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Reform, Economic Growth, and the Poverty Question in Africa

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Abstract - In recent discussions on poverty in the developing world, particularly Africa, historically and politically, high economic growth rates have been acknowledged, both in globally and notably in Africa. Yet, experientially, economic growth and reforms have not translated into reducing the scourge of poverty suffered by nations in the global South. At the international level, regular revision of poverty reduction programmes with the intention of proffering imported solutions to African nations, without adequate acknowledgement of indigenous development paradigms and framework is rife. In view of the foregoing, this paper examines the paradox of crushing poverty in the midst of plenty and the vagary of importing solutions coupled with the intellectual aridity that has become endemic among present day academia, culminating in the absence of creative indigenous development thinking with pragmatic solutions in Africa.

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Reform, Economic Growth, and the Poverty Question in Africa

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Abstract - In recent discussions on poverty in the developing world, particularly Africa, historically and politically, high economic growth rates have been acknowledged, both in globally and notably in Africa. Yet, experientially, economic growth and reforms have not translated into reducing the scourge of poverty suffered by nations in the global South. At the international level, regular revision of poverty reduction programmes with the intention of proffering imported solutions to African nations, without adequate acknowledgement of indigenous development paradigms and framework is rife. In view of the foregoing, this paper examines the paradox of crushing poverty in the midst of plenty and the vagary of importing solutions coupled with the intellectual aridity that has become endemic among present day academia, culminating in the absence of creative indigenous development thinking with pragmatic solutions in Africa.

The paper argues that poverty in African countries require a change in strategies adopted by governments of nations in Africa which are usually a response to international agendas that alleviate poverty. Making direct assistance available to the very vulnerable poor who are not usually accessible to such programmes which are white elephant projects is important. The paper concludes that improving the access of the poor and vulnerable in terms of provision of basic social facilities and maximizing their human capital for productive use in the economy, based on indigenous frameworks which are region-specific, are imperatives to mitigating the scourge of poverty in many African countries.

I. INTRODUCTION

The issue of poverty presents a paradox in Nigeria. Though the country is rich in land, human, and natural resources the people are still considered to be poor. Per capita income today is still around the same level as in 1970, and in between, over US \$300 billion have been earned from the exploration of the country's oil resources. Despite this huge earnings the human development index released by UNDP recently showed that Nigeria is one of the poorest nations ahead of 27 other African countries in the world.

This issue of poverty is arguably one of the sharpest thorns in the heels of government throughout the world. There is hardly any government which comes into power without formally declaring a sort of program aimed at the alleviation of poverty in the country whether this programs are successful or not is a relative issue but the realization of the harmful consequences that comes with a rising poverty population is so daunting

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that nations all over the world have spent decades and billions in monetary terms trying to combat this menace called poverty in order to foster economic growth.

Although Nigeria is a richly endowed nation and is potentially one of the wealthiest states in the world (United Nations, 2001) as quoted by Igbiniedion and Igbatayo (2007). Despite Nigeria's considerable agricultural and mineral resources, it is ranked by the World Bank as a low-income country and among the 13 poorest countries in the world on the basis of per capital income. Propelled by the oil and gas industry, Nigeria has the second largest economy in Sub-Saharan Africa, after South Africa. Crude oil accounts for over 90 percent of Niger's foreign exchange earnings and 80 percent of government revenue, (EIA, 2005). Projections indicate that Nigeria's oil export revenues are expected to grow by 27 percent in 2005 to \$37.7 billion, and then rise another percent to \$41.1 billion in 2006. A member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Nigeria is the world's sixth largest crude oil exporter and is projected to export 2.2 million barrels of crude oil per day (bb1/d) in 2005.

However, decades of mismanagement accompanied by massive corruption, political instability and poor policies have paralyzed Nigeria's economy, manifesting in low growth and widespread impoverishment.

In Nigeria, the problem of poverty are multi-faceted among which are widespread outbreak of AIDS pandemic, lack of access to good health facilities, high infant mortality, lack of essential infrastructure, unemployment and underemployment, entrenched corruption and so many other vices.

