

Poverty and exclusion in Nigeria: from basic needs to millennium development goals – the role of human rights law

Abstract

Poverty dominates discourse at national, regional and international levels. This is because poverty and extreme poverty are scary challenges to humanity. The poor and their identity signify breakdown, exclusion and threat. This paper traces the development literature from basic needs to the millennium development goals, highlighting the broken promises as a result of consistent disconnections and distortions in policies. This narrative showcases the lack of will to secure humanity. The poor and underperforming economics share a commonality - the absence of sincerity to push through the corridor of neglect that sustains the poverty virus. The discussion recommends absolute recourse to the holistic realization of human rights through a legal system that punishes disobedience by state and non state actors.

Keywords: Poverty, extreme poverty, millennium development, and human rights

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Igwe OW,¹ Ahiakwo RI,² Princewill Nengi O³

¹PhD, Associate Professor of Human Rights Law, Faculty of Law, Rivers State University, Nigeria

²LL.M (London), Retired Judges of the High Court of Rivers State, Ph.D Candidate at the Rivers State University, Nigeria

³BL, LL.B. Legal Consultant, Nigeria

Correspondence: Igwe OW, Ph.D, Associate Professor of Human Rights Law, Faculty of Law, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Nigeria, Email wllmsgw2@gmail.com

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Introduction

Most narratives on international development are of the consensus that tackling poverty and global inequality should be high priority. In the view of O' Connor¹ "poverty is a condition while development is a process or set of processes". The concept of development unlike poverty is a subject of debate and simmers with unclassified variables. Notwithstanding the disputations, all member countries of the United Nations have lent their support for Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that set 2015 as a target date for the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, the achievement of universal primary education, the elimination of gender discrimination at all educational levels, a large reduction in child and maternal mortality, a halt to and reversal of the spread of HIV/AIDs, malaria and other major diseases and a more determined pursuit of environmental sustainability. Particularly, Goal 8 calls for a global partnership for development and sets several targets relating to trade, debt and the needs of the poorest countries and populations. Rhetorically, multilateral and bilateral development agencies are now showing commitment by assessing their policies in terms of their impact on poverty alleviation. Poverty is intriguing as Bono and other celebrities are on a campaign to make poverty history. Sometimes, poverty is an affliction that only the victim can express. There are complexities in seeking its reduction, even sharp clashes among scholars and practitioners. It is therefore imperative to examine the differing conceptions of poverty, relating same to policy debates. It is desired to align domestic and global forces and institutions in such a manner that will reduce poverty.

The poverty reduction narrative

In the view of Alan Thomas,² 200years ago, most people were poor. This raises the concern about the relationship between poverty

and development. Could it be asserted that societies that reduced the level of poverty are those who are developed? The query is hinged on the position that poverty and the gap between the rich and poor have been arraigned in the context of a peculiar era in which "both population and per capita income came unstuck, soaring at rates never before seen or even imagined".³ The template became rising per capita income, which as an average, masks staggering disparities. As well brought out by Milanovic Branko:

Even as large numbers of Indians and Chinese were joining the consumer society, many in the two countries were left behind... while a part of the rich world was discussing techniques that would prolong the human life-span to over 100years, millions were dying from easily preventable diseases, lack of safe water, or infections... for those who found themselves born in wrong social group and of a wrong race or sex, a large part of the promise went unfulfilled⁴. For those from an economically rich background, it may be difficult to cause them to understand that poverty has ruthless consequences that only the victim knows how it feels. In that case, for us in Nigeria, it has gone beyond being merely a deep ethical concern. It has in some communities become a bottomed-out hopeless situation.

For Paul Streeten, the following presents four compelling reasons to reduce the monster of poverty:

- I. Poverty reduction can be a means of achieving higher productivity by contribution to a well-nourished, healthy, educated, skilled and alert labor force;
- II. It would lower fertility rates;
- III. It is good for the physical environments⁵ and

³Sachs J. *The end of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for our Time* (New York Penguin). 2005.

