
IMPLEMENTING AFRICAN UNION CHARTER AND POVERTY REDUCTION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: The paper examines the implementation of African Union (A.U) Charter and its effects on poverty reduction in Nigeria. One of the aims of African Union is to coordinate efforts for the purpose of achieving "better life and higher standard of living" for the purpose of Africa. The main reason behind this was to make sure that poverty is reduced to the barest minimum and people of Nigerian state enjoy better life and good governance. However, till date, reducing poverty is the greatest challenge facing Nigeria as a country. Despite various efforts made, millions of people still struggle in absolute poverty. This becomes a problem and hence the study. The paper argues that the implementation of A.U. Charter, in the area of achieving better life and higher standards of living has not been effective. It examines in details the aspect of the Charter that deals with "better life and higher standard of living". It also examines NEPAD, MDGs and NEEDS as programmes used by A.U. to achieve the objective of poverty reduction. Theoretical postulations on the right approach to poverty alleviation were examined. Data collected through secondary sources were critically analyzed and findings show that Charter defect, corrupt practices, bad governance, poor economic policies, lack of commitment to poverty reduction programmes in Nigeria are major causes of sustained poverty. The paper therefore made appropriate recommendations, based on the above findings. Among them are effective monitoring of implementation of A.U. Charter, reduction of corrupt practices, commitment to implementing poverty eradication programmes and formulation of implementable economic policies in Nigeria.

Key words: African Union, Organization of African Union, Programme Implementation, Poverty, Poverty Reduction.

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Introduction

The concern for development was one of the aims behind the formation of Organization of Africa Unity (OAU) on the 25th May, 1963 by the then Heads of African States and Governments. After thirty-nine years of its existence, its performances were assessed especially in the area of achieving "better life for the people; it was observed that the Organization did not achieve much. On the 9th of July, 2002, the Organization was disbanded and replaced by its successor-African Union (A.U.). Though some improvements have been recorded by A.U., so much still remains to be done especially in the area of poverty reduction, which is one of the yearnings of the African people, for positive continental identity and functional unity. Since the end of the Second World War, the question of how to eradicate wide spread poverty prevalent in African countries has become one of the key issues in development policy debates. On the basis of the realization that development is real only if it enables people to fully realize their potentials, and that poverty constitutes a major hindrance to this, considerable efforts have been made over the years by governments, development institutions like the United Nations, World Bank and African Union (subsequently referred to as A.U), to understand the process by which poverty is generated in African and specifically Nigeria and thus develop strategies that are appropriate and effective in reducing it.

Although poverty is a global phenomenon, majority of the poor live in developing countries mainly in Africa (World Bank, 2003). According to United States Census Bureau (2010), International Data Base (2010), the world population is 6.8 billion and nine hundred and twenty six (926) million people out of this do not have enough to eat, ninety-eight percent of the world's undernourished people live in developing world. Also, about thirty percent of the world's hungry live in Africa (26 percent living in Sub-Saharan Africa while 4 percent live in near East and North Africa). See Table 1.

Table 1: World's Undernourished People

Region	Population Hungry (Million)	Percentage
Asia and the Pacific	578	62.41
Sub-Saharan Africa	239	25.82
Latin America and the Caribbean	53	5.72
Near East and North Africa	37	4.00
Developed Countries	19	2.05
Total	926	100

Source: United States Census Bureau 2010.

Like many other African countries, the issue of poverty and how to reduce it constitute critical challenges facing Nigeria today. As one of the Sub-Saharan African countries, Nigeria

is one of the world's most endowed nations, with abundant human and material resources. (Adekunle, 2009:35). These resources are located in all the states of the Federation and exist in commercial quantities (Ajibewa, 2006). Despite the country's great wealth in natural and human resources, poverty remains a major challenge to sustainable development.

