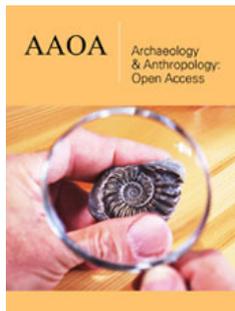


Strengthening Nigeria-China Poverty Alleviation Collaboration

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Opinion

The biggest issue confronting Nigeria today is extreme poverty. Currently according to a new report by the World Poverty Clock shows Nigeria has overtaken India as the nation with the most extreme poor people in the world. India has a population seven times larger than Nigeria's. The struggle to lift more citizens out of extreme poverty is an indictment on successive Nigerian governments which have mismanaged the nation's vast oil riches through incompetence and corruption. At the end of May 2018, our trajectories suggest that Nigeria had 86.9 million people in extreme poverty almost 50 percent of the nation's estimated 195 million population, thought to be living on less than \$1.90 a day, compared with India's 73 million. As Nigeria faces a major population boom – it will become the world's third largest nation by 2050- the nation's problem might likely worsen. But having large swathes of people still living in extreme poverty is an Africa-wide problem. The humongous cries ravaging Nigeria from numerous fronts are all inexorably tied to extreme poverty ravaging more than 50 percent of Nigeria population. The near-total state of anarchy, evidenced by terrorism, gangsterism, kidnapping, armed robberies, murders, arson, lawlessness, ethnic violence and uncontrolled population explosion all drive from and are linked to extreme poverty. In March, the International Monetary Fund had said Nigerians are getting poorer saying there is a need for coherent and comprehensive economic reforms. What is more, extreme poverty in Nigeria is growing by six people every minute, while poverty in China continues to fall.

Today the easiest method to alleviate poverty is to create employment. This is where the Nigerian government needs to learn from China. As of 1990, China had a whopping 756 million of its citizens living in extreme poverty. How was China able to achieve this remarkable success of poverty reduction among its over 1.4 billion inhabitants Very easy. Chinese leaders realized the quantum of its extremely poor people is a timed nuclear device and decided to confront this frontally. Also, the Chinese officials also realized that the major existential threat confronting them was not foreign; Japan, United States or Russia, but the nation's own unemployed hordes who would soon soar and wipe them away. How were they able to handle this? First, the Chinese Communist Party developed a comprehensive poverty eradication plan and an implementation strategy of attaining a similar result. The plan had a five-year renewable cycle, with measurable goals, timelines for achieving a similar outcome, rewards or sanctions for responsible officers. The Chinese government owned and still own and is the main driver of the poverty eradication program. The plan is developed by the central government decision-making organ (Politburo) and this is drilled down to the provinces, the counties and rural villages. The nature of the Chinese government system makes the workability of the plan a lot faster since it is a socialist system with central authority at the Politburo.

There is a nationally suitable budget for the program which has steadily augmented every planning cycle for five years, current amount is US\$41.7 billion in 2013-2017, more than double the level of the previous five years, with big jumps in 2016 and 2017. This figure is way above the entire fiscal budgets of numerous African nations including Nigeria. The funds deployed under the poverty alleviation campaign cover numerous areas, including for rural infrastructure, agricultural subsidies and discounted loans. The broad goal of such assistance is to encourage self-development and empowerment of poor populations. The strategy dates to the previous administration's "new socialist countryside" policy aimed at bringing rural residents to small towns, thus allowing for urbanization and agricultural modernization.

The urbanization strategy released by President Xi Jinping in 2014 had a similar focus on migration to smaller conurbations. The major difference, however, is in the scale of the ambition: during the 13th five-year plan period (covering 2016-2020), 10 million people nationwide are targeted for resettlement, up from 2.4 million during the 12th five-year plan period (2011-2015). Government bureaucrats have less discretion in choosing where to invest poverty alleviation fund and oversight by the China's anti-corruption agencies has also been significantly enhanced.

As the world's largest developing nation, China has always attached importance to poverty eradication and human development. According to the global \$1.25 poverty line, from 1981 to 2013, China lifted 850 million people out of poverty, with the percentage of people living in extreme poverty falling from 88 percent to 1.85 percent. According to World Bank report, from 2012 to 2013 alone, approximately 100 million people escaped extreme poverty. That's a quarter of a million people per day; or 200 people per minute. According to United Nations report, China has contributed about 76 percent of poverty reduced across the world, making China a nation with the most people lifted out of poverty in the world and demonstrating "strong leadership and dedication". In order to move millions of Chinese people out of poverty, the Chinese leadership made the decision to move away from the comfort zone of easy revolutionary rhetoric, took economic modernization as a central task, launched reform and opening up and travelled the difficult terrain of "groping through the river by feeling the stones." While Nigeria makes the difficult choice of moving away from the comfort zone of endlessly reclining received wisdom, of foreign political systems, orthodox economic models that have got Nigeria nowhere. Chinese leadership believes in a bottoms-up grassroots movement to focus mainly on boosting the standards of living for ordinary Chinese people and this can be attained in Nigeria too. When Deng Xiaoping launched reform and opening, China was mired in widespread poverty, but the Chinese people were willing to work hard to develop a more prosperous nation. Starting from agricultural reforms, followed by boosting the rural economy other than the farming sector, and through territorial and targeted approaches, poverty was efficiently identified and addressed. Additionally, governments at all levels as well as institutions such as universities have all demonstrated dedication to alleviating poverty, which led to fruitful collaboration and partnerships that were working towards a common goal. Nigeria is in a similar stage

of development as the nation is eager to escape the poverty trap and hence China does know how to deliver outstanding outcomes for Nigeria, since China had experienced similar circumstances four decades ago and much of the world did not believe China would succeed. But China has proven the doubters wrong and today it is time for Nigeria to seize the moment with China's willing to support, China and Nigeria can join hands to march ahead on the path to prosperity. Nigeria government needs to realize that targeting is the key to alleviating poverty, because targeted poverty reduction strategy permits the Chinese government to identify and reach the poorest of the poor, and to provide support to help them move out of poverty. This is especially important as the Chinese government is cracking the tough nut by 2020. Also, the participation of all segments of the society in China from the government to enterprises, NGOs, and ordinary people, all parts of the China society are making concerted efforts to eradicate poverty, to pursue inclusiveness development with no one left behind. China has adopted a multi-sectoral approach to poverty reduction, which brings together agro-industry development, food security, social protection, health, education and ecological restoration. Among these, agro-industry development has been given priority, since it is key to lift the poor out of poverty in a sustainable manner. Same with education which can break the inter-generational poverty cycle. Globally, after steadily declining for over a decade, global hunger is on the rise again, affecting 815 million people in 2016, or 11 percent of the global population. For China, maintaining and sustaining food and nutrition security of Chinese people, especially in the context of increasing population, rapid urbanization and rather limited natural resources per capita, remains a strategic focus for the Chinese government. China's development provides a valuable reference for Nigeria because China is willing to share with other developing nations, such as Nigeria under the framework of South-South cooperation and the Belt and Road initiative. To turn this valuable reference to reality, Nigerian government needs a simple and comprehensive master plan designed along similar lines of Chinese development strategy with specific goals, a timeline for the attainment which in turn should have an impact on GDP and HDI. With that said, Nigeria has a second mover advantage to employ China's poverty alleviation strategy with the most significant effect and prominent innovative experience, and unceasingly attain novel outcomes in shared development for mankind.

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