

Rethinking 'NEEDS' and 'MDGs' as Panacea for the SDGs: Issues and Options

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Abstract

After years of economic stagnation and numerous challenges of development, couple with the struggle to meet up the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Obasanjo administration embarked on a reform program during his second term in office, the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). The program focused on improving the macroeconomic environment, pursuing structural reforms, strengthening public expenditure management and implementing institutional and governance reforms. This paper revisits the philosophy of the NEEDS in relation to MDGs in terms of the major policy measures that had been implemented to serve as lessons for the attainments of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Although the country had some success stories under NEEDS and MDGs, challenges exist particularly in translating the benefits of the NEEDS into welfare improvements for the citizenry; improving the domestic business environment and extending reform policies to the grassroots. Consequently, the paper argued that reforms by subsequent governments would achieve better results with greater inclusiveness or credible grassroots ownership. Hence, the journey to better reforms towards the attainments of the SDGs should focus on peace building, promotion of accountability at all levels and credible measurements of objectives of reforms/SDGs.

Keywords: Empowerment, NEEDS, MDGs, SDGs, Reforms

Introduction

Before the restoration of democracy, Nigeria suffered setbacks that tarnished its reputation with severe challenges of development. This heralded the need for development strategies to bail the country out of its woes. Hence, the National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS), introduced during the second term of President Obasanjo. The program was rooted from a previous initiative to bail Nigeria out of its economic, social and political crisis. NEEDS was canvassed to create a new Nigeria citizen who values hard work and realizes that one cannot have something on nothing. It is a product of the vision 2010, KURU declaration which was seen as different from other Nigeria's development model because it was people's plan for prosperity and coordinated action at the federal and state level with a feasible plan (Nzekwu, 2007). NEEDS proposed a bold step to achieve macro-economic stability and support for more efficient use of resources to grow the economy. It was initiated to face the challenges from the new development paradigm.

The method and strategies of attaining NEEDS as a medium and long-term strategies are clear target and objectives of empowering people, promoting private enterprise and the way the

government does its work via cosseted strategies and participatory budget effects with emphasis on pro-poor growth results, outcomes and impact and, a new approach to budget (NEEDS, 2004). Impliedly, the NEEDS vision is based on previous initiative but with a difference. This led the country to seek support of the World Bank on mechanisms to move Nigeria out of poverty which enjoyed the blessings of the International Development Association (IDA), the largest source of concessional finance for the world's 74 poorest countries, 39 of which are in Africa. Resources from IDA are expected to bring positive change to the 1.3 billion people who live in IDA countries. The IDA was also at the forefront of the NEEDS project that classified Nigeria as an IDA-only country, and the Nigerian government's request for the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to support its reform program under a proposed non-borrowing instrument (World Bank, 2006).

The NEEDS, therefore, is classified as a pro-poor project that was expected to move a sizeable number of Nigerians out of poverty. However, poverty went down in the country between 1996 and 2004, from 36.3 percent to 32.4 percent. On the other hand, the proportion of non-poor was much higher in the country in 1980 (72.8 percent) compared to 1992 (57.3 percent) and 1996 (34.4 percent). Although it rose to 43.3 percent in 2004, it dropped to 31 percent in 2010 (NBS, 2010). One begins to wonder at this stage whether NEEDS was truly a pro-poor economic model or like other economic models before it that are lacking in measurable target, top down approach, elitist, non-participatory; lacking in real development focus, etc. This is especially so when one understands the core values of the program in terms of wealth creation, employment generation, poverty reduction and value re-orientation. This might be said to have reawakened many Nigerians to the challenges of that time amidst the struggle to meet up the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, from the second term of President Obasanjo to the reign of his successor President Yar'adua, little can be seen in terms of real development issues such as fiscal discipline, participatory democracy or electoral reform, macro-economic stability or concrete growth, etc.

