

POVERTY ALLEVIATION AND THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS: THE ROLE OF OBASANJO FARMS NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study examines poverty alleviation and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) within the context of private sector investment – Obasanjo Farms Nigeria (OFN). This was necessitated by the fact that private sector investment, especially in agricultural production can help in the realisation of the MDG (1), which is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger by the year 2015. The study is strengthened, indeed anchored on the theories of capitalism and development, which seek to demonstrate how it is possible for individual investors to maximize profits and states to promote the widest distribution of goods and services to attain advanced economic growth. In essence, the frameworks show that, while capitalism is characterised by competitive free market and motivated by profit within prevailing economic conditions, the government can cushion the 'inhuman' effects of capitalism by redistribution of wealth to the impoverished segment of the population. It relied on the use of primary and secondary sources of data to test the veracity of the hypotheses raised in the study. The former involved the distribution of questionnaires to a sample population of 50 people, which was analysed with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and the latter helped to sustain existing arguments in the work. Findings revealed that the attainment of MDG (1) is inconceivable under the current ambience of distortions in government policy on agricultural sector in Nigeria. To be sure, the disconnect between policy pronouncements and policy implementation on the part of the government will hinder the actualisation of the MDGs. To that effect, the study concludes that poverty alleviation will continue to elude the teeming population of Nigerians until this anomaly is reconciled. The study canvasses, among other things, that the government should create a climate for a robust public-private partnership in the country to engender growth, while maintaining its resolve to provide enabling economic environment.

Keywords: Poverty Alleviation, Millennium Development Goals, Obasanjo Farms Nigeria.

1. Introduction

The United Nations (UN) held a Millennium Summit on 6th-8th September 2000 in New York, where 189 UN members and the international organizations pledged to meet some development targets that were set forth in a Millennium Declaration. In the case of poverty reduction, the target consists in halving the proportion of the population that was living in extreme poverty as of 1990 and the deadline is in the year 2015 (UN, 2002:3).

There are eight time-bound goals which are further divided into 18 specific targets designed and supported to serve as a blueprint and plan of action by the world to provide tangible solutions in tackling extreme poverty. They are generally known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Bisong (2008) describes the MDGs as a development agenda set up by the world community which focuses on achieving certain minimum standards in human development in various areas of life, like the environment sustainability; gender equality, eradication of diseases and poverty reduction. The MDGs that the UN member countries agreed to at the Millennium Summit are (UN, 2000):

1. To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development

Every nation in the world in one way or the other suffers from poverty; it has affected the world as a whole in such a way that it cannot be eliminated, though efforts are being made for poverty to be alleviated. The overall poverty rates fell from 46 per cent in 1990 to 27 per cent in 2005 in developing regions of the world, and this progress is being sustained. This is despite setbacks caused by the 2008-09 economic downturn and the effects of the food and energy crises. However, even if these positive trends continue, in 2015, roughly 920 million people would still be living under the international poverty line of \$1.25 a day, as adjusted by the World Bank in 2008.

So far, attempts have been made by the Nigerian government to reduce poverty through different programmes like: Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), the Directorate of Foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructures (DFRRI); the Better Life/Family Support Programme (BLP/FSP); the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS); Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP); National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) and so on, but most of these programmes failed as a result of poor planning, design, formulation and implementation by the various administrations that floated them.

Indeed, poverty is an irreducible absolute core (Sen, 1983: 332). This depicts its complexity as a social and economic phenomenon, its dimensions and determinants are multiple and the most important goal in any human development is to achieve the basic needs of food, health and shelter, without its availability a man may become impoverished.

Furthermore, hunger is both a cause and an effect of poverty. It holds back economic growth and limits progress in reducing poverty. The negative economic impact of hunger is dramatic, with annual losses of at least 6–10 percent in labour productivity and hence in gross domestic product (UN, Millennium Project, 2005). Thus, it is believed that the rate of hunger could be halved by 2015 which is highly essential as a result of the fact that every man must eat to be able to do anything; no hungry individual can participate actively in doing any work, be it: academic, financial, industrial, agricultural and so on. This simply means that every man in order to obtain the economic means to sustain his life must work in order to eat.

From the ongoing, it is very imperative for us to note that it is only through agricultural production and investment that food can be processed to reduce hunger. This brings us to an understanding that agricultural development is an inevitable contribution that will quickly enhance the halving of hunger in Nigeria by 2015.

