

# UNINTENDED BENEFITS OF MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS TO A CULTURALLY EMBEDDED RURAL ECONOMY

*S. O. Olubiyo*

Department of Economics, Federal University of Agriculture,  
Abeokuta, Nigeria

*A. E. Obayelu*

Department of Agricultural Economics and Farm Management,  
Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, Nigeria

*A. Oriade*

Department of Marketing, Innovation, Leisure and Enterprise  
University of Wolverhampton Business School,  
University of Wolverhampton, UK

---

## Abstract

The burden of local traditions to free people from the vagaries of poverty and economic doldrums in rural areas cannot be overemphasised. Traditional practices succinctly formed the premix of behaviour that exerts influence on decision making process on average rural entrepreneurs on many issues that borders on their means of livelihood. There is nothing untoward about reliance on traditions in decision making except it hinders independent thinking, savages enterprising behaviour and retrogresses or dampens enthusiasm to recognise and embrace ideas that have the potentials to improve quality of life and wellbeing. These phenomena are symptoms of adherence to culture and traditions that are common occurrence in rural societies. The successful governments have failed to accede to the yearning of the people instead they turned them to object of political games until the advent of the United Nation declarations that enforced a change in the game plan to address the seemingly problems of poverty ravaging the world. This paper therefore highlights the cultural and traditional web that impinged on rural entrepreneurs and the changes the millennium development goals (MDGs) have brought to governance and the potentials to rejuvenate rural economy.

---

**Keywords:** Rural, entrepreneurs, MDGs, culture, poverty

## **Introduction**

The three key players to the attainment of MDGs (United Nations, governments and target audience) have distinct but not mutually exclusive roles to play for a nation to achieve the targets and objectives of the MDGs. The UN through which the MDGs declaration was introduced has the main role to sensitise, encourage and monitor government's commitment to addressing the salient issues as contained in the declaration. Each government is expected to harness its domestic resources to fashion out appropriate strategies and programmes and implement same to meet the targets enunciated in the declaration. The main focal point of MDGs is to address the enormous problems of poverty that is ridden high worldwide and the associated malaise such as hunger, diseases, unnecessary deaths, misery and social ills that the global world has to contend with. The people that suffer from poverty and invariably the target audience are the first group to face the social poverty malaise, they are often handicapped to perform their roles to recognise, reciprocate and align with efforts to address issues that surround their deplorable conditions. It is important that salient issues are addressed to safeguard the target population to wholesomely embrace programmes that are introduced to uplift their poverty status. One of the issues that exerts influence on rural people decisions and which is of interest to this paper is the prevalence of culture and tradition that permeate rural areas and hinders people from being themselves and their abilities to make choices (Jutting and Morrison, 2005; UNDP, 2004). Culture and traditions embodied a checklist of behavioural norms, values and practices that adherents rigidly uphold and there are sanctions for violations but no specific reward for obedience. The homogeneity and close knit in relationships in rural communities and the associated information asymmetry automatically positioned the people in a good stead to spy on each other to identify culprits and enforce compliance. The fear of reprimand can constrain behaviour and entrepreneurial activities that an individual could explore.

In many parts of the country culture and traditions or religious sentiments have not been particularly helpful in liberating the rural population from economic doldrums because they piloted lives within a narrow confine that hinders self determination, creative and innovative thinking. This myopic and sometimes regressive inclination and prescription even preclude progressive decisions to control the type and level of association and economic activities adherents can engage. Therefore, strict adherence to local traditions has restricted and discouraged many rural people from embracing and exploring new ideas or participated on projects and programmes that have the potential to break the common cycle of poverty, diseases and backwardness that is widespread in rural areas. Cultural obligations have been reported as the main reason many people in

the northern part of the country rejected the polio vaccines that control the virus that ravaged, killed and impaired many people in the area (Nasir et al 2014; Kaufmann and Feldbaum, 2009; Olusanya, 2004; Kapp, 2004) and the reluctance of farmers to adopt new farming practices (Asiedu-Darko, 2014). Similarly, some religious groups have forbid followers from investing in certain line of business or use information technology gadgets (TV, radio, phone or internet). These invariably impeded information flows and networking that springboard enterprising behaviour. Even Boko-haram, one of the world deadliest insurgents has ‘no to western education’ as its slogan or mission statement thereby forbidding people from attending schools or to source for knowledge and skills to empower or awaken the consciousness of the people for self determination and sustainable development (Okeshola, 2011).