However, this work is divided into four sections. Preceding the introduction is section two which is the review of related literatures and section three is the methodology and the analysis of empirical results. Finally, section four involves policy implications, recommendations and conclusion.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

a) *Definition and Concept of Poverty*

Given its multi-dimensional nature, poverty has been perceived using different criteria. It may be seen as a reflection of alarming defective in the economy as evidenced in the mass penury, pauperization and poor welfare condition off the citizenry of a particular economy. However, the search of the relevant literature

shows that there is no general consensus on any meaningful definition of poverty. Because poverty affects many aspects of the human condition, including physical, moral, and psychological, a concise and universally accepted definition is elusive. Different criteria have been used to conceptualize poverty. Most analyses or authors follow the conventional view of poverty as a result of insufficient income for securing basic goods and services. The concern here is with the individual's ability to subsist and to reproduce himself as well as the individual's ability to command resources to achieve them (Sen, 1981; Amis and Rakodi, 1994). Historically, this involves transition from a situation of where subsistence depends upon wage with which to purchase food.

Many other authors have conceptualized the poor as that portion of the population that is unable to meet the basic nutritional needs. Other views poverty in parts, as a function of education, health, life expectancy, child mortality, levels of consumption and expenditure, etc. Poverty is also related to entitlements (Sen 1983) which are taken to be the various bundles of goods and services over which one has command taking in consideration the means by which such goods are acquired (e.g. money, coupons, etc.) and the availability of the needed goods.

Poverty, like an elephant, is more easily recognized than defined (Abayode, 1975). However, it is very important to seek the definition concept no matter how crudely, at least to provide a focus by which we can determine the limits of our understanding. He went ahead to say that it is not altogether a semantic escapism or academic obscurant for economist to search for an alternative means of identifying poverty separating it from its opposite phenomenon of non-poverty."

In this vain, Galbraith (1969) explains that people are poverty stricken when their incomes, even if adequate for survival falls radically behind that of the community. They are degraded, for in the literal sense, they lie outside the grades or categories which the community regards as acceptable. He went further to describe the conditions explicitly when he explained that those affected by poverty have such limited and insufficient food, poor clothing as well as such painful and comparatively short life-span. Given the present "global shrinking" as a result of advancement, in electronic media, the world has become a group of communities within a global village and comparison of living standards of one community with another can be made just by watching television. When a country's living standard falls below an acceptable global standard, e.g. Nigeria, then such a country is poverty stricken in a Galbraith sense.

According to Obadan (1997), he defines poverty as a situation of low incomes and low consumption. This he said can be used in the

construction of the poverty line's values of income or consumption necessary to purchase the minimum standard of nutrition and other necessities of life. This is the case for Nigeria whose per capita income is low compared to other developed countries of the world, likewise the calorie intake. Accordingly, people are counted poor when their measured standard of living in terms of income and consumption is below the poverty line. However, poverty as earlier stated has both income and non-income dimensions which are usually intertwined. Based on this, Chambers (1995), sees poverty as the lack of physical necessities, assets, and income. It is a sub-set of the general condition of deprivation whose dimensions include poverty, social inferiority, physical weakness, isolation, vulnerability, seasonality, powerlessness, and humiliation. This is the case for the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, which has led to serious deprivation in the area.

In the same vein, the World Bank, (1996) defines the poor as those who are after illiterate, in poor health, and have short lifespan. They have no access to the basic necessities of life such as food, clothing, and decent shelter; are unable to meet social and economic obligations; they lack skills and gainful employment; have few, if any economic assets; and sometimes lack self-esteem. Very often, the poor lack the capacity to escape from th

which has about 75 percent of her population as poor, they lack the capacity to escape since the state of infrastructure is close to zero likewise the basic necessities of life.

Just as definitions of poverty are designed around the causes or visible attributes of poverty, Anyanwu (1997), conceptualizes poverty when presented a schema of poverty concept in a table below which is meant to illustrate the fundamental problems of determining the scale of poverty and deriving effective measures to alleviate it.

The first conceptualization as a consequence of the deficient of the person concerned cannot lead a life that is worthy of human dignity. It merely states that, because of the distribution structures in a society, certain economic subjects are disadvantaged to unacceptable extent. Thus relative poverty exists when the subjects under consideration are poor in relation to others who need to be more closely specified.

The second is based on individual circumstances. Hiffe (1987) distinguished between conjunctural poverty and structural poverty which are types of poverty based on individual circumstances. Conjunctural poverty is a temporary phenomenon into which normally self-sufficient individuals are thrown into crises while structural poverty is long-term and normally caused by individual circumstances. A distinction exists between structural poverty among the land-rich and the land-scarce societies. In land-scarce societies, the same groups are in poverty but in addition, they lack

access to land, employment, or employment at a sufficient level to provide for basic subsistence.

The third is based on microeconomic and macroeconomic perspectives. In microeconomic terms, poverty refers to a situation in which individual persons or households are not able to satisfy their basic needs or can satisfy them only to an inadequate degree. From a macroeconomic perspective, poverty exists when the average inhabitants of a country live below the minimum subsistence level or not far enough above it. Thus, while the macroeconomic concept of poverty is country-specific, the microeconomic aspect is concerned with particular individuals or households.

The fourth is based on location. Locationally and spatially, there is urban poverty and rural poverty. Urban slums, ghettos, and shanties are usually characterized by environmental degradation, inadequate welfare services and social deprivation, low per capita income, overcrowded accommodation, low level of education, low level of capital resources, and non-formal sources of capital for business. Rural poverty is characterized by poor material condition, low level of education or a high rate of illiteracy, lack of infrastructures, expensive technology, low levels of investment, high population growth rates, high levels of unemployment and underemployment, poor health and high out-migration (Rogers et al., 1998).

The fifth in this series is based on the nature of the society. Galbraith, (1958) classified this type of poverty into generalized poverty, island poverty, and care poverty. Generalized poverty refers to pervasive poverty which is common. Island poverty is that which exists in the midst of plenty such as Nigeria's, which the World Bank, (1996) considers a paradox. Case poverty is associated with affluent societies, is caused by peculiar circumstances of individual or families such as ill-health or disability.

III. DEVELOPMENT AND REFORM

Development and reform have become the most popular concepts in the intellectual and policy discourse on the progress of nations. The achievement of rapid development has emerged as the dominant aspiration of every developing nation. It has become the central pivot around which the policies and programmes of most countries revolve. In fact, the popularity and legitimacy of most governments in the world have come to depend increasingly on their ability to promote development. So powerful is the emotive appeal of the idea of development that no rational person can be seen to be openly opposed to it. This has, expectedly, transformed the concept of development into a powerful tool of propaganda, sloganeering, and deception in the hands of selfish ruling elites. The legitimacy seeking propaganda and gimmickry associated with development is something to be constantly borne in

mind in our analysis of national development policies and aspiration.

The resurgence of the neo-liberal economic doctrine in development thinking during the 1980's and the 1990's has similarly transformed the concept of "Reform" (alongside its synonyms such as "structural adjustment," "market forces," and "global competitiveness"), into the popular lexicons of contemporary discourse on development. The appeal of the reform slogan, especially since the collapse of the Soviet Union, lies in the ascendancy of the ideology of bourgeois economic liberalism as a superior alternative to the revolutionary socialist ideology of planned or command economies. Reform is packaged to connote a moderate, liberal, gradualist, and non-violent form of social engineering designed to remove all defects considered to be impediments to economic revival and betterment. It connotes flexibility or adjustment to emerging or changing realities as opposed to structural rigidity.

It also connotes a sort of pragmatic realism which is opposed to the ideological dogmatism of the past. This explains why the slogan of reform has become so easy to sell. It has become a powerful propaganda tool which governments have employed to wrap or to package all kinds of self-serving policies and agenda.

The problem with the twin concepts of "development" and "reform" is that they have been so idealized that they have become, in the minds of the people, a kind of "paradise:" everybody desires it; everybody has his own ideas about it; but nobody is exactly sure what it looks like. Just like paradise, nobody has a complete roadmap of the exact contours of the final destination and, worse still, nobody has an exact roadmap of how to get there. In situations like this, the easiest and the most natural tendency on the part of many is the copy the stereotyped models or roadmaps of other nations, especially the developed ones, without remembering that nobody's roadmap exactly fits the circumstances of the other. Therefore, every people and every nation must discover their own unique roadmap and follow it.

To discover in what direction (and probably in whose direction) Nigeria is heading it might be useful to begin this discussion with a brief examination of the historical and philosophical roots of the ideology of reform. This is what occupies us in the next section.

IV. INTELLECTUAL ROOTS OF THE REFORM IDEOLOGY

One of the lessons of historical experience is that development, as desirable as it may be, does not just happen. It is the product of the conscious or unconscious, planned or unplanned actions of people, organizations, and governments. It involves, among

other things, the efficient use or management of resources (both human and natural); the creation and effective utilization of capital and technology; and the evolution of an appropriate institutional framework within which progress and development are best attained. What has provoked endless debates and controversies among scholars and policy-makers are over the years is how resources can be most efficiently and sustainably utilized how capital can best be created, invested, and accumulated; how the creativity, initiatives, energies, and talents of the human population can best be fostered and managed; and what constitutes the most appropriate institutional framework for stimulating and coordinating the contributions of the key elements of the economic and social process.

The idea of sustained progress or improvement in the economic and human condition started crystallizing in Europe right from the period of the Renaissance. Regardless of whether the nomenclature used was "progress," "civilization," "modernization," or "development," a consensus had emerged that economic performance and the human condition in general could and should improve. It was on the question of how that consensus tended to break down.

Starting with Adam Smith came the intellectual seeds of the economic growth model. This was articulated in terms of the possibility of a rapid expansion in the productivity or wealth of nations made feasible by the market which he considered the most efficient resource management. Adam Smith located the impetus for rapid economic growth in the relentless drive by capitalists to maximize profit and accumulate capital. From Ricardo came a strong theoretical pillar revolving around the importance of international trade as a mainspring for national economic growth. With sundry contributions from different orthodox economists, the doctrine of economic growth gradually became established as the dominant approach for achieving long-term growth in productivity and aggregate national output.

By the 1940s and 1950s when development economics and sociology of development emerged as distinct intellectual subjects concerned with the poverty and underdevelopment of the emerging post-colonial nations of the Third World, the idea of development had become synonymous with economic growth. Under the dominant influence of the growth-and-modernization paradigm, the strategy of development in the Third World was reduced to the simplistic one of following the stages, growth processes and economic template of the advanced Western countries. Most of these countries were guided, aided, and cajoled into adopting a variety of pro-economic growth policies in the hope of achieving rapid development. While the growth orthodoxy remained quite strong, the overwhelming consensus on the primacy of the market as the driving

force for achieving economic growth suffered some setbacks.

The Keynesian revolution, the rise of the welfare state in Europe, and the increased significance of state planning made popular by the meteoric rise of the soviet union to super-power status all pointed to the fact that the state was a far more important player in the development process than the minimalist role assigned to it by the liberal, market-driven model of economic growth. The philosophy of development planning and the role of the state as a strategic player in the economy began to gain prominence in the 1960's and the 1970's especially in the Third World where the private sector was still very weak. The rise of dependency and neo-Marxist theories which located the source of the Third World's stagnation and underdevelopment in the exploitative and debilitating effects of Western imperialism/colonialism added extra impetus to the role of the state as a strategic economic player.

Confronted with Weak market institutions as well as a private sector which lacked the capital and managerial capacity to compete with foreign metropolitan capital, the state was seen as the best instrument available to the domestic ruling class to seize control of the "commanding heights" of the economy and to drive the political economy away from strangulating of hold imperialism control towards the path of national self-reliance. Thus was cemented the developmental state which was to become the dominant target of attack by the forces of liberal economic reform and globalization.

Reduced to its most simplistic terms, the liberal reform agenda takes its intellectual and policy origin from the controversy concerning the respective roles of the state versus the market as the prime movers of the development process. The proponents of economic reform have argued that free competition and the unrestrained reign of market forces would, in almost all circumstances, bring about a more optimal allocation of production factors, a more optimal distribution of commodities and a faster rate of economic growth than a regulated economy with administrative controls and central planning. Isolating state intervention as the single most important factor responsible for the stagnation and poor economic performance witnessed in most Third World countries, there has been a strong push, especially from the World Bank and the IMF, for developing countries to adopt a market-oriented reform agenda. Central to this agenda have been policies emphasizing;

- i. The downsizing of the role of the state via drastic cut-backs in government expenditure, reduced social spending, withdrawal of subsidies, retrenchment of public sector workers, etc;
- ii. The enthronement of the private sector as the dominant player in the economy, via privatization of

- state enterprises, dismantling of price and other controls, the promotion of private domestic and foreign investment, the deregulation of the economy etc; and
- iii. The liberalization of foreign trade via, among others the elimination of all forms of protectionism, currency devaluation, promotion of export-oriented economic activity and submission to all World Trades Organization (WTO) protocols. While there may be variations in exact policy details, the key elements (constituting the main economic framework) have remained constant.

It must quickly be added that the economic reform agenda has also come along with a definite political agenda (the promotion of liberal democracy) and a social agenda, which though not advocated as ferociously as the economic and political dimensions, would eventually lead to a total re-orientation of value systems along the lines of secular, entrepreneurial individualism. Liberal, multi-party democracy is seen as a necessary or accompanying political arm without which the economic reform agenda would hardly achieve its objectives. Consequently, the wind of democratization has also with the force of a tornado in Africa since the 1990's. The social agenda is being pushed a lot more subtly to avoid a social and cultural backlash.

V. THE DIVIDENDS OF REFORM

The reform agenda is being driven with the promise or the assurance of bounteous dividends which would accelerate economic growth, improve general economic prosperity for the population and ensure drastic reduction in existing levels of poverty. The gospel of reform is delivered with such unequivocal certainty or guarantee that any doubting Thomas is dismissed either as a saboteur or a victim of illusion or lack of vision.

One sure dividend of the reform ideology in Nigeria is the way it has impacted on the language of public discourse; everything is now being couched in terms of the dividends or the returns which every economic effort, political programme or social plan will yield for the public. It is now fashionable to talk about democratic dividends, or the dividends of tourism and cultural engineering, or even the, spiritual dividends of sponsoring people for pilgrimage. What better way is there to cultivate the capitalist spirit than to infuse the language of profit and dividends into the mindset of or the psyche of the people?

In trying to conceptualize the benefits or dividends of reform in all its ramifications, let us first focus on the fundamental objectives (stated and unstated) which the real apostles of the liberal reform agenda, the forces of global capitalism, are out to achieve. After this, we can then look at the benefits and consequences for individual countries in the Third World

and in Eastern Europe upon whom these reform policies have been imposed under different guises.

The first fundamental objective of the reform agenda is ideological. It is intended to achieve a fundamental paradigm shift in development thinking in favour of global capitalist development and penetration. Even though the reform agenda is presented as a package of pragmatic solutions to seemingly identifiable problems, distortions, policy mistakes and social dislocations seen here and there, they are collectively united by the ideology of foreclosing all other options in favour of global capitalist expansion.

Onimode (2003:48) has described structural adjustment and the liberal economic reform agenda as "the most enormous, ideologically driven, economic experiment ever devised," the principal aim of which is to use "orthodox, neo-classical, unfettered market economy doctrine to penetrate most of the Southern hemisphere and the African continent in particular."

According to Toyo (2001), the forces of global capitalism are employing six major doctrines to push through their agenda, viz: the doctrine of economic efficiency and growth, the doctrine of privatization, the dictum of democracy, the slogan of human rights, the maxim of poverty alleviation, and the motto of anti-corruption. All these are appealing, easy-to-sell clichés designed to whittle down actual understanding of and opposition to the underlying ideological mission of the reform agenda. The ascendancy of global capitalism is therefore, the first most fundamental dividend of the reform ideology.

The second real dividend of the reform agenda has been the centralization of the management of global capitalism in the hands of the club of the rich G-8 nations, under the watchful eyes of multilateral agencies such as the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO, whose primary responsibility has been to police and implement the rules that keep the system in place. The direct beneficiaries are the huge transnational corporations, mostly based in the G-8 nations, which are not accountable to any national government especially in the Third World, and which dominate virtually every sector of global industrial, commercial and financial activity (Isamah, 2002). The growth of national economies is by far secondary to the goal of global penetration by these corporations and the concentration of wealth and market power in the hands of these "real winners" of global economic reform.

What dividends have developing countries such as Nigeria really harvested from the reform, they have so religiously implemented? There is a broad consensus, of opinion that economic reforms have delivered much less in Africa, in terms of benefits, than the reform advocates have claimed. Even seen in terms of the narrow objective of growth maximization, the result in Nigeria has been disappointing. From the introduction of SAP in 1986 up to the end of the 1990's, overall GDP

growth continued to trail behind the population growth rate of 2.8% except between 1990 and 1992 as well in 1996 and 1997 when the country experienced marginal growth. This awful performance partly explains why the level of poverty rose from 28% in 1980 to 42.7% in 1992, and accelerated to 65.6% in 1996, and finally hit 70% in 1999 (Ajakaiye, 2003:283). Not only did the economy remain stagnant, SAP actually induced a sharp skewed distribution of income in favour of the rich.

According to Collier (2006:13), "by 2000 the distribution of income had become bimodal, something completely unique to Nigeria. There is a big group of poor people, another group of rich people, and very little in between" by way of a middle class. It is therefore not surprising, he concludes, that this "environment of rising inequality has produced one of the world's worst crime waves."

Economic growth has picked up substantially, averaging 3.75% between 1999 and 2003 as compared with 2.65% during the 1994 - 1998 periods. The GDP growth rate hit 6.15% in 2004 and has remained between 5 and 6.5% since then. Putting together all available growth indices Teriba (2006) has come to the conclusion that the Nigerian economy has finally entered into "the recovery mode," the lingering fear being how to sustain this level of growth. Despite this apparent growth, Nigeria remains a socially unstable, crime-infested and deeply divided country whose ruling elites have continued to cart abroad the stupendous wealth they have continued to make from oil. It is a country where the burden of crippling poverty is still very high. The present growth rate, even if distributional equity were to improve, is still too slow to make any serious dent on poverty. According to the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), "at the current 2.9 percent per annum population growth rate, the Nigerian economy needs to grow at close to 10 percent per annum in order to double income per capita in a decade and shrink the poverty rate" (CBN,1999:30).

VI. GRIEF-PRODUCING GROWTH AND THE POVERTY TRAP

The Nigerian dilemma concerning poverty cant be captured at two levels. The first is the paradox of crushing, unexpected poverty in the midst of plenty (World Bank, 1996), and the second is the tyranny of imported solutions and the implied intellectual aridity of an absence of creative, indigenous development thinking. One of the imported solutions foisted on Nigeria was the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) which dominated the policy environment in the 1980s and 1990s, followed by its re-baptized version called economic reform agenda from the year 2000 onwards.

In the words of Mimiko (2002:59), this policy regime

"represented for a great majority of Nigerians an assault on their prevailing standard of living. It neither provided the basis for sustainable growth nor poverty reduction. Rather, it dislocated the entire economy and compressed production."

Yet, it is still believed in many circles that the economic prosperity generated by this market-driven strategy of integration into global capitalism will one day, if the economy grows fast enough, bring about a massive reduction in poverty.

We should begin to question the kind of growth engineered by this liberal reform ideology. In Nigeria most of the growth has taken place in the crude oil sector with additional emphasis now shifting to solid minerals, agricultural exports and other exporter-oriented extractive activities while manufacturing, power, utilities and vital infrastructures remain comatose. The concern for poverty which is being pushed along with the reform agenda is itself a carrot brought in to spice the bitter pill of the past failures of SAP. Instead of the orthodoxy of a "trickle-down" of the benefits of growth, market-driven economic growth programmes have demonstrated an undeniable "trickle-up" tendency. Numerous studies have documented convincingly the detrimental social implications of various reform programmes, especially their tendency to by-pass the poor (see Wilson, Kanji & Braathen eds: 2001).

Towards the end of the 1980s, a poverty focus began to reappear in the international agenda for development, culminating in the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by United Nations in September, 2000. The World Bank in its revised reform programmes have included a strategy for addressing poverty in a direct manner, rather than through the orthodox macro-economic philosophy of trickle-down. Countries adopting economic reforms were tutored to adopting Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), ostensibly "prepared" by their national governments, whose aim was to ameliorate poverty.

According to Martinuessen [1999:302) the very elements of this poverty reduction agenda include;

- Helping the poor to make the most productive use of their most abundant asset, that is labour, through the provision of labour intensive technologies and other employment opportunities;
- Improving the poor's access to basic social services, including primary health care, family planning, nutrition, and primary education; and
- Providing direct assistance to the worst-off segment of the poor who cannot be reached through other programme elements.