Agricultural development in the alleviation of poverty is viewed from the angle of industrialization with commensurate increase in growth of food and animal products that translate into a better per capita income and availability of social and economic infrastructural facilities. The categories of people involved in agricultural production are: Farmers, Private sectors, and the government. Agricultural production should involve a deliberate action on the part of the producers (farmers, private sector, government) of their own free will or by means of coercion to use land, labour, implements and annual inputs (owned, purchased, hired, obtained in credit or through customary arrangements, reciprocal or not) in a such a way that a greater or even smaller part of the crops produced or animals reared, are majorly for sale or consumption.

To be sure, agricultural production has played a tremendous role in the foundation of every nation's economy; Nigeria, for instance in 1960s engaged in the cultivation of palm nuts in the East, ground nuts in the North and cocoa in the West. Then, these cash crops were the main sources of foreign exchange and revenue generation for the country, but now it has become history. Hence, poverty in Nigeria has not only been linked to this colossal loss of the country's economic heritage, but has been blamed on other various causes including inadequate growth, high and growing unemployment, problems in the productive sector of the economy, widening incoming inequality, weak governance, social conflict, gender factors, environmental factors, and history of oil boom (NPC, 2004).

Consequently, the private sector involvement in the alleviation of poverty and attainment of the MDGs through the establishment of effective market relations, fostering competition, encouraging entrepreneurship, committing the Nigerian government to support enterprises in facilitation of trade, investment in technology and skills development has become inevitable.

Accordingly, the Obasanjo Farms Nigeria (OFN) Limited, which came into existence on October 8, 1979 and has consistently maintained quality production and distribution of agricultural products is a private agricultural outfit that could play a leading role in the alleviation of poverty and achievement of the MDGs through the production of food, creation of jobs, boosting of economic activities, especially through research and development.

In view of the above background, the study is divided into five sections. Following the introduction, the second segment reviews existing scholarly literatures on poverty. The third section presents a brief note on the history of poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria. Data presentation, analysis and discussion of findings are done in the fourth section. The fifth section concludes the paper and offers relevant policy recommendations.

2. Literature Review on Poverty

Poverty is an unresolved multi-national and multi-dimensional phenomenon that has drawn a lot of attention especially among nations and scholars in the world. On one hand, nations in their efforts to tackle the issue of poverty have discovered that it cannot be totally eradicated but can be alleviated, on the other hand; many scholars have made different attempts to define poverty. Thus, there is no universally accepted definition of poverty giving the complexities and ambiguities that characterise its meaning. Nonetheless, an attempt is made to conceptualise poverty in the context of this study.

World Bank (1990) defines poverty in terms of low consumption, poor health status and limited educational achievements and suggested three main requirements for poverty reduction: broad-based growth, human development and safety nets. It argues that poverty reduction efforts should rely heavily on labour-intensive growth and on broad provision of social services.

Ogwumike (1991:105) portrays “poverty as a situation of low or inadequate income to meet the basic needs of life”.

Aluko (1975:149) defines poverty as a lack of command over basic consumption needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. According to him, such lack of resources to meet the basic necessary means to satisfy ones needs incapacitates the individual in protecting himself against social, economic and political deprivations. In other words, he claims that where there is an adequate level of consumption which gives rise to sufficient food, clothing, and shelter but an individual cannot have the required resources to satisfy those basic needs, then poverty is evident.

Basic needs can be categorized as primary and secondary. Primary needs comprise of food, water, housing and shelter; while secondary needs consist of economic, social, cultural and political services that include health, education, security, liberty, freedom of expression and religion, access to productive employment, basic infrastructure, credits, and so on. This categorization of basic needs alludes to a broader definition of poverty and posits the phenomenon as a problem beyond lack of adequate income to meet the basic necessities of life (Ogwumike, 2001).

Poverty has also been defined as the inability to attain a minimum standard (World Bank, 1990). The report constructed two indices based on a minimum level of consumption in order to show the practical aspect of the concept. While the first index was a country-specific poverty line, the second was global, allowing cross-country comparisons (Walton, 1990).

The United Nations has introduced the use of such other indices as life expectancy, infant mortality rate, primary school enrolment ratio and number of persons per physician as factors to be taken in the measurement of poverty.

Poverty thus includes mismatch between capabilities, assets and entitlements; and lack of access to basic non-material needs such as good governance, participation, identity and self-esteem (Sen, 1983; Blackwood and Lynch, 1994; Streeten, 1999).

According to Townsend (1992), poverty depicts a “situation in which a given material means of sustenance, within a given society, is hardly enough for subsistence in that society”.

