Millennium Development Goals and the Nigerian Stock Exchange: Regulatory Imperatives, Challenges and Prospects

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A cursory look at the twin concepts of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Nigerian Stock Exchange (NSE) may throw up two seemingly disparate issues, the former borders on a socialist/public welfare orientation whereas the latter is the vanguard of a modern capitalist economy. However, profound thoughts on this subject will reveal an intricately woven relationship that is result based and necessary for sustainable national development.

This study will shed more light on the nature of MDGs, the level of compliance to its requirements in Nigeria, the activities of key stakeholders, the challenges of MDGs and the regulatory imperatives and challenges of the NSE. The study will also examine the prospects of the MDGs and proffer recommendations. Finally the role of the business community in achieving sustainable national development will be discussed.

Definition of Terms

A stock exchange is a centralised market for buying and selling stocks where the price is determined through supply – demand mechanisms; individuals and institutions buy and sell stock in an auction like forum. The goal of the participants is primarily wealth creation. The NSE is therefore an organised market place, approved and regulated by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), where members gather to trade securities. Members may act either as agents for customers or as principals of their own.

Millennium Development Goals on the other hand were developed out of the eight chapters of the United Nations Millennium Declaration, adopted by 189 nations and signed by 147 heads of states and governments in September 2000. MDGs are eight goals and twenty one targets to be achieved by 2015 in response to the world's main development challenges. The Goals are summarised as follows:

- **Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger.** Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day and the proportion of people who suffer from hunger.
- **Achievement of universal primary education.** Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, complete a full course of primary schooling.
- **Promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women.** Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015.
- **Reduction of child mortality.** Reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate.
- **Improvement of maternal health.** Reduce by three quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio and achieve, by 2015, universal access to reproductive health.
- **Combating HIV/AIDs, malaria and other diseases.** Have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDs and reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases.
- **Ensuring environmental sustainability.** Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes, including ensuring access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation and improving the lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers by 2020.
- **Creation and maintenance of global partnership for development.** Develop an open trading and financial system that is rule-based, predictable and non-discriminatory, including a commitment to good governance, development and poverty reduction – nationally and internationally. In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications.

The MDGs synthesise, in a single package, many of the important commitments made separately at the international conferences and summits of the 1990s; and recognise the interdependence between growth, poverty reduction and sustainable development. MDGs also acknowledge that development depends on democratic governance, the rule of law, respect for human rights, peace and security.

The Nigerian experience

MDGs have become key tools in monitoring human progress across nations. The United Nations Development Programme has been given the role of Global MDG Monitor for the UN System, a role that UNDP Nigeria takes very seriously. The UNDP has transformed the MDGs into an actionable instrument of development management by turning the eight goals into 18 targets and 48 indicators that can be used to monitor human progress. Nigeria amongst other nations has signed up to these goals, targets and indicators. Below is a summary of UNDP recent reports on MDGs compliance in Nigeria:

Goal 1: Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger. People living in relative poverty declined from 65.6 per cent to 54.4 per cent in 2004 while 35 out of 100 people live in extreme poverty and 30 out of 100 children are under-weight. Poverty incidence has been consistently higher in rural areas than urban areas while wide disparity occurs in poverty trend in the zones. The prospect of reducing poverty in Nigeria is bright in view of macroeconomic stability and progressive economic growth in the last six years. Government policies at the three tiers should be focused on increased productivity in the agricultural sector. Investment in infrastructure, especially in rural areas should be scaled up.

Goal 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education. Performance on this goal is on course. About 84 out of 100 school age children attend school and an increasing number stay there through to primary six. Net enrolment ratio in primary school education was 84.26 per cent in 2005 as against 81.1 per cent in 2004. The literacy rate among 15-24 year olds improved from 76.2 per cent in 2004 to 80.2 per cent in 2005. The success was bolstered by the implementation of the Universal Basic Education (UBE), improved policy environment and better intergovernmental coordination in the sector. Concerted efforts are needed to reduce the cost of primary and junior secondary school, improve the quality of teaching and schooling, and sustain political commitment to the implementation of UBE.

Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women. The ratio of boys to girls in primary schools improved by 79 per cent in 2003 to 81 per cent in 2005, while the proportion of women in non-agricultural wage employment stood at 79 per cent in 2005. The proportion of women in national parliament was 5.76 per cent as against 30 per cent target. Secondary school enrolment has increased for both male and females at the tertiary level. There is need to mainstream gender issues into local, state and federal governments' development strategies.

Goal 4: Reduce Child Mortality. Reduction of child mortality remains a key challenge. Nigeria has the third highest child mortality rate in the world. As against the global target of 30/1000 live births in 2005, Nigeria had 110/1000 live births. Low maternal education, low coverage of immunisation, weak primary health care system, high incidence of poverty and inequality and poor household practices accounted for the high mortality rate. Percentage of one-year olds fully immunised against measles rose from 31.4 per cent in 2003 to 50 per cent in 2004. However wide disparities subsist between rural and urban centers and among geographical zones. There is need for improved co-ordination among three tiers of government in the provision of health services. Better decentralization of immunization management, strong advocacy on better household practices, access to drinking water and adequate sanitation are needed for success.

Goal 5: Improve Maternal Health. Maternal mortality remains a daunting challenge to Nigeria. Against a global target of less than 75/100,000 Living Births (LB) in 2015, Nigeria had 800/100,000 LB in 2004- the second highest maternal mortality rate in the world. Rural areas and the northern regions are worse than the national average. The various factors contributing to such high rates are unsafe abortions, early and child marriages, early pregnancies and inadequate family planning services.

Goal 6: Combat HIV-AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases. The HIV prevalence rate fell from 5.8 per cent in 2001 through 2005 to 4.4 per cent. Prevalence across the states, however, varied significantly. Malaria and Tuberculosis (TB) still remain major public health problems with the former accounting for 60 per cent of 300,000 deaths annually. Blood transmission, unsafe injection and sexual practices are key drivers of HIV and AIDS, while stigmatization and discrimination against people living with AIDS remain rife. Poor sanitation and high cost of treatment accounted for the prevalence of malaria while poor reporting network and weak public education are responsible for the spread of TB.

Goal 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability. Nigeria's rich environmental resource base is being undermined by deforestation (3.5 per cent per annum), erosion, desertification, gas flares and oil production. Access to safe drinking water is improving but access to sanitation is still low while housing has reached a crisis point with only 31 per cent having secured tenure.

Goal 8: Develop a Global Partnership for Development. Nigeria has enjoyed the benefits of progressive partnership with the international community. The decision to exit the Paris Club creditors was finalised in 2005 while FDI has increased significantly. However, access of Nigeria's agricultural and semi-processed goods to industrial countries remains weak.

Challenges of MDGs in Nigeria

A critical barrier to planning for achievement of the MDGs continues to be the availability of up to date data on most of the indicators. This is compounded by the limited funding available for data generation and management. Constitutional responsibility for implementation on almost all the goals rest with the states and local governments in Nigeria's federal structure; in spite of remarkable strides at federal level, appreciation of the requirements for meeting these goals, as well as institutional capacity remain relatively low at the lower levels of government. Poor governance, changes in policy thrusts of successive administrations, and integration of the MDGs in the national development strategies have also been a challenge, while other challenges include a weak monitoring mechanism for the MDGs and low stakeholder involvement of civil society organisations, private sector, the business community and, specifically, the Nigerian Stock Exchange, which is in a vantage position to harness private sector funds and support.

The Regulatory Imperatives and Challenges of the NSE

The Nigerian Stock Exchange (NSE) experienced unprecedented growth in the eight-year democratic rule of 1999-2007, when world class financial professionals were engaged in rebuilding an economy ravaged by several years of military misrule. Appointment of the right crop of leaders to key positions in national finance and economic management ushered in a wave of good ideas and effective regulatory policies.

Landmark financial reforms led to robust economic growth and buoyant investor confidence. The unleashing of the private-sector created demand for services such as project finance, debt/equity capital-raising to fund expansion ventures, corporate advisory, as well as new capital market products like exchange traded funds and derivative products linked to real estate investment.