In many rural communities some people are chosen or imposed themselves as the custodian of the instruments of power to interpret and enforce the tenets of a belief. It is these cultural-religious chauvinists that created fears in the minds of their followers and hoodwinked them to believe such indulgence invariably blocks unfettered access to deities and prevent recalcitrant to make heaven. The inherent obsession to traditions and religious practices and the overriding influence of the enforcers of the tenets of faiths have contributed to prolong the manacles of ignorance and poverty on the people and erode people’s consciousness to self-determination and the confidence to demonstrate their enterprising acumen and appreciation of quality of life. Although the limit impose by culture and religion has not erased the quest for survival among rural people as they continued to face life challenges within the limit imposed by their immediate environment. This can be seen through the myriads of enterprises that adorned rural areas except that they worth little to support and guarantee quality life. However, the burden of local traditions on entrepreneurial activities and the need to free people from poverty and economic doldrums in rural areas cannot be overemphasised. To this end this paper highlights the cultural and traditional web that impinged on rural entrepreneurs and the changes the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has brought to governance and the potentials to rejuvenate rural economy. The paper also contributes to the existing literature in development economics and provide information to rural development policy makers in the formulation of appropriate policies. It will also serve as a guide to practicing and prospective countries and researchers who may investigate further into the subject matter.

### **Government Insensitive to the Plights of Rural People**

The government has not been pragmatic in penetrating the rural areas to enlighten the people of the need to think outside the confine of traditional

norms and practices that have retrogressive effects on their living conditions. Despite, many government officials and agents are products of the cultural divides that encompass the country, many still capitalised on the weakness and ignorance among their people to manipulate, collude among themselves and sometimes with their unsuspecting kindred to deny the majority of the people the benefits of the common wealth which they later appropriate for their personal and selfish gains. The rural people have been forced to content with the perpetual neglect, abuse and deceits from successive governments while their lives continued to revolve round the dictate of culture and traditions and the limit imposed by their rudimentary subsistence production activities. The continued failure and neglect of the government to accede to the plight of rural population in the provision of essential social infrastructures like electricity, roads, supply of clean and safe water, communication networks (vital elements in poverty reduction and the gateway to link the people to outside world to embrace new ideas that would the break or dilute the grip of culture on the people) rural and remote areas of the country are becoming havens to many cultural and religious ideologies that are hitherto outside the known traditions checklist. The ensued propagators of these ideologies are hiding under the traditions and religion induced ignorance and gullibility of the poor people to coordinate, perpetuate and launch their network of attacks far beyond the rural perimeters. Successive government policies have always followed the prescription terrain and discountenanced the peculiar problems and attributes of the target beneficiaries causing many policies to fail to impact on the lives of the people. Traditions and religion sentiments exert great influence on the life of the poor such that they easily felt disenfranchised and forced to develop indifferent attitudes to programmes that are contrary to their beliefs. The recent scramble for concerted efforts and urgency for actions to rejuvenate rural life, enhance the quality of life and stem the disastrous incursion of insurgents in rural areas are proofs of government insensitive to the plights of the large proportion of its population. Over 67 per cent of the total population are classified as poor (UN, 2014a; Imoudu, 2012; NBS, 2011) majority of them lives in rural areas where they have no access to aforementioned basic social amenities. This may be a major explanation why many rural dwellers will continue to be engrained in social and cultural beliefs that have confined them to perpetual cycle of poverty. Government does not need to enforce a spontaneous change in the ways of life of the people to impact on them but through participatory, demonstration and enlightenment programmes the people could feel the importance of embracing the ideal of cultural shift.