The ‘working poor’ is defined as those who are employed but live in households where individual members subsist on less than \$1.25 a day. Most of these workers are engaged in jobs that lack the social protection and safety nets that guard against times of low economic demand, and they are often unable to generate sufficient savings to offset hard times. (MDGs Report, 2010)

A concise meaning of poverty can also be seen as a living condition in which an entity is faced with economic, social, political, cultural, and environmental deprivations (Ajakaiye and Olomola, 1999). Poverty is the lack of material resources of certain duration and to such an extent that participation in normal activities and possession of amenities and living conditions become impossible or very limited (Townsend, 1992).

These problems of poverty we have examined in their various dimensions are not just peculiar to the developing world like Nigeria; they are also affecting developed nations alike. For instance, in 2001, an estimated 32.9 million people lived in poverty in the United States of America (*Time*, October 7, 2002, p.18). Poverty alleviation is topping the list of the MDGs developed from the World Conference organized by the United Nations in the past years, including the September 2000 UN Millennium Summit. MDGs Report indicates that:

Progress on poverty reduction is still being made, despite significant setbacks due to the 2008-2009 economic downturn, and food and energy crises. The developing world as a whole remains on track to achieve the poverty reduction target by 2015. The overall poverty rate is still expected to fall to 15 per cent by 2015, which translates to around 920 million people living under the international poverty line— half the number in 1990 (MDGs Report, 2010:6).

Perhaps, the above expectation is fundamentally anchored on a critical linkage between the private sector development and poverty reduction. Nicholas Stern, chief economist of the World Bank emphasized this linkage when he argued that “the investment climate in urban and rural areas, at both the national and state levels is the key to achieving sustained poverty reduction” (Stern, 2001).

According to Dollar and Kraay (2001), “A world free of poverty” is the mission of the World Bank; for its part, the International Finance Corporation (IFC) seeks to “promote private sector investment in developing countries, which will reduce poverty and improve people’s lives”. Multinational firms exploit their workers and their wages do not rise, even with an increase in demand for their work; globalization has made some people who are already rich even richer by keeping the poor in poverty.

There is a subsisting argument that growth driven by trade or investment gives western multinationals a major role in the MDGs of a country, and these big firms are interested only on profits and not in the wellbeing of the people. One critic, Gindin (2002:5) contended that, “where growth has come, it has come with a general improvement in social justice but costs in terms of internal democracy, human rights, and equality”. In the mid-fifties, A Latin American general, when asked about economic development in his country, responded with words that still capture so much of the present reality in third world “economic miracles” like Brazil and Mexico: “The economy is doing great, but the people in it aren’t” (cited in Gindin, 2002:7).

The high level of poverty in Nigeria is partly attributed to high rate of unemployment. In 1990 for instance, the national unemployment level was estimated at 3.2 per cent (CBN, 1991); subsequently, the rate started declining and it fell to as low as 1.8 per cent in 1995, but since 2000, the rate had risen to as high as 4.0 per cent. The decline during this period could actually be attributed to the roles of private sectors. A study in Nigeria carried by Onibokun et al (1996) reveals that the proportion of households living below poverty line in the four cities of Lagos, Ibadan, Kano and Onitsha were 63.7 percent, 62.1 percent, 35.02 percent and 87 percent, respectively.

In short, the Federal Office of Statistics (FOS) states that the basic causes of poverty in Nigeria have been identified to include:

inadequate access to employment opportunities for the poor; lack or inadequate access to assets such as land and capital by the poor; inadequate access to means of fostering rural development in poor regions; inadequate access to education, health, sanitation, and water services; the destruction of the natural resource endowments which has led to reduced productivity of agriculture, forestry and fisheries; inadequate access to assistance by those who are victims of transitory poverty such as droughts, floods, pests and wars; and inadequate involvement of the poor in design of development programmes. (FOS, 1999:2)

Conventionally, poverty is viewed in terms of insufficient income in securing the basic necessities of life; food (including water), clothing and shelter.

Nnebe, argued that it is common to regard poverty as a condition of: not having enough to eat; poor drinking water; poor nutrition; unfit housing; a high rate of infant mortality; low life expectancy; low educational opportunities; inadequate health care; lack of productive assets; lack of economic infrastructure (Nnebe, 2007:171-172).

These phenomena could lead to desperation that would make people restless and helpless until they become violent, engaging in robbery, theft, and other deviant human behaviour in the bid for survival. Poverty can force women into situations in which they become vulnerable to various forms of dangers, such as early

marriage, teenage pregnancy, health complications and so on. It is also a factor that could lead to high rate of infection of HIV/ AIDS.