The banking system consolidation over 2004-06 became a catalyst for dynamic reforms in pensions, the bond market and the insurance sector, thus impacting the wider economy. To that extent, the newly enlarged banks were instrumental in the financial market revolution, which opened up domestic stock and debt markets and expanded liquidity. This in turn, fuelled the boom in non-oil sectors pressurising the capital market to fund infrastructure projects, especially in power, water, transportation and communications (these infrastructural developments are key MDGs indicators).

High oil revenues driven primarily by the conflict in the Middle East generated double-digit growth figures in nominal gross domestic product (GDP) between 2003 and 2006, with the economy doubling in size over the period to US$115.46 billion. Annual real GDP growth averaged 7.3 per cent during 2003-2006, exceeding the regional average of 5.3 per cent. By contrast, the economy grew by just 2.7 per cent per year in 1997-2001, according to the International Monetary Fund.

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Financial developments further enhanced the nation's prosperity and a 2007 IMF report showed that in 2006, the non-oil economy (where four-fifth of workforce are employed), expanded by 7 per cent for the fourth straight year, led by financial services, information technology, retail and wholesale trade, as well as agriculture - where cocoa production and exportation grew by over 15 per cent and inland fish production grew by 33 per cent within eight years.

The private sector, and specifically the NSE, came to fore in the march towards sustainable national development. Foreign direct investment (FDI) reached a record high of about US$7-US$9.1 billion in 2006, of which almost a half or US$4.1 billion went into non-oil sectors. The bulk of FDI was channeled through the NSE into the oil and gas industry, with beverages, telecoms and banking also attracting large amounts. European and US firms have traditionally been the major investors; however Chinese firms were now making big inroads. The country enjoyed surpluses on both its fiscal and external trade accounts, whilst forex reserves surged to over US$43 billion in 2006 (the highest in sub-Saharan Africa), compared to only US$5.5 billion in 1999.

The Nigerian authorities gained credibility and respect from the global financing community. The improved macro policy framework, strengthened institutions, and wide-ranging structural reforms led to impressive macroeconomic outcomes – notably robust growth and low inflation, as well as improved investor confidence. The parliamentary passage of the Fiscal Responsibility Bill was a key step in ensuring prudent use of oil wealth. It requires future governments to continue depositing windfalls into excess crude account. Spending from the latter would be authorised only at times of revenue shortfalls or capital expenditures in future years. The law also aimed at improving fiscal transparency, as all three tiers of government are required to publish bi-annual audited accounts. Penalties for non-compliance include heavy fines and even imprisonment.

Nigeria also slashed its debt stock from nearly US$37 billion in 2004 to below US5 billion as at February 2008, a phenomenal reduction through debt forgiveness and buybacks programmes. The only debts outstanding were owed to multilateral institutions and a few bilateral loans.

The NSE in the last seven months of 2007 ranked among the world's top performers, with All-share index surging 55 per cent (on top of a 37.8 per cent gain over 2006). Growth in market capitalisation was equally stunning, in June 2007, the value of equities traded on the Exchange hit N7.86 trillion (US$61.67 billion), representing a hefty capital appreciation of 85.4 per cent since end 2006. The main contributors to soaring equity prices were blue-chip stocks in the oil and gas, banking, food and beverages and building materials sub-sectors. The growth was driven by new listings and supplementary listings of new shares by quoted companies as well as upbeat market sentiments. Conducive business climate and tax incentives invariably attracted foreign investors, hence increasing the activity level. Nigerian firms and the NSE were thus able to form global partnerships for sustainable growth and development. The NSE index of 2007 outpaced the performance of 2006, which ended with a return of 39.3 per cent in US$ terms, thus recording its best performance in three years. Most observers expected the bullish trends to continue into the third quarter of 2008.

The current administration inherited a strong economic legacy, however it lacks its predecessor's capitalistic bent and market-driven orientation. Ethno-tribal sentiments have crept back into the administration of the Nigerian economy. This has led to policy somersaults by the regulators of the capital and money market with an attendant dip in the indices of corporate performance in the stock market in the first half of 2008.