### **Millennium Development Goals a prologue to revitalise Rural Areas**

It can be argued that the global and collective actions of the United Nations declaration that culminated in the acclaimed MDGs came a bit too late or long overdue. The goals to halve poverty and combat child and maternal mortality, diseases infestations and improve school enrolment and gender equality among others (UN, 2000) should have taken effect long before the millennium launch probably alongside the treaty on weapon non-proliferation, general agreement on tariffs and trade (GATT), chatters on human rights or the introduction of the international criminal court among others instead of the indiscrete support the United Nations gave the stringent and anti-people policies of the structural reforms that international monetary fund and World Bank imposed on poor and needy countries in the mid-1980s. These actions have no doubt worsened the poverty status of majority of developing countries (Ssekendi 2013; Noorbakhsh and Noorbakhsh, 2006; Ogbimi, 2005; Bond and Dor, 2003; Bortot, 2000). It can be inferred from Riddell (1992) that these actions were series of unfair, uncaring and inefficient fiscal and monetary adjustment majority of developing sub-Saharan African countries ever experienced. Although, the millennium declaration may be late to arrive, it is a landmark of global recognition of the dysfunction in governance and government insensitive and apathy to the myriads of poor people that lives mostly in rural areas or clutched in slums in urban and peri-urban areas. The UN declaration is unprecedented recognition of the plight of the poor people and a launch pad for global action to assess, evaluate, stimulate and orientate government programmes toward the underprivileged and vulnerable people in the societies.

Aside from the stated goals and target set, the millennium development framework has exerted tremendous impact on various governments. MDGs have brought government closer to the people in terms of government recognition, promptness of action and involvement of stakeholders on programmes for rural areas. Similarly, MDGs has exposed government's inaction, failures and irresponsibility to the people and challenged them to redress the dysfunction, lackadaisical and lopsided programmes to the people. The MDGs has abridged the cultural divide in governance because efforts to attain the set goals have formed the pedestal for rural policy formulation and implementation. The MDGs targets are the standards of measures of policy success and their impacts on quality of life and wellbeing of the people. The number of countries that signed up to the UN declaration has heightened competition and rivalry between governments and the ensued global comparison in retrospect has forced governments to recognise their inefficiency and strive assiduously to effect a positive change in the quality of lives of the citizenry. The UN declaration has exposed the weakness among national policies and the fear of comparison of MDGs performance among nations has sprang many governments to action, in a

view to either outperform other nations or receive commendation for meeting a comparative number of targets.

Since the September 2000 declaration of the global action to reduce world poverty and enhance the living conditions of the usually undocumented segment of the population (the poor, neglected, unprivileged, disadvantaged and vulnerable people) nations have been seen to devising strategies to achieve the goals (UN, 2005; UN, 2014). Majority of the people that suffers poverty, malnutrition, untimely death and without access to healthcare, clean and safe water and education lives in rural areas and many of the strategies to achieve the MDGs revolves round provision of essential social amenities such as clean, safe water and sanitary facilities (WHO, 2006) and facilitating access to productive inputs. In another instance Kanagawa and Nakata (2008) cited improved electricity as one of the amenities that can reduce poverty and ameliorate living conditions of poor people living in rural settings. These strategies when fully implemented invariably would rejuvenate rural economy, catalyse latent enterprising activities of rural areas and open rural entrepreneurs to the outside world (IFAD, 2003). However, few months to the expiration of the fifteenth year benchmark for countries to attain these goals or take stock and reflect on their performance many governments are still exploring strategies to adopt to meet the targets (UN, 2014, Zamba, 2014). One should not be surprised if the United Nations mandated each country to adopt the MDGs as a rolling policy documents into the sustainable development phase so as to enable countries to align their programmes to appropriately address the excruciating poverty issues that confront their citizenry.

### **An Excerpt on an MDG Implementation Strategy in Nigeria**

Nigeria is whirling in the tide of globalisation and the ensued global searchlight on it to meet minimum standard on human development has forced the government to lean backward on programmes to meeting the minimum MDGs targets. The MDGs reports (UN, 2014) showed the government has changed its tenuous attitude toward the poor through the introduction of programmes that recognised and are adaptable to the peculiar circumstances of the people. The approach that stood out for much of the MDGs successes and relevant to this paper is government recourse to involve the stakeholders or target audience in the design and implementation of programmes to address peculiar needs. The government has adopted the participatory or inward looking approach in many of the rural poverty alleviation and quality of life enhancement programmes and it has spurred many rural people to embrace activities that could confront their debilitating living conditions, revitalize their enterprising behaviour and overall ways of life.

The government mandated its officials and agents (Kumolu, 2014) to go back to their constituent grass roots (slums, villages, towns and cities) to enlighten, sensitise and enlist the people on programmes to uplift their living conditions and well being. The respective officials, agents or representatives were mandated to organise meetings and enlighten the people on government programmes in their indigenous languages, customs and traditions peculiar to their localities. It was anticipated if the people could hear messages on government programme from their kiths or tribesmen such programmes would gain the trust of the people and arouse interest to embrace and participate on programmes, which may allow them to gradually trade-off their age long practices for improved living conditions. Similar strategists were adopted to involve social groups and professionals that have contacts with the focal or target groups of the MDGs like the journalist initiatives for youth empowerment (JIYE) to widen access to employment opportunities among the youths, and the midwifery service scheme (MSS) and the integrated maternal, newborn and child health Strategy (IMNCHS) both to widen access to health and reduce infant and maternal mortality. The model MDG village is an approach that has contributed immensely to the success so far recorded by the government in the pursuit of the MDGs (Awolala and Akingbade, 2013; Chovwen et al., 2009). The success of the millennium village has proved government limitations in achieving the MDGs without the involvement of target audience on programmes design and implementation. Although the ideas of millennium village cannot be purely attributed to Nigeria government but the villagers (participants on the projects) were provided with necessary materials, training and skills on relevant decision making within the confine of the village. The people are literarily detached from the precinct of their culture and tradition to environment where they are encouraged to make independent decisions that will gradually participants into the routines outlined for attainment of MDG. The people have embraced the ideals of the model village and the living conditions are reported to have improved. Although the country is still lagging behind in many of the indicators of MDG performance but the positive change in government attitudes to the poor and under privilege in the society gives hope of better outcome in the near future and the searchlight of the UN must continued to beam on the country as the world moved to the sustainable development goals.

## **Conclusion**

Nigeria has been acknowledged a leader across MDG because of the relative success it has recorded towards the set targets in reducing poverty, reduction in communicable diseases, infant and maternal mortality, increasing access to improved drinking water sources, improving the lives of

slum dwellers and achieving gender parity in primary school enrolment (Zamba, 2014; PM News, 2013). The government has tried to address the problems enunciated in the MDGs except the insurgency that is drawing back the wheel of progress most especially in the north eastern part of the country. It may be difficult for Nigeria to fully meet the MDGs targets in 2015 but the awareness by the government to live up to its responsibilities, the glowing global watch and comparison between countries have instilled the sense of commitment on the government to accede to the yearning and debilitating conditions of the large percent of its population. Similarly, the experimental ideal of the millennium villages has brought governance and its programmes to the people and demonstrates the inherent benefits of government and stakeholder partnerships. The potentials for replications of such villages are in effect great successes of MDGs that are signal of better future for the rural entrepreneurs. The millennium village has proved that if the rural areas are provided with necessary supports and social amenities and productive inputs the rural people may gradually be relieved of the shackles and malaise of poverty and its multiplier effect that pervade rural and slum areas and open up these areas to wider economy.

### **References:**

- Asiedu – Darko. E. (2014). Farmers’ Perception on Agricultural Technologies A Case of Some Improved Crop Varieties in Ghana Agriculture. *Forestry and Fisheries* 3(1): 13-16
- Awolala D. O. and P. B. Akingbade (2013). Success Stories on Millennium Development Goals: Alleviating Poverty in Ikaram and Pampaida Millennium Villages, Nigeria. *Global Journal of Economic and Social Development* 3(1): 21-32
- Bond P. And G. Dor (2003). Neoliberalism and Poverty reduction Strategies in Africa. Discussion paper for the Regional Network for Equity and Health in Southern Africa (EQUINET) March, 2003.
- Bortot, F. (2000). An Alternative Views on Asian Crisis and IMF’S Role: Notes on Fundamentals and Expectations. *Savings and Development* No2: 177-218
- Chovwen, A; Orebiyi O; Savadogo A; Afere T. and E. Afolaya (2009). Achieving the Millennium Development Goals: An Assessment of Water and Sanitation Intervention of the Ikaram Millennium Village, Nigeria. *Researcher*, 1 (2) <http://www.sciencepub.net>
- IFAD (2003). Achieving the Millennium Development Goals by Enabling the Rural Poor to Overcome their Poverty. Panel Paper for the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Session of IFAD’s Governing Council.