⁴Milanovic B. *Worlds Apart: Measuring International and Global Inequality* (Princeton, NJL Princeton University Press). 2005.

⁵It has been argued that the poor are both a cause – though less than the rich and the main victims of environmental degradation.

¹O'Connor A. "Poverty in Global terms". In: Desai v, R.B. Potter, eds., *The Companion to Development Studies*. (London Arnold). 2002;37–41.

²Allen Tim. "Taking culture seriously". In Tim Allen and Alan Thomas eds. *Poverty and Development in the 21st Century*. Revised ed. (Oxford and New York). 2002;443–466.

IV. It can contribute to a healthy civil society, democracy and greater social stability.⁶

One major challenge inhibiting poverty reduction is conceptual diversity – the poverty narratives are increasingly multi-dimensional. For some advocates, the rich have no responsibility for the poor since poor countries are solely blameworthy for wrong-headed economic policies and civil wars. Some others ridicule the poor for the damnation, being doomed by unfavorable geography and climate. Joining on the other side of this blame game is Milanovic.⁷ He challenged Leszok Balcerowicz⁸ when he asked: “Can one seriously argue that colonization or more recently, cold war had nothing to do with furthering civil unrest and adding to the misery of the poor countries”? On another tone, there is no war that has wreaking havoc in the poor countries that cannot be linked or related directly indirectly to external/foreign elements. In Nigeria for instance all agitations that are endangering peace are because of the political structures that were laid by the colonial masters. Their structures were primarily for the benefit of the invaders who not only dislodged the functional native way of living and livelihood but also outsourced the communal rhythm of the natives. Alien and unsuited laws were introduced to change the face of the communities. These devastated their social and economic life style, short changing habits, and turning them to a life of dependence.

Magid Rahnema in the same vein argues that poverty as a global construct is new, arising from the economization of life and the forced integration of vernacular societies into the world economy:

Following a consensus reached among the world elites on the diagnosis of the disease (under development and lack of income), as well as its care (economic and technological development), armies of experts, politicians, planners bureaucrats, socio-economists and even anthropologists, started acting as pauperologists... [who pursue] a universalist one – track, income – based and totally a cultural recipe for abstract ‘patients’.⁹ Abstract ‘patients’ indeed; it is absolutely unfair and demeaning to state that the western ‘gods’ should only be hunted by unpenetrated moralism expressed in a compulsive feel of ethnical burden. This burden should now be deconstructed and made over to bear legal obligations that searches the soul and empowers the victims that have become the wretched poor and dying. The West owes a legal obligation to either ‘develop’ the derided Third World, poor countries or face the consuming consequences of poverty. Before this contemporary era of development every society was not developed though they were in harmony with nature and now the ‘gains’ of development has not effectively spread out denying the choice of being undeveloped.

The value of aid in poverty reduction

The intent here is to assess how aid by donor countries may reduce (or ridicule the desire to reduce) poverty, but first a historical narrative: Aid in generic texture is subordinate – the classical expression of the ‘receivers’ hand underneath in beggarly recipient. It is a low

indulgence rooted in subjugation always with attached strings. In the spirit of newness at the dawn of the World War II, the western states were in uncommon agreement to ship little portions of the public expenditures into foreign aid for developing countries in Africa, Asia and the Americas: Every state developed its arm matrix that was enveloped in state interest though coated with the shield of relief of poverty. No legal obligatory strings were attached, as same may be withdrawn at the whim of the giver. Ebullience almost immediately becomes the project of development economists who concluded that poverty would decline in the wake of economic growth. Initially in the 1950s foreign aid was perceived as the major enhancers of growth in what was described as backward areas, later called developing or less developed countries. Intriguingly the economic recovery feat achieved by the Marshall Plan in the reconstruction of post war Europe was nothing compared to the no effect result of the pittance handed down to the Third World countries. It became self-compelling that technology and human capital were much more in need to drive the economies to a rebound. This prompted a new paradigm shift that was summarized by Rodinelli as:

