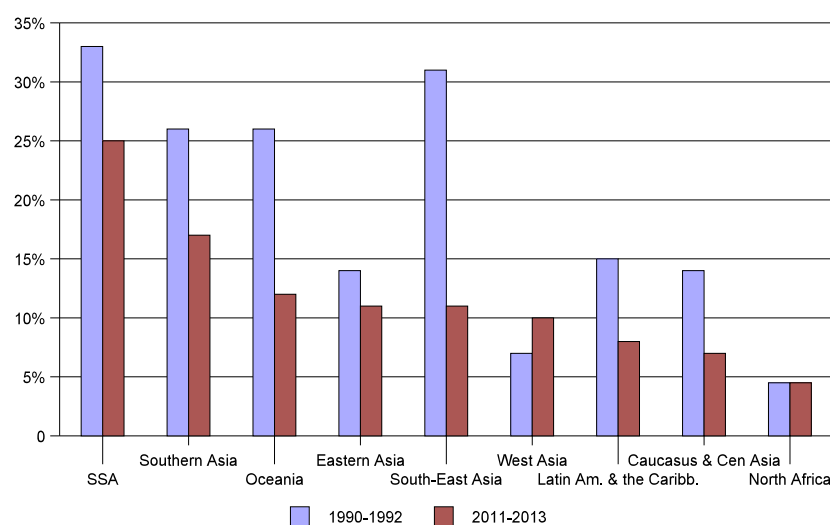


Figure 2. Hunger reduction in sub-Saharan Africa and other continents.

Source: Author's Extraction from Countries with Notable Percentage of Extreme Poor (MGD Report, 2014).

Data and Methodology

There were two stages of selection; first, there was random selection of 5 countries, and second was the purposeful selection based on data availability and language of reporting. Data extractions are basically from the tracking records of selected countries. Ethiopia, Gambia, Nigeria and Tanzania were purposely selected due to availability of data in English on MDGs updated to 2014. The MDGs Report on country basis from 1990-2015 (as available for different countries) were retrieved from the archives of the United Nations website. Inability to select countries from sub-regions is a limitation to this study. Congo was excluded because not only did data stop at 2010 but the report was written in French. To avoid translation errors, the study is limited to data presented in English language as stated earlier.

The methodology employed was descriptive analysis; extracted data were analysed using graphs and tables for easy comparison and analysis. It should be noted that the poverty line of less than \$1.25 per day (base year 2005 purchasing power parity) was adopted for the MDGs on eradication of extreme poverty and hunger reduction target. The aim was to halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than

\$1.25 a day, that is, reduce by half the 1990 rate of poverty and hunger by 2015. The region is expected to reduce this rate of poverty by half. Also a ratio of 1:1 is expected for boy and girl enrolment to achieve gender equality. Meanwhile a ratio of 50:50 was expected for men and women participation in leadership, especially in the parliament. However, if the country-based benchmark ratio for women participation is achieved, it is concluded that such a country is considered to have met their target. For example, Nigeria has a country-based benchmark for women in parliament at 35 percent, Tanzania set 30 percent, same as Ethiopia.

Findings

Poverty and Hunger Eradication (Goal 1)

Ethiopian Achievements

The MDGs Report on Ethiopia indicates that significant progress was made in extreme poverty and hunger reduction. Ethiopia's achievement on eradication of extreme poverty and hunger reduction across its rural and urban regional states was highly outstanding, however, 22.6 million people were still living below the poverty line. As at 2014, the country was certified by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) to have achieved reduction

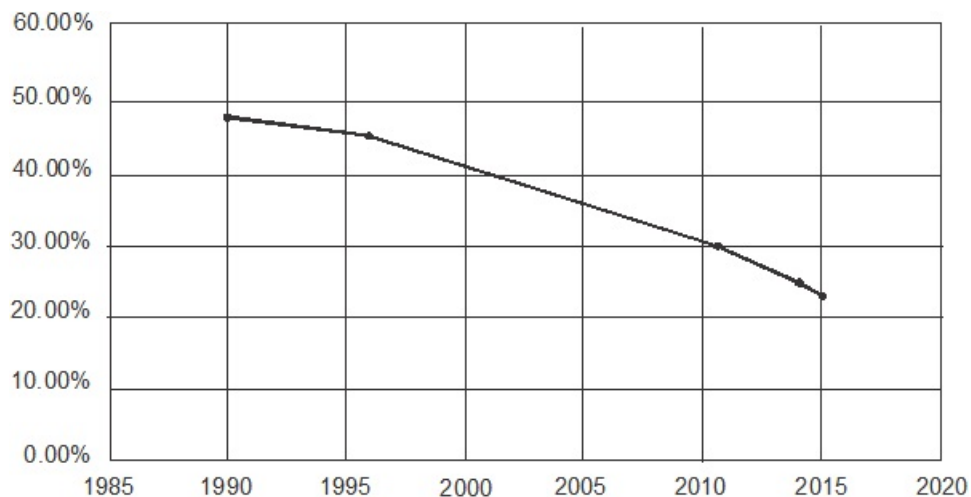


Figure 3. Ethiopia: Incidence of poverty prevalence 1990-2015.