African Union, during its third extra ordinary session on "employment and poverty reduction" between 8-9 September, 2004, in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, restated its resolve to "empower the poor and the vulnerable, particularly in the rural communities...by enhancing their capacities through education, skills and vocational training, health, access to financial resources, infrastructure, technology for sustainable poverty reduction, with a view to improving the living conditions of the people (A.U. 2004:4). A.U. has put in place programmes and projects in order to reduce poverty. Based on that, all the participating countries, Nigeria inclusive drew their respective poverty reduction programmes in order to reduce poverty to the barest minimum. Considerable efforts have been made in Nigeria over the years to resolve the issue of poverty. The problem, however, is that these efforts have yielded little results. This becomes a challenge facing Nigeria and hence this work. This paper therefore aims at examining how far the implementation of A.U. Charter, using New Partnership for Africa's Development, subsequently called NEPAD, has helped in reducing poverty in Nigeria.

The paper is organized into nine sections following this introduction. Section two discusses African Union Charter and its objectives. Section three dwells on African Union and poverty reduction programmes, objectives and strategies of NEPAD are discussed in section four, section five dwells on conceptual and theoretical framework. Incidence of poverty in Nigeria is treated in section six. Section seven dwells on MDGs, NEEDs and poverty reduction in Nigeria while section eight takes care of the factors militating against achieving A.U.s objective on poverty reduction in Nigeria. Conclusion and recommendations are treated in sections nine and ten, respectively.

African Union Charter and Its Objectives

African Union Charter was inspired by the noble ideals which guided the founding fathers of African continental organization and generations of Pan-Africanists in their determination to promote unity, solidarity, cohesion and cooperation among the peoples of Africa and African States (AU, 2002).

- The African Union in its Article 3 of the Constitutive Act (K) contains the objective that has to do with raising the living standards of African people. Thus, the objective, among others is "to promote cooperation in all fields of human activity to raise the living standards of African people". The idea of raising the living standards of African people has to do with packaging a comprehensive initiative, strategies in order to achieve poverty reduction among the nation states. Also, article 9(e) of the Act

empowers the Assembly to monitor the implementation of policy and decisions of the Union as well as ensure compliance by all member States (Constitutive Act of the Africa Union 2002:5).

African Union and Poverty Reduction Programmes

African Union (AU) replaced the OAU in 2002. In October 23rd, 2001, OAU came up with a New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). This is a vision and a strategic framework designed by African leaders for economic and social revival of Africa. The origin of NEPAD lies in the merger of the Millennium Partnership for the African Recovery Programme (MAP) and the OMEGA Plan for Africa by then President T. Mbeki of South Africa in conjunction with then President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria and President Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria, respectively. Out of this merger, the New African Initiative (NAI) was born. This was endorsed by the leaders of the G-8 countries on July 20th, 2001. The policy framework was finalized by the Heads of State and Government Implementation Committee (HSGIC) on 23rd October 2001 and NEPAD was formed. (Pila, 2005:34, Policy Analysis and Research Project, 2007:43).

Objectives of NEPAD

The objectives are:

- i. To eradicate poverty.
- ii. To place African countries, both individually and collectively on a path of sustainable growth and development.
- iii. To halt marginalization of Africa in the globalization process.
- iv. To enhance its full and beneficial integration into the global economy.
- v. To accelerate the empowerment of women (Geoff, H., Higgins, K., Sharma, B. 2009, Pila, 2005).

NEPAD Strategies

The NEPAD initiative has identified and pursued workable strategies for achieving the set objectives. This paper only identifies and discusses some of the strategies as they apply to objective one—to eradicate poverty. According to NEPAD document, the strategy employed for poverty reduction in Africa, is Millennium Development Goals (Pila, 2005). The MDGs came into existence in September 2000 at the United Nations Millennium Summit held in New York. It is aimed at reducing the number of people who lived on less than a dollar by the year 2015, by pursuing the following eight goals.

- Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger,
Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education,
Goal 3: Promote equality and empower women,

Goal 4: Reduce child mortality,

Goal 5: Improve maternal health,

Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDs, malaria and other diseases,

Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability and

Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development (FRN, 2006).