A consultative Department for International Development (DFID) and World Bank Collaboration with the National Planning Commission described poverty in terms of lack of access to resources by individuals which could lead to a state of powerlessness, helplessness despair and inability to subsist and protect oneself against economic shocks, social, cultural and political discrimination and marginalization among others (cited in Enebe, 2007:174).

However, what is a necessity to one person is not uniformly a necessity to others. Needs may be relative to what is possible and are based on social definition and past experience (Sen, 1999).

According to Enebe (2007:172), "Inequality among social groups within the community as influenced by factors such as gender and age, are potent considerations in the expression of poverty". For instance, gender disparities in the sharing of economic power among others, are contributory factors to poverty of women who sometimes bear the household responsibilities.

The rigidity of socially ascribed gender roles and women's limited access to power, education, training and other productive resources are some of the structural causes of poverty.

Enebe (2007: 92) simply states that "poverty is the basic reason for a lack of food". Therefore, poverty could be reduced when efforts are made on how to grow food more reliably, how to harness energy, how to make water and sanitation safe, available and reliable and how employment could be created for all. The food distribution system in Nigeria remains largely poor, because of factors like crop seasonality, inadequate storage technology and facilities, inadequate transportation and system of distribution and inadequate market information and communication.

With the advent of oil exploration in Nigeria in 1950s, and the distribution of same in commercial quantities in the 1970s, agriculture has become neglected resulting to a sharp drop in agricultural production coupled with the lack of social services in the rural areas where the majority of those involved in agriculture live; plus a high rural-urban migration. This has further aggravated a high rate of unemployment and under-employment as most of these rural migrants lack the required skills and knowledge needed to work in the urban centers. Thus, they have resorted to doing menial jobs that could sustain their basic needs and the end result is absolute hunger and poverty. (Asaju, 2008:51).

Aminu (2006:17) has rightly noted when appraising the 2006 UN MDGs report on Africa that, "weak structures and corruption on the part of the politicians is a major limitation of policy implementation in Nigeria". Klugman (2002:555) provides a more direct analysis of the governance- poverty link. Examining growth in incomes for the poorest population of income earners, he discovered that good governance is progressive in that it is associated with larger growth rates in incomes for the poor than for the population overall. This infers that without good governance any nation becomes doomed, because the poor will continue to get poorer and the richer will continue to get richer - a fact evident in Nigeria.

Therefore, the structures, programmes and initiatives adopted by different governments in Nigeria, according to (Asaju, 2007) lack "professionalism and honesty on the part of government bureaucrats who are the major implementers of these programmes". It has been observed that those who captured the benefits of the initiatives were not the poor but the rich and powerful. Since these services are directed at a particular group rather than the entire population, the rationale for targeting in a national strategy for sustainable poverty reduction comprises three main elements, namely: promotion of sustained economic growth, delivery of social services to the poor and the use of transfers and social safety nets to protect poor and vulnerable groups (the young, old, handicapped people living in resource-poor areas) (World Bank 1990).

The most heartening and promising evidence shows that the MDGs could really work, the poor can escape from the condition of extreme deprivation, just like India, that was ridden with famine, and viewed as a hopeless case of suffering and synonymous with poverty, is now actively competing in the Information Technology (IT) (Sachs, 2011).

3. A Brief Note on Poverty Alleviation Programmes (PAP) in Nigeria

Various governments in Nigeria have made concerted efforts to reduce poverty by introducing and formulating policies geared towards that end. Among the first activities carried out by Nigerian civilian government after the military regimes and the UN General Assembly agreement on the MDGs, was the development of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), the establishment of the Universal Basic Education Programme (UBEP), the introduction of Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP), this programme was however stopped because of criticisms that the ruling party hijacked it and the money rarely got to those who actually needed it.

Consequently, government revisited the matter of poverty alleviation and came up with the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), the National Poverty Eradication Council (NAPEC) and National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). The government has also tried to reduce poverty in recent time through upward review of salaries and wages. For example, those who were poor, especially in the civil service and during Structural Adjustment Programme SAP, were gradually alleviated from poverty through this process. The government had done a lot in this direction by rationalizing some of the institutions involved.