- I. All societies could modernize and grow economically in a sequence of historically verified stages that had occurred in western nations over the previous two centuries.
- II. This process could be facilitated in poor countries through the transfer of resources and technologies from the industrialized nations and;
- III. Leaders of developing countries eager for growth and modernization would sacrifice other values constraining developmental efforts and with the help of western advisors, provide the political and moral support necessary to achieve these goals.¹⁰

Overcome by the desire to achieve real economic growth, the developing countries sought a template of a New International Economic Order (NIEO) that would attract multinational corporations and foster beneficial changes in the rules of international trade.

For Riddell,¹¹ academic and purposeful commentaries questioned the value of development assistance. The right saw it as a wasteful intervention in the market place that was undermining dynamism and for those on the left, it was a tool for capitalism to exploit the third world. The drift in development assistance slowed prominently in the 1970’s with attention paid to devising employment-generating and rural development schemes. Rober McNamara¹² gave this new shift a boost when argued that:

The basic problem of poverty and growth in the developing world can be stated very simply. The growth is not equitably reaching the poor... the data suggest that the decade of rapid growth has been accompanied by greater maldistribution of income in many developing countries and that the problem is most severe in the country side... one can conclude that policies aimed primarily at accelerating economic growth... have benefited mainly the upper 40percent of the population.¹³

⁶Those who are rattled by poverty lack capacity to engage in rebellion, although eventually gross inequality can contribute to social conflict and possibly to civil war.

⁷Ibid, 157.

⁸Former Head of the Bank of Poland.

⁹Rahnema M. “Poverty”. In wolfgang Sachs, ed. *The Development Dictionary*. (London: Zeb books). 1992;161–162.

¹⁰Rodinelli DA. *Development Administration and U.S. Foreign Aid Policy* (Boulder, Co: Lynne Rienner). 1987;22.

¹¹Riddell R. *Foreign Aid Reconsidered 1987* (London: James Curry).

¹²World bank President Address to his board of governors in Nairobi in 1973.

¹³*Op.cit.* 196–197.

Basic human needs

In 1876, the International Labor Organization in the world empowerment conference invigorated the Redistribution with Growth (RWG) in a more concrete direction by emphasizing the Basic Human Needs (BHN) approach to poverty alleviation. The process caught on and shortly, the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) (the club of rich country donors) adapted a statement that recognized the plight of one billion people in the world who, largely for want of productive employment, remain unable even to meet the most urgent needs of food, decent drinking water, shelter, health care and education¹⁴. The organization saw the ideas of BHN as “not primarily welfare or charity but productivity oriented, aiming at increasing the productive income of the poor”¹⁵. Among the efforts of BHN are to re-label ongoing activities, encouraging technocratic programming that viewed the poor as target groups rather than participants in developments, etc. The donor countries and agencies embraced development, rather than as mere welfare, but as small-scale community – based projects in the spheres of basic education and literacy, primary health care, and water purification. BHN was unfortunately not well received by government in aid – recipient countries. They perceived the project as complementary to aspirations for an NIEO. All attention directed at making official development assistance (ODA) conditional on meeting basic needs were resented and seen as distracting “attention from the problems connected with underdevelopment and... the industrialized countries” joint responsibility for them¹⁶. Within the World Bank interest was shown in BHN as a more thorough going alternative to RWG. But according to Ayres¹⁷, McNamara including other senior managers saw it as potentially too innovative. Notwithstanding this, BHN influenced the Banks World Development Report 1980, which sought to strategies on poverty and ‘human development issues’, defined as education health, nutrition and fertility. With the exit of McNamara and entrance of A.W. Clausen (the former CEO of the Bank of America), there occurred a paradigm shift. This new change introduced the magic of the market place, and the neo-liberal structural adjustment, which became known as the Washington consensus. The south was told to exit debt by exporting.