For instance, the stock market which began the year on a bullish note, with the All-share index appreciating by 22 per cent to peak its year at 66,371.20 points in the first quarter ended March 31, had the trend reversed in the second quarter as the bears dominated, causing the indices of corporate performance to plunge drastically.

Another challenge of the NSE was the delayed passage of the 2008 budget by the Federal Government, which led to a liquidity drought. This situation was exacerbated by the regulatory policy to stop margin trading by stockbrokers. Besides, the increase in Monetary Policy Rate (MPR) by the Central Bank made money market instruments more attractive, prompting investors to move funds from the capital market to the money market on one hand, while on the other hand increasing the cost of funds because several banks simply increased interest charged on credit by several points. The effect of this is a greater burden on the real sector, higher consumer prices and increased inflation.

The CBN Governor, Professor Charles Soludo, proposed the radical solution of currency redenomination to alleviate the strain on the economy but his proposal is yet to be adopted by the Federal Government. The CBN policy of a uniform financial year end to allow for better assessment of all the banks also affected the NSE because the banks became Machiavellian, with a drive to

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mobilise as much funds as possible in order to have an impressive balance sheet at the year end. The capital market was losing funds to the money market and credit was not being extended to stock broking firms, trading volumes were free falling alongside share prices. The situation deteriorated to the point that many banks refused to accept non blue chip shares as security for lending because the securities suffered steady price loses. It is however noteworthy that the CBN has extended deadline for compliance by a year, much to the relief of all stakeholders.

The policy of the NSE, which increased the volume of trade from 15,000 to 100,000 units before share price could be allowed to move, made speculation unattractive to members who lack the financial capability to assume significant positions in dealing. More so, allegations of price fixing by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) - the apex regulator - also dampened investor enthusiasm.

The primary market also lost momentum as a result of regulatory policy changes. Some companies that had planned to approach the market were discouraged by the lackluster performance of the secondary market. The new NSE policy stopping newly listed companies from returning to the market until after one year excludes many growing companies from equity financial sources. Besides, the NSE published a Caveat emptor for unquoted companies planning private placements, indicating that henceforth, listing shall be allowed at the offer price, which drowned the erstwhile market enthusiasm about private placements and the lure of premiums.

These challenges had the effect of undermining private sector participation in achieving MDGs. Corporate captains had to look out for their organisations single-mindedly and many lost the little zeal they had in corporate social responsibility (CSR).

Implementation of the MDGs in Nigeria

Despite these challenges, political commitment remains very high at the Federal level under the leadership of the Senior Special Adviser to the President on MDGs. Under its four practice areas, UNDP has provided support to the government in the areas of poverty reduction, HIV/AIDs, democratic governance, energy and environment. UNDP seeks to partner with key stakeholders in the private sector, like the NSE, to increase fund support and awareness in order to achieve the MDGs in Nigeria.

Data Management

A major component of UNDP's assistance has been the production of country MDG reports published for 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006. At sub-national level UNDP has succeeded in taking the message of preparing MDGs reports to the state level on pilot basis, with Niger and Akwa Ibom States MDG Reports serving as the first set of pilots. About ten states are in the process of developing their MDGs reports. These will provide important baseline information and serve as advocacy and awareness raising tools. A mid-term review of the MDGs is also underway. In collaboration with the Office of the Senior Special adviser to the President on MDGs, the UNDP has undertaken a National MDGs Costing Exercise in eight key sectors (agriculture, health, education, roads, energy, water resources, environment and housing). The final results are being reviewed. This would provide a good basis for estimating the cost of achieving the MDGs in Nigeria.