This is because the polity failed to show much positive outcome for Nigerians to appreciate the economic model. With the ratification of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, along with a historic agreement in Addis Ababa on ways to mobilize financing needed for the SDGs, the world has a new roadmap for ending poverty by 2030 via the support of the IDA, which is poised to play a key role in this mission by catalyzing trillions of dollars in needed investment – public and private, national and global and translating the SDGs into country led action (World Bank, 2020). This paper focuses on revisiting the trends or developments in those era of NEEDS (taking into cognizance the poor or vulnerable groups) as a panacea to moving Nigeria up the ladder towards sustainable growth and development, as the world journey into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

Conceptual Framework: NEEDS and Vulnerable Groups in Nigeria

NEEDS is classified as Nigeria's local solution to address lingering economic challenges of the country. NEEDS builds on the earlier two-year effort to produce the interim "home-grown" Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) and the wide consultative and participatory processes associated with it. It is a plan on the ground and founded on a clear vision, sound values, and enduring principles (NEEDS, 2004). It is a medium-term strategy (2003 - 07) which derives from the country's long-term goals of poverty reduction, wealth creation, employment generation and value re-orientation. The program is a nationally coordinated framework of action in close collaboration with the State and Local governments i.e. State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (SEEDS) and other stakeholders to consolidate on the achievements of the return to democracy (1999- 2003) and build a solid foundation for the attainment of Nigeria's long-term vision of becoming the largest and strongest African economy and a key player in the world economy (NEEDS, 2004).

As a core package of the NEEDS strategy, it provides a safety net that was to prevent people from becoming poor or poorer. Special programs were outlined to protect the rural poor, urban poor, women, youths and rural communities (Nnana, 2005). The instruments and intervention that was put in place to address the vulnerable group are; the rural poor access to credit and land, participation in decision-making agricultural extension services, improved seeds, farm inputs and implement strengthening of traditional thrift, saving, and insurance schemes. For the urban poor, it includes labor intensive public work schemes, affordable housing, water and sanitation, skill acquisition and entrepreneurial development, access to credit, scholarships and adult education and affirmative action to increase women representation to at least 30%) in all programs. The youths are expected to benefit from education, skill acquisition, and access to credit, prevention and control of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted disease, entrepreneurship development, etc.

For children are the basic education, prevention and treatment of childhood diseases, girl child education, and care for OVC's, children's parliament and juvenile justice administration, rural communication, water, rural roads, electricity, school health facilities and communications. The government plan to ensure the perfection of the vulnerable groups through its major services of expected growth which are agriculture and rural development, manufacturing, small and medium size enterprise, solid minerals development, manufacturing, small and medium size enterprises, solid minerals development, information and communication service, tourism, oil and gas, power, education, public work and housing intervention schemes. Others are micro-credit, concessional credit, etc. These were also expected to have served as the chief source or means of employment generation in Nigeria. It was also the concern of NEEDS to integrate rural development in collaboration with the states through the SEEDS and local councils LEEDS program. While the vision and mission of NEEDS seem laudable and sound, one gets encapsulated more with its statistical projections that NEEDS targets minimum annual GDP growth rates of 5% in 2004, 6% in 2005 and 2006, and 7% in 2007. This of course is the

minimum needed to achieve adequate per capita and improve welfare, however, this was not the case before the Obasanjo handover and the President Umaru Yar'Adua's Seven Point Agenda.

NEEDS and the Vulnerable Groups: For Better or Worse?

Nigeria has always articulated reforms in response to failed policies in the economy and society. Ranging from the failure to utilize oil boom in the 70's and the resulting crisis of the Nigerian economy that followed in the SAP era of the mid 1980's as pushed and encouraged by the IMF/WORLD bank and other financial institution eager to promote their interest and dominance (Kwanashie, 2007). The NEEDS package even though claimed to be people oriented was also clearly a mis-match for the Nigerian economic woes. This is simply for the fact that unemployment was on the rise, maternal health a disturbing issue, polio-eradication a problem, public school increasingly un-fashionable, basic agricultural inputs to farmers erratic, low women representation glaring, water, electricity, housing etc. at a great distance from the vulnerable group or poor Nigerians. The Nigerian state as at then was weak and inefficient, this is so as it is viewed to have been captured by a small elite (Kwanashie, 2007).

The Nigerian democracy is a glaring example of this. The 2007/2008 United nation Human Development index rank Nigeria 158 among the poorest of the member states. This implies that Nigeria is one of the world's poorest countries, with the largest population of poor in Africa. NEEDS planned to look more of policy rhetoric than a development strategy, as there can be little justification for a people-oriented policy since NEEDS suffered such failure despite the abundance of human and material resources in Nigeria. The fact remains that the country has not been able to transform potential resources into wealth. Reforms have not created new competencies and economic structures to facilitate poverty reduction and genuine empowerment. This is especially so that the NEEDS have failed to enhance the development of technology to meet up the challenge of that era. As earlier mentioned, Nigeria was ranked 158 out of 177 countries with a Human Development index score of 0.47.