Source: Author's extraction from Ethiopian MDGs Report, 2015.

in hunger by half. Its implementation of the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) contributed to the fall in food prices at the time of extreme rise in food prices and the reduction of hunger to 10.4 percent. (Ethiopia MDG Report in United Nations (2015).

Gambia's Achievements

Gambia's achievement on eradication of extreme poverty and hunger reduction was far from the target of 2015. Records show that aside the base year record on incidence of poverty in the year 1990, the Integrated Household Survey conducted in Gambia in 2010 revealed that though poverty was more prevalent in the rural than urban areas, rural-urban migration has, however, increased urban poverty due to the increase in unemployment. Available data indicate that Gambia was unable to achieve the first goal of eradication of extreme poverty. One of the challenges the country faced was vulnerability to climate change, drought and floods which made it impossible to meet the hunger reduction target (Gambian MDGs Status Report in United Nations, 2015).

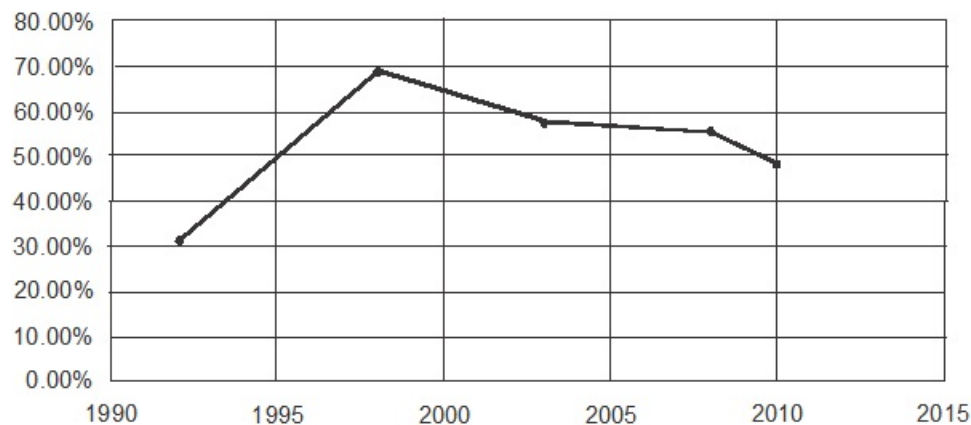


Figure 4. Gambia: Incidence of poverty prevalence 1990-2015.

Source: Author's extraction from Gambian MDGs Status Report, 2015.

Nigeria's Achievements

Extraordinary progress was achieved by Nigeria on eradication of poverty despite the National Bureau of Statistics report of 2010 that more than 60 percent of the population was below the poverty line. The incidence of

poverty presented a downward slope curve as a result of reduction from the 1990-1992 figure of 65.6 percent to the 2013 figure of 31.1 percent (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Nigeria: Incidence of poverty prevalence 1990-2013.

Source: Author's extraction from Nigeria's MDGs Status Report, 2015.

The 2013 figure was very close to the 2015 MDG target of 21.4 percent. Significant progress was recorded in Nigeria on hunger reduction such that the country was recognized by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) to have achieved reduction in hunger by half. Hunger was reduced by 66 percent, though still prevalent in the northern part of the country in both urban and rural areas.

Tanzania's Achievements

Report on poverty in Tanzania was not adequate as compared to the other three countries. Available data on poverty and hunger reduction started from 2007 and ended in 2011/2012. This is also broken down into rural, urban and Dar-es-Salaam. Figure 5 presents the trend of poverty in Tanzania (Note that the figure is a combination of data for rural, urban and Dar-es-Salaam). It is worthy of note, that poverty was more prevalent in rural Tanzania. On hunger reduction, the country was able to reduce hunger from 11.8 percent in 2007 to 9.7 percent in 2011/2012. Reports were basically

on two main districts, Bunda and Uyui; both were able to record remarkable progress on hunger reduction. It could, therefore, be concluded that this aspect of goal one was achieved.