Debt Cancellation

Achievement of Goal 8 received a major boost in October 2005 when Nigeria and the Paris club signed an agreement, which guaranteed a write-off of 60 per cent of the country's external debt stock - paving the way for Nigeria to exit the Club. The Policy Support Instrument (PSI) concluded by Nigeria with IMF was approved by the Fund's Executive Board on 17 October 2005. The total stock of Nigeria's public debt was estimated at US$36.2 billion, out of which around US$30 billion was due to the Paris Club (source: IMF staff report and Paris Club creditors). In total, this agreement allowed Nigeria to obtain a debt cancellation estimated at US$18 billion (including moratorium interest). With the debt relief included in this agreement, the Paris Club creditors extended their support to Nigeria's economic development policy and its fight against poverty by agreeing to a debt reduction under Naples terms on eligible debts, and a buy back at a market-related discount on the remaining eligible debts after reduction. Payments were made in three tranches of $6.4 billion, $1.3

billion and $4.4 billion. This feat was recorded under the Finance Ministry of Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala.

The Millennium Villages

The implementation of the Millennium villages in Kaduna and Ondo states by the UNDP in collaboration with the respective state governments is motivated by the need to transform the lives of rural people as well as provide good pilots for other states and local governments to emulate as good practices. The local governance project is being implemented in Ondo State and will be extended on a pilot basis to Bayelsa State. The LGP is aimed at demonstrating successful models of local government planning and decentralisation. In addition, a local poverty reduction strategy guide for the participatory preparation of Local Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (LEEDS) was produced and tested in 18 local governments in 6 states. UNDP continues to provide technical support to States in the use of this guide and 5 States (Sokoto, Ogun, Akwa Ibom, Gombe and Kogi) are currently in the process of developing LEEDS using this methodology. In two of these States, the LEEDS preparation process is informing the review and development to follow on States Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (SEEDS). It is hoped that there will be lesson sharing between the states to aid replication of this mainstreaming.

Macroeconomic plans

A MDGs consistent macro economic framework has been initiated with the National Planning Commission (NPC) and Office of Senior Special Adviser to the President (OSSAP) on MDGs as the anchoring institutions. The outcome of this would feed into the National Economic Empowerment Strategies Phase 2 (NEEDS 2), or any medium term development strategy of government, as well as the Vision 2020 initiative. Under this practice area UNDP is also working with the National Bureau of Statistics and States statistical agencies in 18 states to build capacity for data management and statistical literacy. UNDP has also supported the OSSAP on MDGs with technical personnel and have further enhanced the institutional capacity of the office through the provision of relevant physical facilities.

HIV/AIDs

UNDP through its work on mainstreaming HIV and AIDs into national poverty reduction strategies, sectoral plans and budgets, is creating the enabling environment for strong multi-sectoral response to the HIV epidemic in Nigeria which led to the reduction of HIV prevalence from 5.8 per cent in 2001 to 4.4 per cent in 2005. More specifically, the technical and financial support to Global Fund Grants implementation in Nigeria, through the Country Coordinating Mechanism (CCM), has a direct impact on prevention, care and support for people living with and affected by HIV - all these leading to achievement of goal 6: combat HIV, malaria and tuberculosis.

Energy and Environment

The contributions that the UNDP Energy and Environment Unit has made towards the attainment of the goal 7 of the MDGs include, but not limited to, preparation of various policies in the energy and environment sector that assist the government at the advisory level. These policies include:

- Policy guidelines on market and abattoir sanitation.
- Policy guidelines on solid waste management.
- Policy guidelines on excreta and sewage management.
- Policy guidelines on school sanitation.
- National environmental sanitation policy.
- Policy guidelines on pest and vector controls.
- National erosion and flood control policy.
- National drought preparedness plan.
- Renewable energy master plan

It is noteworthy that the Lagos State Government has once again demonstrated its desire to be the fastest growing state in Nigeria by adopting the above policy guidelines and creating the Lagos State Waste Management Authority, in active partnership with the private sector under the LAWMA/PSP scheme. At this point it is recommended that the government take another step forward by partnering with waste recycling and energy conversion firms in developed countries, to transform the massive waste generation potentials of Lagos State to renewable energy sources and other useful products. This is a necessary form of “technological cooperation” to address the sensitive issue of waste management, in order to avoid health complications arising from the effects of a rapidly growing population in a small area of land. This initiative could be advanced in conjunction with the private sector and the NSE.