The score looks at a triple combination of life expectancy index [0.359], education index [0.648] and the GDP index [0.404]. This continued to beat one's imagination as to how peoples'-oriented policies or programs failed to move Nigeria higher than expected. The answer is simple, NEEDS was an elitist conception i.e. the strong economic team as at then felt a policy be rolled out to address public good without efforts to generate the needs of the populace or marshal out practical steps that can be achieved alongside poor inputs. But one needs to ask how it was elitist conceived? The simple answer is that while there was a massive national campaign to draw-up NEEDS throughout Nigeria, the implementation was strictly that of the government red-tape machinery with serious administrative shortcomings. This is not to mention the corruption allegations against the Obasanjo government as revealed by the National Assembly power probe revelations among others.

An assessment shows that NEEDS was not peoples' plan and failed to redress poverty or the problems of the vulnerable groups in Nigeria. This can be noticed from the MO. Ibrahim foundation and the Robert Rotberg Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University assessment of Good Governance in Africa, 2007. The 2007 report clearly shows that Nigeria

ranked below average of other African countries in terms of Voice and Accountability, Political Stability, Government Effectiveness, Regulatory Quality, Rule of Law and Control of Corruption. Even poorer countries like Madagascar, Togo, Chad, Niger, etc. possess good credentials in these variables than Nigeria as depicted in the table below.

Table 1: Good Governance Ranking in Selected African States

COUNTRY	INDEX	Voice and Accountability	Political stability	Government Effectiveness	Regulatory quality	Rule of law	Control of corruption
Nigerian	14.83	29	5	23	16	8	8
Madagascar	43.17	42	42	45	42	43	45
Niger	28.17	40	23	27	32	23	24
Mauritius	51.83	50	53	52	53	52	53
Ethiopia	19	20	8	19	15	25	27
Togo	17.5	12	13	9	23	17	31

Source: MO. Ibrahim Foundation and the Robert Kennedy School of Government Harvard University Assessment of Good Governance in Africa. Africa report, 2007

Table 1 above shows that Nigeria has not done enough to put its house in order. Likewise, the NEEDS plan by all standards or ramification is a function of good governance without which participatory contribution to draw NEEDS and properly implement it will not be there. The table also shows that there was serious neglect in terms of assessment to cross check whether Nigeria or its institutions were upright and doing to implement the NEEDS agenda or reform policies of the government. Hence, the poor and vulnerable were taken for a ride by replacing an existing model with a super one that seeks to promote more of private or corporate interest than the poor or teeming masses in Nigeria. This may be the reason why the government was more as a debt serving one than people oriented. The fact remains that the number of the poor or Nigerians vulnerable to poverty has increased overtime with children, women and the elderly or pensioners seriously paying for the price NEEDS or the reform agenda than corporate Nigeria. Simple answer to this shows that lack of Good governance creates a breathing space for the reform agenda not to see the light of the day. This is for the fact that despite collaborative effort between states' and LGAs' to move vulnerable Nigerians forward through NEEDS or previous programs, little or nothing was noticed. S

NEEDS: Collaboration with States, LGA'S & Support to the Vulnerable in Nigeria

The desired effects of NEEDS were expected to trickle down to the states and local government areas i.e. if the policy environment is okay; hence, the Government vigorously pursued its NEEDS or reform policy down the ladder with SEEDs and LEEDs. Above all, to guarantee the success, NAPEP was created to address the NEEDS programs as it relates to the

vulnerable groups. NAPEP, developed schemes for partnership with states and NGOs. These schemes included among others Micro Finance Coordination Scheme, Youth Empowerment Scheme, Capacity Enhancement scheme, Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (National Planning Commission, 2004). They were expected to move a large number of Nigerians out of poverty and reduce the number of sizable Nigerians from becoming poor people.

However, the more this scheme was administered, the more the realization of achieving these goals became a little difficult or impossible. The causes are also not farfetched, that is interest rate and cost of doing business in Nigeria was at all-time high. The government took a bold move to intervene in the Nigerian Capital Market to safeguard the country from imminent crash. Prior to the exit of the Obasanjo administration, the reform policies of the state or NEEDS strategy seemed an illusion as it concerned the poor and those at the bottom of the ladder. This was because the poor continued becoming poorer and Nigeria was confronted with the challenge of meeting up the United Nations millennium declaration i.e. the MDGs; as depicted by the table below.