Millennium development goals (MDG's)

The search for end to poverty sustained setbacks with failing budgets, criticisms of waste, duplication and weakening public enthusiasm for ODA. On the sidelines, bilateral donor agencies shifted focus to rebuilding support and improving the quality of their declining resources. This gave vent to the OECD council in May 1996 to endorse – *Shaping the 21st century: The contribution of development co-operation*. The central theme was to call for a global effort to achieve goals that “seek to give real meaning to the improved quality of life that is the ultimate aim of sustainable development”. It was geared towards:

- I. Reduction by at least one-half the number of persons living in extreme poverty by 2015;

¹⁴OECD. 1977;149–151

¹⁵*Ibid*

¹⁶Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1991;18–19.

¹⁷Ayres, R. L. *Banking on the Poor: The World Bank and World Poverty* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press) 1983;83–89.

- II. Universal primary education in all countries by 2015;
- III. Elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005;
- IV. Reduction of infant and child mortality rates by two-thirds the 1990 level and of maternal mortality by three-fourths that level by 2015;
- V. Access through the primary health care system to reproduce health services for all individuals of appropriate ages no later than 2015; and
- VI. Creation of operational national strategies for sustainable development in all countries in 2005.

The agenda made claims that it was placing “stronger emphasis than ever on the developing country itself as the starting point for development corporation efforts”¹⁸. The aforesaid goals re-affirmed even if rhetorically the somewhat centrality of poverty reduction in ODA programming and they were incorporated into *We the peoples: the Role of the United Nations in the 21st Century*.¹⁹ This was subsequently followed by the millennium development goals that modified the OECD’s proposal by adding a specific goal to combat HIV/AIDs, malaria and other diseases and by dropping²⁰ the referral to reproductive health services.

The UN millennium development goals (MDGs)²¹

The eight goals, calling for global partnership was also new.²² The MDGs and 18 associated targets were approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2002.²³ Since 1999, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) have replaced the erstwhile structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s and 1990s. PRSP raises two rhetorical shifts:

- I. Poverty reduction as conceived is viewed as the dominant objective, and
- II. The plans are apparently jointly negotiated by donors and recipients in such a manner that the latter will take effective ownership of them. For Smillie:

Many... have been rushed; much of the content has been designed offshore; the participation of civil society has been weak...; and the commitment of donors... is patchy ... the approach could... be described as a ‘babysitter model’ rather than one genuinely based on ownership. Donors, usually in the form of the World Bank, hold the governments hand while it creates a suitable PRSP.²⁴

¹⁸See OECD. 1996;(5):12–28.

¹⁹United Nations 2000 which the former UN Secretary – General Kofi Annan Presented to the general Assembly in September, 2000.