The UNDP Energy and Environment Unit also has four pilot projects on renewable energy access to rural dwellers spread all over the geopolitical zones of the country. Villages with no access to the national grid were chosen for the pilots and Solar PVs were constructed to generate electricity to public buildings like schools, churches, mosques and, most importantly, the health centers.

Democratic Governance

UNDP recruited a MDGs expert for the National Assembly with the overall goal to provide the National Assembly with timely, accurate, and relevant information for effective allocation of resources and decision-making. This is to ensure that the budget is MDGs compliant and leading to the attainment of set objectives. It is also to ensure that public policies and performance align with the achievement of MDGs and link to the annual budget. The expert also has the responsibility of strengthening the capacity of the National Assembly Budget and Planning in budget analysis. This would result in improving deliberation of the legislature on the budget.

Prospects of MDGs - Eradication of Extreme Poverty

The current volatile situation in the Niger Delta is a classic example of how bad things can get where the requirements for the achievement of Goal 1 are not met. Extreme poverty, penury amidst plenty and persistent environmental degradation in the face of vast youth unemployment has led to virulent militancy, unmitigated loss of life and property, widespread kidnapping, growing banditry, and all manner of collateral damage coming from the federal government military response to the menace of youth restiveness. The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta and other militant youth organisations in the Delta are made up of several unemployed young men and women who see the pecuniary benefits that would accrue to them in the bid to draw world attention to the plight of the goose laying the golden eggs. Many of these militants are highly educated, well informed and keenly motivated to wage an increasing successful guerilla war against West Africa's dominant military power. In this instance, the youth have been able to cut Nigeria oil output significantly and jerk up international oil prices at will.

The long-term solution to the problem in the Niger Delta and other potential trouble spots in the different states of Nigeria is not to subjugate the people with crude military power but to eradicate poverty and increase the employment to population ratio.

The activities of the Joint Task Force involving the Nigerian Army, Air force and Navy to curb the militants growing power and clout would have been needless if the government had done its best to provide jobs for thousands of waterside dwellers impoverished by the effects of oil exploration and exploitation. Livelihoods are destroyed as a result of countless oil spills, which make fishing impossible and crop production futile. It is particularly tragic when one considers the fact that the price of catfish in the southern riverine state of Bayelsa is over 100 per cent higher than the price of the same specie in the south western state of Oyo. The mainstay agricultural business of the indigenous people of the Niger Delta suffers to assuage the global thirst for oil and desperate passions rise in poverty-induced confrontations.

The long-term solution to the problem in the Niger Delta and other potential trouble spots in the different states of Nigeria is not to subjugate the people with crude military power but to eradicate poverty and increase the employment to population ratio. Business leaders should not continue to see the problem of unemployment as that of the government or the individuals concerned, because the effects of mass unemployment are usually violent and affect the entire nation. Recent cases of widespread riots stemming from rising unemployment and inflationary pressures were recorded in South Africa where other Africans living in the country were assaulted and many lost their lives and property to hate filled mobs, who blamed the foreigners for loss of jobs.

Unemployment encourages armed robbery, murder, kidnapping and other violent crimes, which most times are directed at the 'different ones' i.e. the privileged ones, the foreigners, the more affluent and prosperous ones amongst us, who usually are the captains and leaders of the business community. Therefore, it is in our own best interest as businessmen to work towards national poverty alleviation and seek full employment for all who are able to work. It is also in the interest of Nigerians, rich and poor alike, to have state and national welfare programmes in place in addition to unemployment aid programmes, and to support steady reduction in the proportion of those who suffer from hunger.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) analysis of the youth labor market in 1998 noted that, "The job prospects of new school leavers are highly sensitive to the overall state of the labor market". The OECD also notes that institutional factors have a major role in explaining different youth employment outcomes. While in general less educated youth start off with poorer job prospects, their chances of finding better work improve with experience. In addition to an economy with good growth prospects, young people also require that labor markets be youth friendly. This was defined in 1998 OECD report as:

- Providing ample opportunities for young people to be trained within enterprises under wage arrangements and employment contracts that encourage their recruitment and training.
- Providing ample opportunities for young people to gain experience of paid work while they are students.
- Limiting the restrictions that are attached to hiring them.