Table 11 Success Rate of the MDGs as at 2010

MDG GOALS	STATUS IN NIGERIA
Extreme poverty to be halved between 1990 and 2015.	70% of Nigerians live on less than \$1 per day.
Proportion of people suffering from hunger is halved.	29% of children are underweight.
All children to complete primary education	Less than 60% of primary aged children attended School. Seven million primary aged children are not in school. This proportion has grown over the years
Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2015.	The number of girls enrolled in primary education is 92% to the numbers of boys. In some states it is less than 40%.
Reduce death of mother due to child bearing by three quarters between 1990 and 2015.	One birth in a hundred results in the death of mothers. Women in Northern Nigeria have a one in fifteen chances of dying through a pregnancy related cause.
Stop the spread of AIDS.	5% of Nigerians were infected with HIV, with over 10% in some states. About one million children are orphaned by AIDS.
Halves by 2015 the proportion of people without safe drinking.	Less than 50% of the rural populations had access to safe water.

Source: National Consumer Survey 1995/96; Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys 1995 and 2000; Demographic and Health Survey, 2003.

The above table shows that the Nigerian was not salvaged because the condition at then has gone far beyond the depicted statistics as at an assessment by 2003, and the scenario is not better till date. This is true as polio eradication was just won in 2020. To justify this assertion, the 2006 National Bureau of Statistics report showed that 33% of persons aged 15 years and above could not read or write in any language. Higher literacy rate at the national level is dismal. Only 47% of children had access to secondary school, 69.3%, urban and 37.5%, rural; The South West reported the highest figure of 69.4%, followed by South South 48% and South East recording the lowest 32.3%.

Also, 43.4% express dissatisfaction with their secondary education. The levels of satisfaction were highest in South West 74.8% and lowest in North East 42.1% (National Planning Commission, 2004). This implies that the youths who constitute the vast majority of the vulnerable were being challenged and the consequences are clear on the erosion of societal or communal traditional values, whose implications can well be noticed in the emergence of the likes of Niger Delta Avengers, Herders – Farmers clashes, Area boys, Boko Haram, etc. The decay of time tested and highly regarded traditional value systems are pointers to the generational gap created in contemporary Nigeria to the detriment of the youths, who are expected to be the future of our respective culture and traditions. This gap erodes the identity and rich cultural heritage that has remained a source of our national pride among the community of nations. Embedded in this heritage is the culture of commitment to duty, hard work, social and civic responsibility, sense of dignity in labor, productivity, honesty, transparency, respect for elders, etc.

The shortcomings of the NEEDS reflected in the nature of our youths are the real victims of Nigeria's resource-curse dilemma. The youths were born and raised during the darkest era of national resources, occasioned by deprivation, unbridled poverty in the midst of plenty. They were indeed born into a culture of institutionalized corruption in every facet of the national life and, were psychologically sedated to imbibe the lifestyle of greed, selfishness, fraud, examination malpractice, a get-rich-quick-at-all-cost mentality, disrespect for law and order. These are Nigeria's endangered youth population, to whom Nigeria must retribute to secure its future.

One may need to ask at this stage what are the internal contradictions that makes the NEEDS very difficult to see the Nigerian poor or the vulnerable' out of the woes? The answers are simple; the analogy above brings out the link between political economy and reducing vulnerability to poverty in Nigeria and weak institutions to forge ahead for the better. The capacity of our public service to carry out NEEDS reform agenda is weak because of nepotism, corruption, etc. in the manner the public service is managed to deliver public good, over exposure to negative western culture, distanced from cherished cultural values, emerging culture of greed and corruption, ethnicity and lack of national consciousness or nationalism without patriotism.

Our people or the Nigerian state is still statist and patronage oriented; conspirational rather than empirical, with distrust dominating official work or activities. With interest rate standing at 24-26% as at then, the inflation rate of about 15% (and these are highly manipulated figures), millions either fully unemployed or not gainfully employed, life expectancy standing at 45 years, per capita GDP at less than \$200 and incredible sums of security crisis hanging around; there is no way out on the path of NEEDS or reforms; this is also to mention the silent place of the reforms or NEEDS or liberal reforms on the elderly and disable people in Nigeria.