Again, this paper is interested in goal one. As a member of the United Nations, Nigeria keyed into the MDGs and subsequently produced a policy document called the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDs), to further see to the achievement of the NEPAD through MDGs. Specifically, NEEDs has the following objectives:-

- Wealth creation
- Employment generation
- Poverty reduction
- Value re-orientation.

The NEEDs as a national policy was intended to meet some goals of the MDGs and MDGs those of NEPAD. The common objective in all the above, is poverty reduction.

Conceptual Framework

Arguments exist among development actors and economists as to the appropriate definition of poverty and there is no general consensus on the issue. Generally, poverty is usually seen as connoting a situation in which the standard of living is considerably lower than an acceptable norm, the norm being either a certain level of income, expenditure, consumption, participation in community life, education etc.

Conceptually, three dominant views exist in the literature on the meaning of poverty (Oyeranti and Olayiwola, 2005). The first perspective considers poverty in terms of deprivation in some materials of well being which can be assessed in terms of money. Based on this, the World Bank (1996) defines poverty as the inability to attain a minimal standard of living while Ravallian and Bidani (1994) see it as a lack of command over basic consumption needs. Also, World Bank (2002) defines poverty as the lack of what is necessary for material well-being. In this case, the minimal standard of living or basic consumption needs connotes a certain level of income, consumption or expenditure.

The second view considers poverty as being multidimensional in nature entailing lack of adequate livelihood, assets and failure to achieve basic capabilities in nutrition, economic and social life etc. Recently, there has been the tendency to see poverty as a consequence of deprivation; lack of rights and entitlements to assets and resources, lack of skills, good health and socio/economic exclusion mechanisms, including lack of access to active involvement in community's life in all its ramifications. This view therefore posits that the conceptualization

of poverty covers both the primary basic needs (food, clothing, shelter) and the secondary basic needs (economic, social and cultural rights, liberty, freedom, property rights, access to productive assets and employment, lack of which leads to a state of want, powerlessness, helplessness, despair and inability to protect oneself against economic, social, cultural and political discrimination, deprivation and marginalization (Den, 1995).

A third view of poverty considers it as a phenomenon that is difficult to determine, objectively. This means, it is subjective in nature and has both physical and psychological dimensions that predispose its sufferers to hunger, violence, crime, insecurity, discrimination, victimization, political repression etc. This means that poverty is best described by the poor themselves and the communities in which they live. Based on the above discussions, poverty has both material and non-material dimensions.

Theoretical Framework

According to Obadan (1997), the approaches to poverty alleviation are grouped into two-economic growth and non-growth strategies.

- a. *The economic growth strategy*: This focuses on those macro and micro economic policies and programmes that would ensure rapid growth of the economy. It sees economic growth as crucial and driving force for job creation, income generation and poverty reduction.
- b. *The non-growth strategies*: This encompasses a wide variety of social policies and strategies aimed of human capital development, safety nets provision, basic social services; basic needs provision, rural development, employment and public work programmes, good governance, institution development.

A second perspective grouped poverty reduction strategies into four types (Ogwumike, 2002). This is based on the methodology adopted for poverty reduction. These are:-

- a. *Economic growth approach*: This focuses on ensuring growth especially through increased focus on human capital formation via education, health, nutrition and housing needs of the labour force.
- b. *Basic needs approach*: This emphasizes the provision of basic needs such as food, shelter, water, sanitation, health care, basic education etc.
- c. *Rural development approach*: This considers that poverty is mainly a rural phenomenon and that traditional measures of poverty reduction may not work in the rural areas because of its peculiarities. This approach therefore recommends a multi-dimensional, multi-pronged, integrated approach to poverty reduction through

development programmes that provide basic needs and create income generating opportunities for rural dwellers in general and the poor in particular.

- d. *Targeting Approach*: This approach directs poverty alleviation programmes to specific groups (women, the disabled, youths etc) within a society. Thus, it emphasizes social safety nets, micro credit provision, targeted food programmes etc.