Key Considerations related to Youth Employment Strategy

According to the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), IMF country report Nigeria (August 2002), five key principles underpin a developing country's youth employment strategy. These were:

- Promotion of youth entrepreneurship as a viable option
- Linkage of efforts to promote youth employment to information and communication technologies.
- The growing need for public/ private partnerships
- Targeting the poor
- Empowerment of youth - putting young people in charge

The first prong of the strategy - youth entrepreneurship - was proposed not only as an end in itself. It was seen as a way to apply a litmus test for the government about how well the country's education institutions and regulatory framework allowed young people to respond to available opportunities. Two other elements of the strategy proposed direct linkages to the so-called 'new economy' through the use of new, low cost forms of communication like the Internet. One way to do this is through the use of public/private sector partnerships. The fourth principle recommended that the strategy apply to all youth with an emphasis on targeting groups of poor young people in slum areas. In terms of implementing the strategy, it was proposed that the government should allow young people themselves to take the lead in developing and implementing initiatives. It was also suggested that the geographical 'digital divide' and educational gap between the North and the South needs to be addressed as central features of efforts to tap into the new economy.

Other PRSPs of 2003-06, proposed several youth employment initiatives that would facilitate the achievement of Goal 1. These include:

- The repeal or amendment of any statutes or regulations that hinder women and youth access to and control of productive resources, such as land, credit, trade information and technology.
- Encouragement of female and youth participation in public and private credit schemes.
- Provision of business and trade information to micro, small and medium enterprises and the informal sector entrepreneurs.
- The design and implementation of measures that will facilitate expeditious acquisition of titles to land to ensure access to investment finance.
- Facilitation of training and re-training in entrepreneurship skills for those falling out of formal employment.
- Supporting construction of industrial estates and free trade zones by the private sector.
- Encouragement of intermediate input supply linkages between small and medium enterprises on one hand and large-scale enterprises on the other hand.
- Encouragement of the procurement of goods and services, especially in the health and education sectors, from SMEs.

- The review and harmonization of existing legal and regulatory framework with a view to removing impediments to SME operations.

Prospects of MDGs - Quality Health care

Healthcare in Nigeria suffers from inadequate funding. From 1994-97, government health spending averaged a mere 4.5 per cent of the budget. Most public health institutions lack basic facilities such as medicines and dressing. It is also not strange for doctors and nurses to engage in work strikes in protest of poor working conditions and remuneration. Nigeria has done well in terms of producing doctors and nurses relative to the size of the population. Its population per physician ratio of roughly 3,780 is considerably better than the regional average, but it could be a lot better still: then Health Minister Ikechukwu Madubuike estimated in 1995 that no less than 21,000 Nigerian doctors were practicing in the US alone, roughly the same number that were working in Nigeria; other popular destinations for Nigerian health workers are Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The exodus has been stimulated primarily by the low pay and ill-equipped facilities facing many health workers.

It is obvious that the government cannot provide quality health care on its own. Below the surface of the debate over the health care crisis, solutions are evolving daily. Buyers and providers are recognising that the health care system will not be reformed anytime soon, so private hospital managers are forming partnerships with companies to solve what problems they can. These partnerships are addressing the three biggest issues in our health system: cost, quality, and access. They are providing innovative solutions to a wide variety of ills. These partnerships are relatively young and focused on the rich but there are very good prospects for wide ranging collaboration between small and medium sized private clinics and the business community that would be mutually beneficial to all parties. Below are suggested strategies for the business community to partner with medical aid providers in order to control and mitigate the health care crisis in Nigeria:

- A coalition of businesses and health care providers can establish a data management system on the health care of employees. This will ensure that purchasers can put their market buying power together to control costs and improve quality.
- A chain of hospitals can form a partnership with its suppliers that will mean future savings for all stakeholders.
- Insurance companies and hospitals can form a partnership to make long term care insurance available to policyholders.
- The Nigerian Stock Exchange can arrange a conference where those in attendance will represent the wide spectrum of buyers and providers who make up the health care market place; this would include corporate decision makers, hospital administrators, human resource managers, medical directors, federal, state and local buyers of health care, including the military, labor unions, consultants, managed care pharmacists and many others, to explore ways of collaborating to develop the health care system.