In Nigeria and some other Third World countries, the poverty alleviation strategies adopted by governments have served more as expedient slogans of deception than as Well packaged action programmes designed to eliminate or reduce poverty from its roots.

All kinds of ridiculous forms of tokenism are awash in the political landscape in the name of poverty alleviation. For many politicians poverty alleviation has become a convenient platform for them to masquerade as “true friends” of the poor with a definite eye on the next election. As Che Guevara once said, those who give food and alms to the poor are worshipped as philanthropists and saints; those who ask why the masses are poor or have no food are branded as “communists” and subversives (Nkom, 2001).

Understanding who is poor, why he is poor, and what type of actions and reforms can liberate him from the structures of poverty is not what most poverty alleviation measures in Nigeria are known for. As far as poverty is concerned, lip service is the name of the genie both for the domestic ruling class as well as foreign collaborators and multilateral development agencies. For these agents of international capitalism, a population of around 80 million Nigerians trapped in poverty, with little or no purchasing

power is definitely not good for a World in search of ever-expanding markets. It would surely make economic sense to help or “aid” the upliftment of this large population out of desperate poverty so that they can buy more manufactured goods and other services. Poverty alleviation is therefore not a mere game of altruism. It is definitely driven by specific class or political objectives. As compelling and beneficial as poverty reduction may appear, it does need a powerful constituency to push or advocate the adoption of the right kind of policies by government. The palliative, “one-size-fits-all” type of policies pushed by multilateral development agencies such as the World Bank require fundamental rethinking.

VII. CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF THE REFORM AGENDA

This brings us to the last issue this brief discussion would like to consider. There is the assumption, inherent in the growth-and-modernization perspective and which has been carried forward into the reform ideology, that the same development blueprints (whether in poverty alleviation or in macroeconomic growth models) can be applied to different countries regardless of the norms, values, and historical circumstances of the recipient countries. While this may appear contrary to logic, it is a smart and silent strategy of quietly exporting and implanting in the recipient countries the values and cultural edifice supportive of the capitalist system.

As I have argued elsewhere (see Nkom, 2008), every strategy of development has a definite cultural component, whether recognised or not recognized, stated or not stated. Just as the modernization philosophy of the 1950s and 1960s came along with the in-built cultural baggage of westernization, so has global

capitalism come with a “global monoculture” of satellite technology, global consumer tastes and lifestyles, the football mania, the obsession with free choice, and secular value orientations. The Nigerian ruling elite has continued to live under the illusion that one can introduce the capitalist economic system without the accompanying cultural component.

Dazzled by the West’s material prosperity and technological greatness, Nigeria’s ruling elites have wallowed under the illusion that a selective transplant of certain elements of the western model into Nigerian soil will automatically confer the full benefits of western capitalism without the cultural foundation which nurtures the material and technological prosperity of western civilization. Notice that at the economic level, Nigerians have accepted the western preoccupation with achieving rapid growth but without the culture of productivity and efficiency which galvanizes it. We have borrowed the West’s profit motive and its acquisitive appetite for wealth accumulation but failed to imbibe the entrepreneurial and investment spirit of capitalism. We have imported all manners of western technological gadgets and machines but without embracing the culture of invention, laboratories and research which is the foundation for the West’s technological progress. We have continued to buy the most expensive watches but without imbibing the accompanying spirit of punctuality. As a result, “African time” still dominates our day-to-day activities despite the beautiful watches adorning our wrists. It is necessary to recognize the nature and direction of the cultural component of the new reform ideology. Its primary mission is to support global capitalist penetration by promoting in all countries the pattern of consumerism and tastes which favour global sales. It includes a gradual dismantling of local traditions, cultures and structures which will give people alternative lifestyles outside the control and profit calculations of global capitalism. This wave of global homogenization of cultures and lifestyles, via the apparatuses of modern communications and satellite technology as well as the global network of CNN, MTV, and other international media agencies, poses a fundamental threat to cultural diversities, different thought processes, and the accumulated wisdom of different peoples throughout the world. This explains why the issue of the tyranny of imported ideas and the collapse of indigenous problem-solving approaches should be taken with more seriousness.

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