The poverty reduction-related activities of the institutions under NAPEP have been classified into four (Obadan, 2001):

- (1) **Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES)** which deals with capacity acquisition, mandatory attachment, productivity improvement, credit delivery, technology development and enterprise promotion;
- (2) **Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS)** which deals with the provision of potable and irrigation water, transport (rural and urban), rural energy and power support;
- (3) **Social Welfare Service Scheme (SOWESS)** which deals with special education, primary healthcare services, establishment and maintenance of recreational centers, public awareness facilities, youth and student hostel development, environmental protection facilities, food security provisions, micro and macro credits delivery, rural telecommunications facilities, provision of mass transit, and maintenance culture; and
- (4) **Natural Resource Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS)** which deals with the harnessing of the agricultural, water, solid mineral resources, conservation of land and space (beaches, reclaimed land, etc) particularly for the convenient and effective utilisation by small-scale operators and the immediate community.

In addition, NEEDS is Nigeria's plan for prosperity, a government response to the challenges of development and it aims to lay a "solid foundation for sustainable poverty reduction, employment generation, wealth creation, and value reorientation" (NPC, 2004).

NEEDS is likewise about Nigerian people, catering for their basic needs, creating jobs, offering farmers improved irrigation, with the capacity to make the country to become Africa's largest economy and a major player in the global market. The plan recognizes the fact that about two-thirds Nigerians are poor, despite the natural endowments (crude oil, uranium, coal, etc). The vision was believed to have been driven from country's history, endowments, experience, and aspiration.

Ewhrujakpor, (2008) has emphasized that, "poverty in Nigeria is the direct consequence of decreased investments, output, income purchasing power and savings". He reviewed Poverty Alleviation programme, National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) and discovered that Nigeria seems to have obstacles and challenges in the pursuit of sustainable economic growth. He further argued that, "The implementation of government policies is left in the hands of people who betray the confidence of the masses".

In spite of all these activities, the incidence of extreme poverty has not yet changed. Nigerian economy is still characterized by unemployment, lack of infrastructural development, inadequate food, misuse of natural

resources, corruption and population growth. Table 3.1 below shows how far Nigerian government has been progressive in meeting the MDGs in theory than in practice, and how the mortality rate has risen among young women who are still illiterates; those that can incidentally contribute to economic growth. This indicates that over the years, the Federal Government has not taken any serious steps or measures to eradicate extreme poverty in Nigeria.

The gravity of the problems of poverty in the country demand a more precise, integrated and comprehensive approach to deliver commensurate results. In essence, what is required of the Nigerian government is a substantive shift in the level of urgency and commitment, being put in place to achieve the MDGs by 2015, which is less than 1 year from now. Policy reforms geared towards tackling poverty from the grass root are highly needed not just rhetorical postulations; actions are to be taken to encourage private partnership which will help eradicate extreme poverty through wealth creation.

Table 2:2 Social and Economic Measures of Poverty and Development in Nigeria

Nigerian Data and Statistics	2009
Population, total (millions)	154.7
Population, growth (annual %)	2.3
GDP (current US\$) (billions)	173.0
GDP per capita (current US\$)	1,118
GDP growth (annual %)	5.6
Life expectancy at birth, total (years)	47.9
Mortality rate, infant (per 1,000 live birth)	85.8
Literacy rate, youth female (% of female ages 15-24)	64.6
Prevalence of HIV, total (% of population ages 15-49)	3.1

Source: World Development Indicators Data Base, December 2010.

Poverty could be reduced through improving the living standard of the poor men, women and children, providing them with better income opportunities and social protection while empowering them to have a voice in the society (Moreno-Dodson, 2005:2).

For real opportunities to be created there is need to experiment, discover and learn from the policies and practices adopted by other developing nations like China and India that have collectively eradicated extreme poverty and hunger in their regions despite their vast population. The persistence of poverty in Nigeria will continue until the convoluted processes that characterise the poverty alleviation programmes are addressed by the government.

4. Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of Findings

This section presents the data gathered from field work and subjects the findings to critical analyses.

Table A: Do You Have knowledge of the MDGs?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
...	1	2.0
Yes	31	62.0
No	18	36.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2013.

This table shows whether the respondents have the knowledge of the MDGs. 2% gave no response, 62% said yes, while 36% said no. This means that, more than half of the respondents have an understanding of the MDGs.

Table B: If Yes, Rate the Level of Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Nigeria.

Ratings	Frequency	Percentage (%)
...	9	18.0
Very good	2	4.0
Good	1	2.0
Fair	20	40.0
Poor	7	14.0
Very poor	11	22.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2013.

This table shows the rating of the success and the failures of Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Nigeria. 18% have no knowledge of the MDGs and so did not respond, 4% rated them to be very good, 2% rated them to be good, 40% said they are fair, 7% said they are poor, and 22% rated them to be very poor. That means that the programmes and policy measures geared toward poverty alleviation in Nigeria have not been really successful in achieving their objectives.