- Imoudu, E. C. (2012). The Millennium Development Goals and Nigeria's Development: A Preliminary Insight. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Vol. 2 No. 5*; 89-95
- Jutting. J. and C. Morrison (2005). Changing Social Institutions to Improve Status of Women in Developing Countries OECD Policy Brief No. 27
- Kanagawa, M. and Nakata, T. (2008). *Assessment of access to electricity and the socio-economic impacts in rural areas of developing countries. Energy Policy, 36(6), 2016-2029.*
- Kapp, C. (2004). Nigerian States again Boycott Polio-vaccination Drive. Muslim officials have rejected assurances that the polio vaccine is safe--leaving Africa on the brink of re-infection. *Lancet* 28; 363 (9410):709.
- Kaufmann, J.R, Feldbaum H. (2009). *Diplomacy and the polio immunization boycott in Northern Nigeria. Health Aff (Millwood). 28(4):1091-101*
- Kumolu, C. (2014). Beyond the Pass Marks, the Story of MDGs in Nigeria. Nigerian Vanguard May 7 2014
- Nasir, S.G.; Aliyu, G.; Ya'u, I.; Gadanya, M. and Mohammad, M. (2014). From Intense Rejection to Advocacy: How Muslim Clerics Were Engaged in a Polio Eradication Initiative in Northern Nigeria. *PLoS Med* 11(8): e1001687. 7.
- National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2011). 100m Nigerian Destitute Facts: A Jet And Bulletproof Bloated Government In Total Disconnect. Retrieved online on 22 April, 2015 from <http://ends.ng/100m-nigerian-destitute-facts-a-jet-and-bulletproof-bloated-government-in-total-disconnect/>
- Noorbakhsh, F., and Noorbakhsh, S. (2006) The effects of compliance with structural adjustment programmes on human development in Sub-Saharan Africa. In: Paloni, A. and Zanardi, M. (eds.) *The IMF, World Bank and Policy Reform*. Series: Routledge studies in development economics (48). Routledge: London, pp. 145-161.
- Ogbimi, F. E. (2001). Structural Adjustment is the Wrong Policy, *African Technology Forum*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology,8 (1).
- Okeshola, B. F (2011). Challenges Facing the Realisation of Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) in Education Reforms in Nigeria. *European Scientific Journal* 8(3):201-205
- Olusanya, B. (2004). Polio-vaccination boycott in Nigeria. *Lancet*, 5; 363(9424):1912.
- PM News (2013). UN, African Leaders Hail Nigeria MDGs Efforts. Retrieved online on the 20 April, 2015 at <http://www.pmnewsnigeria.com/2013/09/27/un-african-leaders-hail-nigeria-mdgs-efforts/>
- Riddell, J. B. (1992). Things fall apart again: structural adjustment programmes in sub-Saharan Africa. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 30(01), 53-68.

Ssekandi, F. (2013). *Adjusting Structural Adjustment: The Role of the Structural Adjustment Program in Africa's Development*; Tabisa Walwema, pp 1-37

United Nations (2000), *United Nations Millennium Declaration, General Assembly Resolution 55/2 of 8th September 2000*, New York, United Nations.

United Nations (2005). *Achieving the Internationally Agreed Development Goals. Dialogues at the Economic and Social Council*. United Nations, New York.

United Nation (2014). *Millennium Development Goals Report*, New York, 14-27027

United Nation (2014a). *Millennium Development Goals Indicators Country Progress Snapshot (Nigeria)*, New York

UNDP (2004), *Human Development Report*, United Nations, New York

World Health Organization. (2006). *Meeting the MDG drinking water and sanitation target: the urban and rural challenge of the decade*. Geneva 27, Switzerland: WHO Press.

Zamba, C. (2014). *Keynote address at the launch of the Millennium Development Goals' (MDGs) Report in Lagos, Nigeria*