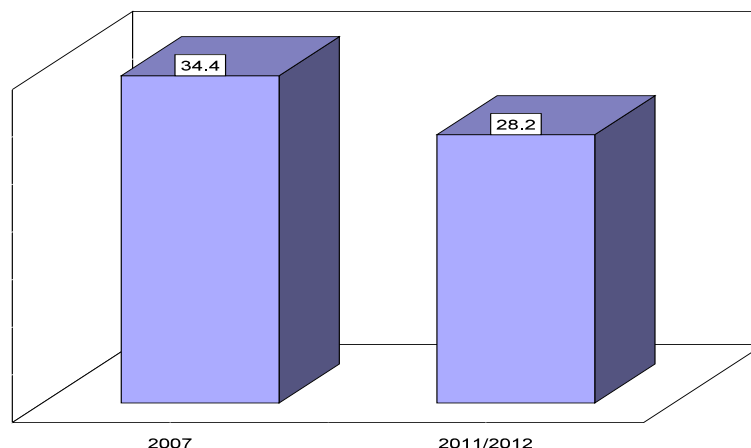


Figure 1.5 Tanzania: Incidence of poverty prevalence 2007-2011/2012

Source: Author's extraction from Tanzania MDGs Status Report, 2014

Gender Inequality in Selected Countries (Goal 3)

Ethiopia's Achievements: Remarkable achievement was made on gender equality with regard to women participation in parliamentary leadership with 38.7 percent as against the benchmark of 30 percent. However, the target of 1:1 ratio of boy to girl enrolment in schools was not achieved. Socio-cultural, financial, political and legal barriers to women participation still exist. Consequently, the gender parity index for this country is poor due to factors such as early marriage, violence against girls, abduction, household chores, and parents' poor level of awareness on benefits of education. Thus, overall, the country failed in gender equality (Ethiopia MDG Report in United Nations, 2015).

Gambia's Achievements: Gambia was able to meet the 2015 targets of gender parity at both primary and secondary school levels. Notably, the MDG target of 1:1 ratio of boy to girl enrolment in schools was achieved and surpassed. However, the country was unable to meet the target for women

participation in parliamentary leadership with only 9.4 percent in 2013. (Gambia MDGs Status Report in United Nations, 2015).]

Nigeria's Achievements: The target set by Nigeria was 35 percent for women in elective parliamentary positions; however, it performed woefully with a meagre 5.1 percent representation of women in the parliament as at 2015. However, it did well in appointing women to political leadership positions with 30 percent women in political decision making positions (Nigeria MDGs Status Report, in United Nations, 2015). According to Nigeria MDG Report and the World Bank and Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), the country's achievement of high gender parity index at primary and secondary levels was yet to be replicated at the tertiary level.

Tanzania's Achievements: This country surpassed the 30 percent target for women representation in parliament by 6.5 percent as early as 2010. Women's parliamentary seat increased from 75 in 2005 to 102 in 2010. However, despite the achievement recorded, gender inequality still exists due to limited access to basic education, health and financial services as well as discrimination against widows, and harassment of women, to mention but a few. Meanwhile, the gender parity index increased as the number of girls enrolled in primary and secondary levels is more than the number of boys.

In summary, Table 1 presents the scorecard on achievements on poverty reduction, hunger reduction, gender equality and women empowerment for each of the selected countries.

Table 1: The MDG Achievements Comparison across Selected Countries

Countries	Poverty Reduction	Hunger Reduction	Gender Equality	Women Empowerment
Ethiopia	✓	✓	X	✓
Gambia	X	X	✓	X
Nigeria	X	✓	✓	X
Tanzania	X	✓	✓	✓

Achievements' Sustainability and Inclusive Economy

The uneven achievement across countries of the world, especially some remarkable achievements recorded in sub-Saharan Africa and some other countries, calls for another UN global development agenda called the Sustainable Development Agenda. It would be aimed at sustainability of achievements recorded under the MDGs and seeking a way to improve beyond the achievements for sustainable economic growth and development. This is attainable with the implementation of inclusive growth where no one is left behind in the economic development and benefit process. Sustainable development is about meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs [(Brundtland, 1987).² Consequently, for African countries to meet the needs of the present and future generations without compromising one for the other, it has become more imperative now to adopt the concept of sustainable development through the inclusive process. The ADB (2011) acquiesces that growth is inclusive if the pace of growth is increased and the economy is enlarged with a level playing field for investment that increases productive employment opportunities. It went further to submit that an important aspect of the inclusive process is participation by every section of the society and their contributions to growth in the process irrespective of their circumstance, whether poor or rich, man or woman.