The SDGs: Policy Options for Global Agenda

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), popularly referred to as the Global Goals, were adopted in 2015 by all the United Nations Member States as an action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. It has 17 goals that are integrated i.e. an action in one area is expected to have effects in others. It is premised on the assumption that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. Unlike the MDGs, the SDGs are designed to bring the world to several life-changing 'zeros', including zero poverty, hunger, AIDS and discrimination against women and girls. It is a follow up to the attainment of the MDGs whose goals have systematically prepared the world against the shortcomings of previous challenges of development.

The SDGs differ in their insistence, not just on technical fixes and financing, but also on doing things differently. The new agenda acknowledges that solutions emerge when results are challenged, when the right policies are adopted and when institutions are transformed. The SDGs recognize that all countries have problems to solve and contributions to make, subject to their abilities (UNDP, 2016).

Nigeria cannot afford to start over with the SDGs via numerous reform packages without taking into consideration the several challenges experienced under the MDGs. In the views of the UNDP, progress will only be significant enough to achieve the SDGs if leaders avoid the temptation to start from scratch (UNDP, 2016). Their challenge is to understand, prioritize and sustain what works and adjust initiatives that have stalled, while strengthening underlying capacities, mobilizing all possible resources and putting in motion the farsighted policies the SDGs require (UNDP, 2016).

It can well be argued that the MDGs necessitated the speed in which NEEDS emerged as a mechanism to reach out and address the plights of the vulnerable groups in Nigeria. However, lessons from the above clearly attest to the fact that beyond reforms or NEEDS, the populace needs to be educated via vigorous campaign to adjust and adapt to changing trends across the globe. This should especially focus on building trust among the communities and supporting reforms in the educational sector to meet up the challenge of time and make youths employable owing to weak educational systems and get rich temptations by the younger generation. NEEDS, SEEDs or LEEDs are supposed to be people oriented and lay the foundation for the MDGs, which was not from its inception. This is because the NEEDS is elitist and imposed on the populace.

Therefore, the populace was expected to buy in and do the right things to be able to get the desired results. The gains or failures of the MDGs is not far-fetched in this regard as most analysis of the outcomes of the Millennium Declaration are clear on the degree to which communities play a great role to its success or failure (UNDP, 2016; Kumar et. al. 2016; Stubbs, 2017). Therefore, going forward on the SDGs via local reforms or packages for development such as the NEEDS, Nigeria needs to do more differently in pushing for community acceptability and commitment in meeting up the Global Goals. Efforts must be made to ensure that building and maintaining peace is placed at the center of the global development agenda i.e. the SDGs. This is because a threat to national peace and stability by several youth groups and politicians is emerging as a major factor that is likely to mitigate the much-desired benefits of the Global Goals. The crisis such as the ones promoted by rebellious groups or insurgents such as the Boko Haram, IPOB, etc. has forced many Nigerians out of their comfort zone or homes and made them accidental refugees at huge cost to the state which affects development. The implications are that many benefits of the global efforts will be wasted or difficult to realize despite the commitments by the government.

Secondly, the data base in the country is poor and increasingly symbolized by questions of integrity. This implies that the measurement of objectives or indicators as were experienced in addressing development challenges across the country deserves a check as the nation moves into the struggle for the attainments of the Global Goals. What cannot be measured is problematic and affects strategy or implementation, with negative consequences on outcomes. Lastly, the NEEDS and MDGs suffered accountability setbacks that should serve as a major lesson to the attainments of the Global Goals in Nigeria and beyond. This challenge needs to be addressed in the pursuit of the attainments of reform programs or policies and SDGs by the government.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the reform policies in Nigeria over the years have failed to protect or improve the poor or vulnerable groups despite global agendas that seek to uplift the poor such as the MDGs. This is because everywhere in the country, the landscape is recognizable i.e. basic needs is the insidious legacy left behind by reform policies of past governments. The reforms such as the NEEDS should have focused more on critical strategy of attitudinal change, re-integration and peace building, affirmative action on improved welfare and sustainable fight against corruption; these, would have added the desired results for the MDGs and lay solid foundation for the SDGs. Therefore, the Global Goals for the year '2030' or SDGs will significantly benefit from governments thoughtful commitment to genuine democratic/economic practices in line with inclusiveness or adherence to positive societal values towards the realization of better life for the poor and vulnerable groups in Nigeria and beyond.

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