Table C: Have You Benefited From Any of the Programmes?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
...	2	4.0
Yes	9	18.0
No	39	78.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2013.

From this table, it is clear that 4% did not respond, 18% said they have benefited from any of the programmes geared towards poverty alleviation, 78% have not benefited from any of such programmes. This shows that the Nigerian government has made greater efforts only in theory to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, and in practice nothing has really been done.

Table D: Indication the Poverty Alleviation Programme You Have Benefitted From

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
...	41	82.0
Scholarship	2	4.0
NAPEP	4	8.0
Operation Feed the Nation	1	2.0
Vocational Training	2	4.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2013.

The table shows the programmes that the respondents have benefitted from in the government's efforts to alleviate poverty. 82% did not indicate any programme which means that most of the respondents might not have benefited from any programme the government has established, 4% said they have benefited from a scholarship, 8% said they gained from National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), 2% benefited from Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) and 4% said they benefited from a vocational training.

Table E: Would Extreme Poverty and Hunger Be Eradicated in Nigeria by 2015?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
...	4	8.0
Yes	18	36.0
No	28	56.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2013.

From this table, it could be seen that 8% did not respond to the question, 36% responded positively by saying yes, then the remaining 56% responded negatively by saying no. This means that the unfolding events indicate that, extreme poverty and hunger would not be eradicated in Nigeria by 2015, except there is an immediate reversal of policies by the government

Table F: What Is The Main Cause of Poverty in Nigeria?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Laziness	5	10.0
Bad Governance	34	68.0
Unemployment	7	14.0
Environmental degradation	4	8.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2013.

In this table, it is clearly shown that 10% choose laziness as the main cause of poverty, 68% blamed it on bad governance, 14% choose unemployment, and 8% said it is due to environmental degradation. This means that all the respondents believe that laziness, bad governance, unemployment and environmental degradation are causes of poverty in Nigeria. For the fact that most of them (68%) chose bad governance as the main cause of poverty in Nigeria, it is an indictment on inept leadership.

Table G: How Can Extreme Poverty and Hunger Be Eradicated?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
...	2	4.0
By Research & Development in Agricultural Production	15	30.0
Government formulating & implementing effective PAP	14	28.0
Through creation of job opportunities	17	34.0
Others	2	4.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2013.

From this table, the respondents were required to provide the necessary solution to eradication of extreme poverty and hungry. 4% didn't respond to the question, 30% said by research and development in agricultural production, 28% said it is by government formulating and implementing effective Poverty Alleviation Programmes, 34% said through creation of job opportunities and 4% said others (provision of quality education, good roads and fixing power supply). This shows that all the above measures in varying degrees, can aid poverty and hunger eradication.

Table H: Would Obasanjo Farms Nigeria Limited, (OFN) Help to Alleviate Poverty in Nigeria?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	44	88.0
No	6	12.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2013.

From this table, in assessing whether OFN could help to alleviate poverty, 88% said yes and 12% said no. This shows that the choice of studying the role of OFN in poverty alleviation is timely.

Table I: What Initiative Have Been Created by OFN Towards Halving Hunger in Nigeria?

Initiatives	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Employment	14	28.0
Operation Feed the Nation	3	6.0
Agricultural production	17	34.0
Diversification of company	2	4.0
None	14	28.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2013.

In this particular table, the respondents were requested to specify the initiative created by OFN towards halving hunger and so for easy analysis the data gathered were categorized. 28% wrote down an initiative that would lead to employment, 6% wrote Operation Feed the Nation, 34% specified agricultural production, 4% specified diversification of company and 26% said none. This shows that OFN plays a vital role mainly in halving hunger through agricultural production.

Table J: In Your View, What Role Could Be Played By OFN in Poverty Alleviation?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
...	14	28.0
Payment on time	3	6.0
Increase of Salary	4	8.0
Provision of Staff Bus	2	4.0
Organizing Training Programmes	2	4.0
Motivating & giving incentives to workers	5	10.0
Avenue for students to do their I.T	1	2.0
Creation of more job opportunities	19	38.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2013.