Sustaining the achievements under the MDGs involves integration of economic growth and development as well as social development. This calls for the espousal of global strategies as contained in the UN Sustainable Development for global economic development that can lift low-income countries that have per capita income of less than USD 767 out of abject poverty, illiteracy, economic stagnation, environmental degradation and technological exclusion among others. Therefore, for the success of the second global development agenda and to improve on the lives of African citizens, a growth strategy with inclusiveness features is imperative. The inclusive growth model has been successful in some nations as evidenced in the Asian and Nordic regions, according to ILO, UNCTAD, UNDESA &

² Quoted in "Sustainable Development: EU Strategy," available at http://www.euractiv.com/sustainable-development-eu-strat-links dossier-188277#group_extlinks, accessed on 3 July 2015.

WTO (2012). They submit that poverty alleviation and social deprivation had remarkable achievements in both the Nordic and Asian countries. They found that equitable income and wealth distribution in several nations located in Nordic and Asian countries is associated with economic development and by inference drastic reduction in poverty level.

In view of these observations, this study makes the following recommendations.

- There is need for social integration of the poor to enhance equality and promote human rights. This can be achieved through provision of social services such as health insurance for the masses and health care centres in localities for easy access to health care services. The poor are usually deprived of many social services due to non-availability or non-affordability. Health services are crucial to survival, therefore, making it accessible and at no cost to some categories may assist in poverty reduction and promote health economy. Increase in health care centres per 1000 population will also create more jobs aside from decrease in morbidity and mortality from illness. Hence, no one would be left behind in the development process and benefit sharing.
- Road transportation is a major means of transportation in Africa. The burden of the poor masses may be lessened through provision of mass transit at low cost. This should be done along with provision of good road network. Other forms of transportation, such as sea transport and most importantly rail transportation, should be developed and made available at cheaper cost to assist the poor. At the same time as delivering the needed services, jobs would be created that are of permanent nature to some citizens. This shall go a long way to lessen stress and financial burden on farmers, market women and other market participants. It also has implications for increasing supply to markets and lowering the cost of goods and services. In the long run, unemployment rates may be reduced as more people are engaged in the development process and short-term benefit realised in the form of wages to contract labour during infrastructure development.
- Social welfare packages for the extremely poor and support to communities of vulnerable people may reduce hunger and incidence

of extreme poverty. The more of such care to the extreme poor, the less they will feel socially discriminated against.

- Loan availability to employers of labour at cheaper cost will drive inclusiveness and motivate the medium and small scale sectors that are the drivers of economic growth.
- Provision of free education with text books at the primary and secondary level as seen in some Asian countries may not only enhance school enrolment but may also reduce poverty prevalence. This is a way to socially include the excluded in the growth process.
- Food security through heavy investment in the agricultural sector may enhance food production and reduce hunger. This could be done through investment in fertilizer subsidy, mechanized farming and provision of conducive environment to local farmers and their families. The Malaysian example of such provisions to farmers such that their children have schools in their settlements, pipeborne water, electricity, internet and other amenities aside education to farmers on mechanized farming is recommended for African countries.
- Investment in infrastructural facilities and amenities in the rural areas has the tendency to minimize urban migration for unavailable white collar jobs. The less people migrate from the rural areas, the more people that will be available to the agricultural sector, especially for farming.
- Provision of low cost and affordable housing for different segments of the economy to address homelessness and to reduce the number of the poor living under bridges and on the streets. This has the tendency to serve as safety nets in these countries and reduce the numbers of miscreants and touts. The attendant benefit of this is a peaceful social structure and responsible people who will care more about the preservation of their heritage rather than its destruction.

Conclusion

The paper examined the achievements on two of the UN MDGs of combating the global menace of poverty in its different presentations in four selected African countries. It found that the precarious socio-economic

condition that led to the fight against poverty, hunger and inequality at the global level has only recorded a little relief in some sub-Saharan African countries, especially Nigeria and Tanzania. Goals 1 and 3 of the MDGs were examined with two components each. On goal 1, i.e. eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, only Ethiopia out of the four selected countries was able to meet the target. Nigeria, Gambia and Tanzania were unable to meet their targets but recorded notable progress in the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger. Consequently, the four selected countries from sub-Saharan Africa were found to have recorded little achievement in poverty eradication but met the target on hunger reduction.

All the countries except Ethiopia were able to record good gender parity ratio. On women empowerment, Gambia and Nigeria failed to meet the MDGs target, but Ethiopia and Tanzania did. The paper shows the various levels of progress achieved and reveals the unfinished business of the MDGs which constitute the foundation for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It explicates inclusive growth as the way to go in sustaining the achievements and improving on them. Only then can the concept of human dignity, political and social inclusion as well as individual freedom be entrenched in national economic growth and development.

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