The third perspective focuses on the mechanisms for implementation of poverty reduction efforts. Here, four approaches are examined.

- a. *Pro-poor growth approach*: This aims at ensuring macroeconomic policy that are favourable to the poor to ensure stability of the economy, conducive business climate, growth enhancing, technological innovation and improved output leading to increased earnings for the people especially the poor.
- b. *Right based approach*: This relies on empowerment and redistribution of political power. They emphasize issues relating to improved political participation, good governance, accountability and rule of law, skill enhancement, credit availability etc.
- c. *Resources based approach*. This focuses on redistribution of assets. They promote security against social risks like ill health, natural disasters and economic shocks; promotes social interaction and provides social and physical infrastructures. Emphasizes things like salaries, wage review, gender equality and institution of safety nets for the poor.
- d. *Sustainable livelihood approach*: This is people centered. It combines the features of all the previous approaches. It perceives the poor are imbued with agency and as such, poverty reduction programmes will only be effective if it complements rather than supplement their current livelihood strategies (Gester, 2000).

The above classifications show that economic growth is vital to poverty reduction. Growth generates the increasing resources that are necessary for increasing levels of consumption and well-being. Without growth, significant levels of living will be unsustainable.

However, the theoretical approach adopted here is that of Ogwumike, which based poverty reduction strategies on four types – economic growth, basic need, rural development and target approach. These are in line with basic strategies employ by A.U. towards alleviating poverty in Africa and specifically in Nigeria.

The Incidences of Poverty in Nigeria

Over the years, the quality of life of the average Nigerian citizen has progressively nose-dived. It is so endemic that people have started seeing it as part of their lot in life. For instance, Obadan and Odusola (2001), reveal how sharply the per capita income of Nigerians slipped from a height of over 1,280 dollars in 1980 to a low 250dollar in 1995. This and other studies generally paint a gloomy picture of a nation trapped in a vortex of abject and abnormal poverty and declining productivity. Available statistics indicate how precarious life has

become for the average Nigerian over the years, in the face of suffocating levels of poverty. For instance, Kayode and Oduola (2000) observe that Nigeria's per capita income of \$240 in 1990 was well below the average of over \$500 for Sub-Saharan Africa. The figure for Nigeria was well below those of Botswana (\$3210), Cote d'Ivoire (\$6,600), Egypt (\$1,080), South Africa (\$3,500), Mauritius (\$3,710). Obadan and Oduola (2008) affirm that Nigeria is even rated in terms of percentage of population, earning less than one dollar per day for randomly selected years.

The level of poverty in Nigeria becomes even more alarming when a critical look is taken at the general income of public servants. The situation the Nigerian workers have found themselves in wage administration has necessitated most of the corrupt practices in the country's public service. The severity of poverty in Nigeria is equally clear when other indicators of services and development are considered. The Vision 2010 Committee Report shows that, 50% of Nigerians live below the poverty line, only about 40% have access to safe drinking water, about 85% of the urban population live in single houses with more than 7 occupants on the average, only about 62% of Nigerians have access to primary health care, and most Nigerians take less than one-third of the minimum required protein and vitamin (Committees Report, 2010).

In Nigeria, poverty scourge has also shown a rising tendency in the past couple of decades, accounting for the nations low development indicators and its ranking alongside the poorest nations in the world (OXFAM, 2003). Majority of Nigeria's population live in poverty with insufficient income to cover minimum standards of food, water, shelter, medical care and school. Given the Nation's rich endowment with natural resources, its poverty profile represents a somber picture of a rich nation in decline, (OXFAM, 2003). Below is a table showing Nigeria's poverty indicators.

Table II: Selected Poverty Indicators in Nigeria

Variable	Value
Population living on less than \$1.00 per day	70%
Population living on less than \$ 2.00 per day	91%
Poverty Gap \$1.00 per day	35%
Poverty Gap \$2.00 per day	35%
Access to improved sanitation	59%
Access to improved water source	62%
Life expectancy (both sexes)	52years

Source: World Resources Institute, 2011

The above table shows Nigeria's high poverty head-count ratio, measured at 70 and 91 percent of the population living on less than \$1.00 per person per day and \$2.00 per person per day, respectively. It also reveals low levels of human capability with inadequate access to sanitation (59%) and portable drinking water (62%) as well as low life expectancy at birth (52 years).

The above analysis shows clearly that Nigerians are indeed very poor, whatever indices are used to measure the phenomenon. It therefore becomes a paradox in the sense that a country with rich natural and agricultural resources and poverty reduction programmes in the past, such as Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) and National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), have failed to improve the living standards of its citizens.

MDGs, NEEDs and Poverty Reduction in Nigeria: As said earlier, MDGs poverty reduction programme are contained in the NEEDS document. To reduce poverty, NEEDs has set the following broad targets:

- Increase average per capita consumption by at least 2 percent a year.
- Create about 7 million jobs by 2007.
- Increase immunization coverage to 60 percent by 2007.
- Increase the percentage of the population with access to safe drinking water to at least 70 per cent by 2007.
- Significantly increase school enrolment rates especially for girls and increase the adult literacy rate to at least 65 percent by 2007.
- Significantly improve access to sanitation. (NEEDS Document, 2004)

It is unfortunate to observe that the Nigerian government did not meet these targets as contained in the policy document. For instance, poverty in Nigeria became alarming in 2010 when the Millennium Development Goal (MDGs) report for the year, suggested that more than 50 percent of Nigerians live in chronic poverty (Nwankpa, 2012). The recent poverty profile report of the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) for 2010 corroborates this position. According to NBS (2010), the incidence of poverty in Nigeria worsened between 2004 and 2010. The report indicates that the number of Nigerians living below poverty line rose from 68.7 million to 112.5 million (63.7% rise in poverty incidence), during the period while the population rose from 139.2 million to 158.6 million (13.9% rise in population), over the same period. During the same period, Nigeria economy grew at an average annual growth rate in excess of 6.6 percent, making the country the 5th fastest growing economy in the world in 2010 at 7.87 percent real growth rate (NBS, 2010). It is therefore a contradiction that while Nigeria's income per capita has gone up, poverty rate is not improving (The Nation, 2013:12).

Also, statistics reveal that Nigerians (especially the poor) do not have access to safe drinking water, primary health care and the rate of unemployment is increasing on a daily basis

(Anger, 2010). This paints a bad picture of the failure of NEEDS as a poverty reduction policy. In line with the policy thrust of NEEDS, the government set up the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) to tackle the challenges of poverty. This programme, since its establishment has little or nothing to show for its existence. Today, NAPEP is enmeshed in controversy. This led the Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to move a motion to probe its activities since its creation (Guardian February, 4:2009).

The local governments in collaboration with their state governments are not helping matters, either. There are reported cases of misappropriation and diversion of budgetary allocations that are meant to efficiently tackle some of the challenges of poverty in the country; the revelation from the probe by the House Committee on Power and Steel into the National Integrated Power Project (NIPP) of the former President Obasanjo's administration, buttresses the fact that intentions on the pages of newspaper are not enough to tackle the scourge of poverty in the country. The probe revealed that over 10 billion US dollars was said to have been spent on the NIPP without any result to show for it (Tell Magazine, April 21, 2008).

Findings in 2004 reveal that poverty was more acute in rural areas in Nigeria and that some geo-political zones were particularly harder hit than others by poverty while unemployment kept souring with the worse affected age bracket being 13 – 25 years (MDGs, 2010). According to Muhammed (2006), Nigeria's democratic experience has neither served the purpose of political emancipation nor led to economic betterment of the citizens. This is especially in the face of endemic poverty, hunger, unemployment and progressive disempowerment of a large chunk of population.