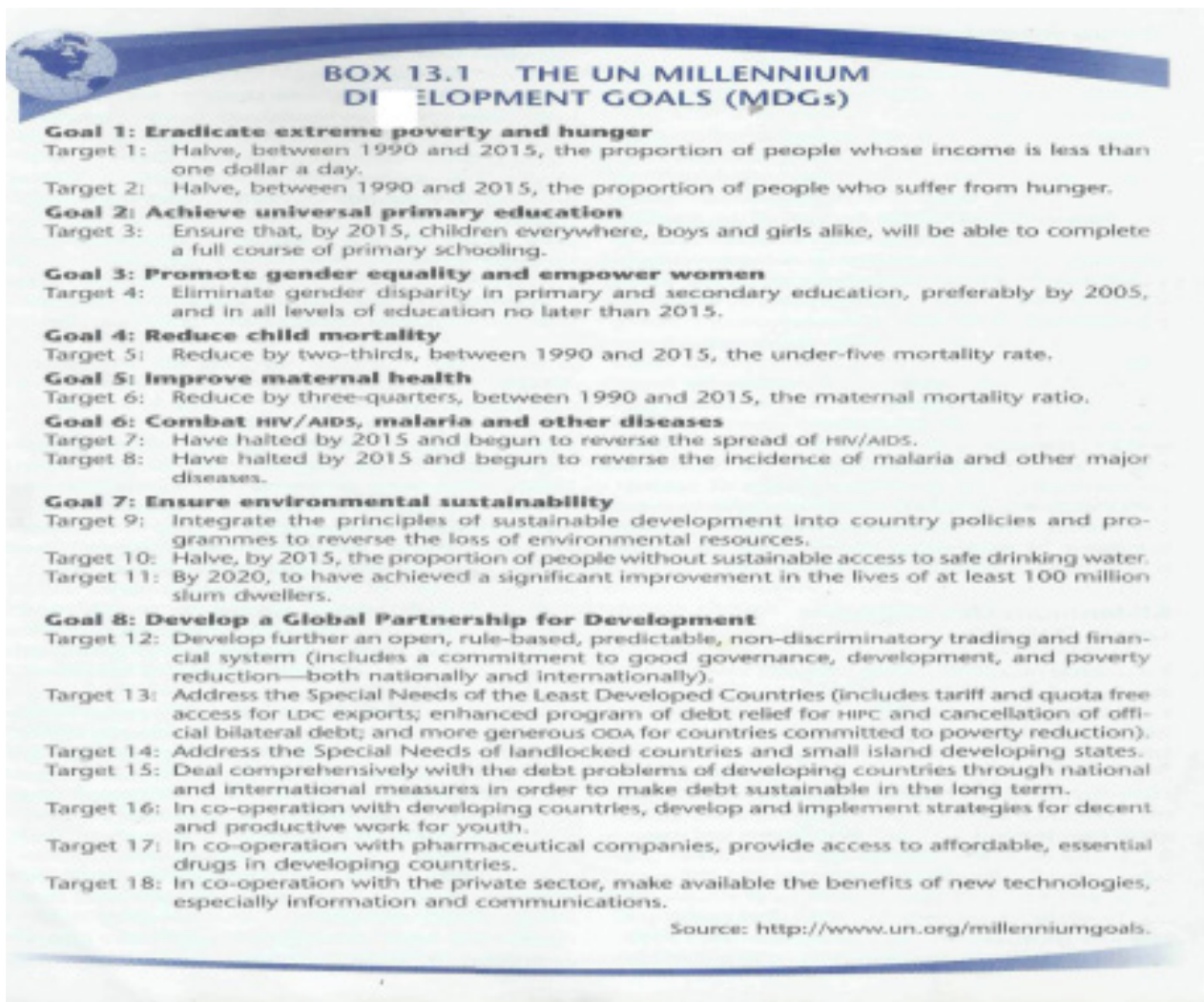
²⁰See Mehrotra S, E Delamonica. *Eliminating Human Poverty: Macroeconomic and Social Policies for equitable Growth*. London: Zeb Books. 2007;321–322.

²¹See Box 1 and Box 2

²²Op.cit.

²³See Box 1

²⁴Smillie, I. *Mastering the Machine Revisited: Poverty, Aid and Technology* (2000, Bourton on Dunsmore, Rugby, UK: ITDG); See also Smillie, I. *ODA: Options and Challenges for Canada*. Canadian Council for International cooperation. 2004;14.



Defining poverty in the context of human rights

Acknowledged, poverty reduction is a priority that needs more resources. In this context therefore, it is imperative that clarity is made of who are really the poor. This narrative may project the clarity. There is relative and absolute poverty. Relative poverty is gauged against societal standards, which invariably vary in accordance with countries, regions and demographic groups and of course these change with time. On the other hand, absolute poverty portrays some measuring line against a benchmark, including, food costs, caloric intake, or enablement induced by minimal education.²⁵ In the view of Sachs, there is a distinction between moderate and extreme poverty. People living in moderate poverty are able to meet their basic needs, but... [e]xtreme poverty means that households cannot meet basic needs for survival. They are chronically hungry, unable to access health care, lack the amenities of safe drinking water and sanitation, cannot afford education for some or all of the children and perhaps