From this table, every respondent was given an opportunity to give in their own opinion the role OFN could play in poverty alleviation. Their responses were categorized in the above format for easy analysis. 28% did not make use of that opportunity, 6% said that OFN should pay on time as an important role in poverty alleviation, 8% said that it should increase the salary of workers, 4% said the staff should be provided with a bus, another 4% said the farm should be organizing training programmes for the staff in order to develop their knowledge and skills, 10% said there should be motivation and giving of incentives to workers, 2% said that an avenue should be given for students to do their Industrial Training (I.T) in OFN, and the remaining 38% said that by OFN creating more job opportunities, poverty could be alleviated. This shows that, for OFN to play any important role in poverty alleviation and halving hunger, the afore mentioned areas should be considered and improved.

Table K: How Would You Rate Job Opportunities in OFN?

Ratings	Frequency	Percentage (%)
...	2	4.0
High	11	22.0
Moderate	31	62.0
Low	6	12.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2013.

From this table, 4% did not rate job opportunities in OFN, 22% rated it to be high, 62% rated it to be moderate, and the rest 12% rated it low. This rating means that OFN in a way has made considerable efforts to achieve full and productive employment for both male and female components of the population.

Table L: Over The Years Have There Been Improvements on Working Implements in OFN?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
...	4	8.0
Yes	42	84.0
No	4	8.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2013.

This question was asked in order to find out whether there have been improvements in working implements that saves time and increase productivity. 8% did not respond to this question, 84% said yes, while the remaining 8% said no. This shows that OFN appreciates the essence of research and development in the cultivation of crops and rearing of animals.

Table M: If Yes, In What Specific Areas?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
...	8	16.0
Poultry Farm	11	22.0
Feed Mill	4	8.0
Fishery	3	6.0
Hatchery	1	2.0
Processing Unit	13	26.0
Others	1	2.0
All of the Above	9	18.0
Total	50	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2013.

This table M is a continuation of the analysis of Table L. It shows that the same 16% combination of the respondents who did not respond and those who said No in the previous Table L did not identify any area of improvement in OFN. However, 22% said it's the Poultry Farm, 8% identified Feed Mill, 6% said it's in Fishery, 2% identified the Hatchery Unit, 26% said it's the Processing Unit, 2% identify others (Snail Rearing), and the remaining 18% said in all of the above. This simply means that over the years there have virtually been improvements on working implements in all areas of OFN operations.

4.1 Test of Hypotheses

This section would be examining the relationships among variables based on facts earlier stated in this study. The assumptions made are to be examined to see if there is any significant or insignificant relationship that exists among the variables. The level of significance of a hypothesis tests the probability of rejecting or accepting a null hypothesis. In order to test the hypotheses, the Chi-square method of statistical analysis is applied to enable us arrive at a correct and valid conclusion.

4.1.1 Hypothesis 1

H0: There is no significant relationship between poverty alleviation and the MDGs.

H1: There is a significant relationship between poverty alleviation and the MDGs.

Here our intent is to test the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between the appropriate combination of poverty alleviation and the MDGs, as this is illustrated in table below.

Table K: A Cross Tabulation of Responses based on the Knowledge of MDGs and the Rating of PAP in Nigeria.

Count

Knowledge of MDGs	Rating of PAP in Nigeria					Total
	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	Very poor	
0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Yes	0	2	1	17	6	31
NO	9	0	0	3	0	18
Total	9	2	1	20	7	50

Table V: Chi-Square Test 1

	Value	DF	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	32.590(a)	10	.000
Likelihood Ratio	36.434	10	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	5.906	1	.015
N of Valid Cases	50		

The Chi-Square value of 32.590 at 10 degree of freedom (DF) is not significant at 0.000 with a linear-by-linear association of 5.906. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected and so we accept that there is a significant relationship between poverty alleviation and the MDGs.

4.1.2: Hypothesis 2

H0: There is no relationship between poverty alleviation and agricultural production.

H1: There is a relationship between poverty alleviation and agricultural production.

The Chi-Square method of analysis will also be used to test hypothesis 2.

Table L: A Cross Tabulation of Responses Based on the Questions: Would Extreme Poverty and Hunger be eradicated in Nigeria by 2015? And would Obasanjo Farms Nigeria Limited, (OFN) help to Alleviate Poverty?

Count

	Would OFN Help to Alleviate Poverty		Total
	Yes	No	Yes
Extreme Poverty and Hunger Eradication by 2015	3	1	4
Yes	17	1	18
No	24	4	28
Total	44	6	50

Table M: Chi-Square Test 2

	Value	DF	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.487(a)	2	.476
Likelihood Ratio	1.503	2	.472
Linear-by-Linear Association	.007	1	.936
N of Valid Cases	50		

In this table, the Pearson Chi-Square has a value of 1.487, with 2 degree of freedom at 0.000 while the linear-by-linear association holds a value of 0.476. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected and we accept the conclusion that there is significant relationship between poverty alleviation and agricultural production. It is important to note that OFN has been established mainly for agricultural production validating its use for analysis in this study.

4.2 Discussion of Findings

From all the foregoing analysis, we have discovered that the government cannot employ every Nigerian but can create a stable environment that will engender research and investment in all the sectors especially the agricultural sector which is the foundation of every nation's economy.

In terms of programmes, the Federal Government is currently implementing a number of poverty reduction projects under the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP). A number of skill acquisition programmes and employment generating activities have been carried out under this initiative. For instance, (a) Youth Empowerment Scheme, (YES) (b) Rural infrastructural Development scheme, (RIDS) (c) Social Welfare services Scheme, (SOWESS) and so on (Nigeria- MDGs Report, 2004).

Even at that, the paradox is still staggering - the study shows that most of the programmes and policy measures geared toward poverty alleviation have been a total failure because most of the respondents do not know there are such programmes or policy measures and have not benefited from them (See Tables C & D).

In a way OFN plays and could still play a role in achieving the goal 1 of the MDGs which is to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger by 2015. Actually, the farm does not officially have any written agenda that is towards achieving the MDGs, it is basically driven by profit maximization but some of the activities being conducted are in alignment with helping the government in poverty alleviation. OFN since its establishment has been able to create employment for the people through its engagement in industrialized agricultural production, processing and distribution. However, having a job is one thing, and the job enabling an individual to achieve his or her basic needs is another thing.

Jaiyeola, (2009) reported on the 30th anniversary celebration of OFN that Obasanjo argued that “he felt fulfilled, in being able to have over 6,000 employees in his farms.... The number of jobs he has created through his farms far out-weighed that of the multi-national oil companies operating in the country”. This fact cannot be denied, giving the statistics available to prove the claim.

Despite all these laudable claims, it is revealed in the study that 6% of the 50 respondents complained about the farm not paying on time, 8% on increase in salary and another 10% suggested that workers should be motivated & given incentives (see Table J).

Moreover, OFN as a private sector driven operation has discovered the need for research and development in its agricultural production, processing and distribution. It was discovered in this study that, over the years there have been improvement and replacement of facilities in the farm; the farm does not make use of outdated farming implements and interestingly, there is a mechanic shop in the farm where machines are being serviced. There is what could be called a continuous cycle of agricultural production in the farm; that is to say that, all the units in OFN are dependent on one another for maximum delivery and efficient services.

To illustrate, there is a Poultry Farm, Hatchery Unit, Processing Unit, Feed Mill, Fishery, and so on. The birds are provided with food from the Feed Mill, they lay eggs that are incubated in the Hatchery, the birds are prepared for sales and consumption in the Processing Unit and the fish in the Fishery depend on the waste products of the birds as their own feed etc. All these decrease food poverty, improve job opportunities, increase agricultural outputs, and generate more income – an effective waste-to-wealth management procedures recorded in OFN.

The United Nations claims that Nigeria stands the chance of achieving only three of the eight MDGs, given the current realities in the country. According to the report, the goals are: **2nd goal** (achieve universal primary education), **7th goal** (ensure environmental sustainability), and **8th goal** (develop a global partnership for development) (cited in Onwuemenyi, 2008).The report further argued that, only sound economic and political governance could restore the country to the path of growth. Hence, the challenge is for Nigeria to arrest poverty through workable agricultural policies and private sector partnership instead of relying on international oil market which causes high volatility in domestic revenue of the government and in foreign exchange earnings.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

This study sought to bring to the front burner the role that private sector in agriculture can play to realise the MDG of poverty and hunger eradication by 2015. It achieved this objective by measuring the indices of poverty in Nigeria and testing the possibility of poverty alleviation by the Obasanjo Farms Nigeria (OFN), a leading private owned agricultural establishment in the country. It became evident however, that despite the laudable initiatives by the OFN to improve agricultural production in Nigeria, the company has no official document that ties its operations to the MDG (1). Furthermore, the policy measures and programmes adopted by the Nigerian government towards achieving the MDGs have not only been ineffective, but have been counter-productive. The situation is further exacerbated by the country's mono-cultural economic structures which have frustrated every effort at diversification of her economy, thus deepening the poverty crisis in the country. The study recommends a robust and intensive synchronization of policies by the private and public agricultural agencies to properly align with specific targets of the MDGs as a remedial measure to arrest the alarming poverty rate in Nigeria.

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