According to Odion (2009), 70% of the over 140 million Nigerians currently live below the poverty line of one dollar per day. The Human Development Report (2010) on Nigeria showed that Human Development Index for Nigeria is 0.40, which gives the country a rank of 158th out of 177 countries. Life expectancy was 46.5 percent, ranking Nigeria as 165th and adult literacy rate (% ages 15 and above) was 69.1, ranking Nigeria as 104th out of 177. The report also revealed Human Poverty Index value of 37.3 percent for Nigeria which ranked the country as 80th among 108 developing countries for which the index were calculated (UNDP, 2010). Also, according to Bello (2007) about one million Nigerian children were given out for forced and exploitative labour of which 18 percent work in dangerous environments after school. This phenomenon is still very much prevalent today. Ten million Nigerian children of school age were reported to be out of school as shown by statistics on school enrolment released by UNICEF (2011).

So, NEPAD's actualization of its objective of poverty reduction through MDGs and NEEDs is still challenged by many factors.

Factors Militating against Achieving A.U.'s Objective on Poverty Reduction in Nigeria

Based on the foregoing discussion, it is now clear that the following factors have constituted challenges to achieving poverty alleviation in Nigeria.

- *Corruption and embezzlement:* This is manifest in the areas where government officials, staff of implementing organizations divert or appropriate funds set apart for execution of mapped out poverty reduction programmes.
- *Poor Leadership:* This is reflected in the area where government pays less attention to monitoring and evaluating projects.
- *Lack of Comprehensive National Poverty Reduction Policy:* The government has as today many poverty alleviation programmes. Some of them disjointed thereby being difficult to implement. Nigerian governments have over the years, many poverty alleviation programmes and projects. For instance, currently in Nigeria, there exist NAPEP, MDGs, NEEDs, NEPAD and Vision 2020.
- *Lack of Accurate Data for Research:* There are limited up to date data. This is necessary and will help to know the correct accurate data.
- *Rapid Population Growth:* Nigeria's population growth continues to be on the upward side. Population growth does not encourage poverty reduction.
- *Poor implementation of Programmes and Project:* In all the project assessments carried out, using the indicator, it became clear that implementations were compromised directly or indirectly, thereby making it impossible for the objectives to be achieved.

Conclusion

No problem receives greater global attention today like poverty. In Nigeria, poverty with its associated multiple deprivations, appear to be the greatest degrader of the economy amongst other contemporary socio-economic problem. Interestingly, the incidence and severity of poverty in Nigeria and African countries are among the most challenging in the world with serious economic and social consequences. It is against this background that A.U is determined to reduce poverty in its member states and specifically Nigeria, using NEPAD. This explains the initiative to embark on poverty alleviation using MDGs and NEEDs which share the same objective in the area of poverty reduction.

Data analyzed show that factors like corruption, poor governance, poor policy, poor project/programme implementation, lack of adequate data, population increase etc have combine to militate against achieving poverty reduction in Nigeria.

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Recommendations

An effective poverty reduction strategy in Nigeria must reflect its multidimensional nature, incorporating economic, social, cultural and political dimensions. So, in order to achieve

A.U. objective towards poverty reduction in Nigeria,

- i. There should be decisive commitment of all stakeholders—individuals, communities, governments, non-governmental organizations and relevant international agencies.
- ii. All arms of government must ensure commitment in the areas of fund allocation and disbursement for provision of social services that are beneficial to the poor.
- iii. Government and people of Nigeria must do everything possible to confront corrupt practices
- iv. Government should undertake a comprehensive study on the causes of poor implementation of development policies and strategies and develop a plan of action to address this critical and persistent problem.
- v. Good governance devoid of conflict is inevitable so that government should be able to concentrate and carry out its responsibility.
- vi. There is the need to fully integrate all the poverty reduction programmes, (MDGs, NEEDs and NEPAD) in the national development strategy and enhance monitoring thereof.
- vii. Finally, there is need to formulate and implement all inclusive policy that will promote transparency and accountability, overcome institutional constraints, promote pro-poor growth bring about structural change, toward reduction of poverty in Nigeria.

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