²⁵White H. "The Measurement of Poverty": In: Desai V, Potter RB, eds. *The Companion to Development Studies* (London: Arnold). 2002;32–37.

lack rudimentary shelter – roof to keep the rain out of the hut, a chimney to remove the smoke from a cook stove – and basic articles of clothing such as shoes.²⁶ Articulating a rare description of poverty, Paul A. Haslam *et al*, said: "The very poor tend to be inarticulate, isolated, non-mobile and powerless. They are suspicious of change, because pursuing bad risks can lead to disaster".²⁷ The real pain is that disproportionate numbers are women, children and the elderly.²⁸ The World Bank has overtime used the benchmark,²⁹ as, below \$1 (360 naira) a day for extreme poverty and \$1 to \$2 a day for moderate poverty and measured in reference to Purchasing Power Parity (PPP). Extreme poverty exists in almost half of Africa (a generous estimate),

²⁶Sachs, J. *The end of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time*. (New York: Penguin) 2005;20.

²⁷Paul A. Haslam *et al*. *Introduction to International Development: Approaches, Actors and Issues* (Oxford university Press) 2009;240.

²⁸See Chambers, R. *Rural Development: Putting the Last First* (London: Longman) 1983;109–110, See also Riddell, R. *op cit*. 280–281.

²⁹Incorporated in the MDG target of halving extreme. 2015.

of course including Nigeria. Most Nigerians are not earning up to N720 per day, many are indeed earning less than N360 a day. In the perception of White, while poverty in common usage is synonymous with income shortage, development literature is focusing on multi-dimensionality.³⁰

In the case of extreme poverty, other non-income data have engaged to bring out the depth and persistence of extreme poverty. White further argues that deprivation in any sphere and others are hard to quantify—environmental quality, spiritual and political freedom—can equally be referred to as poverty.³¹ Drawing down further the description of poverty, Kanbur et al.,³² highlight a progressive expansion from the focus on command over market-purchased goods (income) to other dimensions such as longevity, literacy and healthiness and most recently to concerns with risk, vulnerability,

powerlessness and lack of voice. Stewart, Saith, and Harriss-White, push that the most prominent are: income/consumption (the basis of the dollar-a-day benchmark), capabilities, social exclusion and participatory assessment.³³ The human rights perspective is most and better addressed when the Human Poverty Index (HPI) is sourced.³⁴ In this wise, if human development circles, around expanding choices, poverty then means that opportunities and choices, most basic to human development are denied. A poor person is not at liberty to lead a long, healthy and creative life as he is denied access to a decent standard of living, freedom dignity, self-respect and the respect of others. The consequence of poverty is legion. A poor person suffers exclusion that is primarily discriminatory. The affliction of poverty compounds e.g. the poverty of choices and opportunities is often more excruciating than the poverty of income.

BOX 13.2 THE HUMAN POVERTY INDEX (HPI)

If human development is about enlarging choices, poverty means that opportunities and choices most basic to human development are denied. Thus, a person is not free to lead a long, healthy, and creative life and is denied access to a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity, self-respect, and the respect of others. From a human development perspective, poverty means more than the lack of what is necessary for material well-being.

For policy-makers, the poverty of choices and opportunities is often more relevant than the poverty of income. The poverty of choices focuses on the causes of poverty and leads directly to strategies of empowerment and other actions to enhance opportunities for everyone. Recognizing the poverty of choices and opportunities implies that poverty must be addressed in all its dimensions, not income alone.

The *Human Development Report 1997* introduced a human poverty index (HPI) in an attempt to bring together in a composite index the different features of deprivation in the quality of life to arrive at an aggregate judgment on the extent of poverty in a community.