The Role of the Business Community in Achieving Sustainable National Development

Businesses play a vital role in the development and prosperity of a nation. Business leaders should be committed to meeting the needs of the present while making concessionary plans for the welfare of future generations. This concept recognises that economic growth and the MDGs are inextricably linked and that the quality of life rests on meeting basic human needs without destroying the environment. New forms of cooperation between government, businesses and society are required to achieve the MDGs. Economic growth is required to improve the livelihoods of the poor, to sustain growing populations and, eventually, to stabilise population levels.

New technologies will be needed to accelerate growth while using energy and other resources more efficiently and producing less pollution. Open and competitive markets both within and between nations foster innovation and efficiency and provide opportunity for all to improve their living conditions. But such markets must give the right signals, the prices of goods and services must recognise and reflect

More agricultural development companies should be encouraged and listed on the NSE to trade in different agricultural products, in which the country enjoys a competitive advantage, and develop a strong export markets while satisfying the national demand for food.

the environmental costs of their production, use, recycling and disposal. This is fundamental and is best achieved by a synthesis of economic instruments designed to correct distortions and encourage innovation and continuous improvement, with regulatory standards to direct performance and voluntary intervention by the private sector. Policy mixes by the regulatory authorities should be tailored to local circumstances. New regulations and economic instruments must be harmonised among trading partners and other stakeholders while recognising that levels and conditions of development vary resulting in different needs and abilities. Government should phase changes over a reasonable period of time to allow for realistic planning and investment cycles.

The NSE will advance the actualisation of the Millennium Development Goals only if it recognises, values and encourages long term investments in projects that are MDGs compliant, and if they are based on appropriate information to guide those investments. The world is moving towards deregulation, private initiatives and global markets. This requires the companies on the NSE to assume more social, economic and environmental responsibility in defining their goals. We must expand our concept of those who have a stake in our operations to include not only employees and shareholders, but also, suppliers, customers, neighbors, citizen groups and others. Appropriate communications with these stakeholders will help us to refine continually our visions, strategies and actions.

Achievement of the Millennium Development Goals makes good business sense because it can create competitive advantage and new opportunities but it requires forereaching shifts in corporate attitude, and new ways of doing business. Moving from vision to reality demands strong leadership from the top, sustained commitment through out the organisation, and an ability to translate challenge into opportunities. Firms must therefore draw up clear plans of actions for sustainable development and monitor progress closely. Long term business–to–business (B2B) partnerships and direct investment provide excellent opportunities to transfer the technology needed from the industrialised nations. The concept of technology cooperation relies principally on private initiatives, but it can be greatly enhanced by support from government and institutions engaged in overseas development work.

Farming and forestry, the businesses that sustain the livelihood of almost one half of the world's population should be accorded pride of place in Nigeria. More agricultural development companies should be encouraged and listed on the NSE to trade in different agricultural products, in which the country enjoys a competitive advantage, and develop a strong export markets while satisfying the national demand for food. Farmers should have access to clear property rights and the government should improve the management of forest and water resources, by putting in place regulations that encourages private ownership of land for agricultural development.

The NSE should make much better use of the creative forces of local and international entrepreneurship by providing open and accessible markets, more streamlined regulatory systems with clear and equitably enforced rules, sound and transparent financial and legal systems, and efficient administration.

A clear vision of a sustainable future materialises when the eight millennium development goals have been achieved in Nigeria, and human energies are mobilised to make the necessary changes - thus breaking out of familiar and established thought–decision processes. Business leaders from all parts of the society must join forces to translate the vision into action, that inertia may be overcome with cooperation replacing confrontation, to transform Nigeria into Africa's defacto powerhouse. ei

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