The three indicators of the human poverty index (HPI)

Rather than measure poverty by income, the HPI uses indicators of the most basic dimensions of deprivation: a short life, lack of basic education, and lack of access to public and private resources. The HPI concentrates on the deprivation in the three essential elements of human life already reflected in the HDI: longevity, knowledge, and a decent standard of living. The HPI is derived separately for developing countries (HPI-1) and a group of select high-income OECD countries (HPI-2) to better reflect socio-economic differences and also the widely different measures of deprivation in the two groups.

- The first deprivation relates to survival: the likelihood of death at a relatively early age, represented by the probability of not surviving to ages 40 and 60 respectively for the HPI-1 and HPI-2.
- The second dimension relates to knowledge: being excluded from the world of reading and communication, measured by the percentage of adults who are illiterate.
- The third aspect relates to a decent standard of living: in particular, overall economic provisioning. For HPI-1 countries, the specific indicators are the percentage of people without access to health services and safe water and the percentage of malnourished children under five. It is measured by the unweighted average of the percentage of the population without access to safe water and the percentage of children who are underweight for their age. For the HPI-2, it is measured by the percentage of the population below the income poverty line (50 per cent of median household disposable income).

In addition to these three indicators, the HPI-2 also includes social exclusion, which is the fourth dimension of the HPI-2. It is represented by the rate of long-term unemployment.

Source: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/indices/hpi>.

Humanity everywhere is the same, humans belong to a family – the human family. What makes the members of this family distinct is primarily because they possess rights that are inalienable, rights that are inherent and innate. They come in full compliment to every individual member of the human family. Some of these rights find better expression in freedoms e.g. freedom from want. This for instance means the life of want that poverty imposes is an affront to the endowment of freedoms. Justice Kayode Esho of the Nigerian Supreme Court in the case of *Ransome Kuti v. A. G. of the Federation*, said that the rights are antecedent to the political society itself, insisting that it is a primary condition for civilized existence³⁵. It is doubtful if humanity can lay any claim to civilization when a chunk of its population is either poor or extremely poor. The role of law at the international, region and domestic levels is to secure the hope that human rights stands for, that is, the promise of a better more dignified life. The point is that the challenge of actually achieving human rights—securing their enjoyment—is of fundamental importance. The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria is not robust about providing for and protecting human rights. Chapter 4 of the said Constitution provides for “fundamental rights” and nowhere in the constitution is human rights used. This curious style is strange in a legal document of contemporary time. Poverty cannot be addressed in the absence of deep respect for human rights; the pretence of directive principles

³⁰White H. op.cit., 33.

³¹White, op.cit. 33.

³²Kanbur R, Squire L. “The evolution of thinking about poverty: Exploring the interactions. 1999.

³³See Box 2.

³⁴See Box 2.

³⁵NWLR (pt. 6). 1985;2(211):229–250.

of state policy in chapter 2 of the said Constitution is but a smoke screen, at most a glaring deceit. Even the attempt in domesticating the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights is illusionary, since its provisions cannot be realized outside the legal platform provided by the 1999 constitution.

Conclusion

At whatever level—be it local, regional, international – the dynamics are the same. The same process that produces the rich induces the poor. Poverty is induced by riches, the mechanism that elevates to riches downgrades to poverty. The rich are affluent because the poor are miserable. Human rights involve Civil and Political (CP) rights, Economic, Social and Cultural (ESC) rights and the Solidarity Rights (right to self-determination, right to development and to the environment, etc). These rights matter; they should be realized for humanity to be sustained. Poverty anywhere is poverty everywhere since it is a sign of denial, discrimination, debasement and affliction. ESC rights matter as much as the CP rights and they are only realized holistically. Nigeria and other states in her category should seek to realize the ESC rights through binding legal instrumentation that compels government and her agencies to respect the rights. Accountability can only be properly measured if it is directed towards respect for human rights. After all, the rich are not safe in the community of extremely poor neighbors. This is evident.

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None.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest.