

Poverty and Insecurity in Nigeria

Ifatimehin Olayemi Olufemi ^{1*}

Ezekiel A. Balami ²

^{1,2} Department of Public
Administration, University of
Maiduguri, Borno State
&

Godwin Edoaka Ochogwu

Department of Public Administration,
Bauchi State University, Gadau

Corresponding Author: fatimehin@rocketmail.com*

Abstract

The increasing incidence of the twin evils of poverty and insecurity in Nigeria in spite of efforts made by successive administrations aimed at reducing their tide have been issues of public concern. The major objective of this paper is to identify the causes of poverty and insecurity in Nigeria and examine the relationship between the two. The major cause of insecurity in Nigeria is poverty and failure of governance to achieve the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy as contained in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The study revealed that there exist a perfect correlation between poverty and insecurity in Nigeria and that greed by insurgent groups and corruption by public officials caused deprivation, alienation, conflict and insecurity in Nigeria. The study recommends for improvement in the quality of governance in order to reduce the incidence of poverty and insecurity in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Insecurity, Poverty, Governance, and Nigeria*

Introduction

The increasing incidence of the twin evils of poverty and insecurity in Nigeria pose great challenge to governance and have thus, become issues of public concern. Chapter II of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, pertaining to the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy in Section 2(b) specifically provides that “the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government.” Since mid seventies, successive governments in Nigeria have come up with a lot of laudable initiatives or programmes geared towards poverty alleviation (Idachaba, 2006).

Some of the poverty alleviation programmes include: The National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA) which was established in 1971, the National Accelerated

Food Production Programme (NAFPP) (1972) the Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs) launched in 1973. Others include the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) and the River Basin Development Authorities (RBDAs) were established in 1976, also the Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme Fund of 1977, the Green Revolution (GR) in 1979, and Better Life Programme (BLP) in 1987 Agbamu, 2006; Omokore, 2009). Also the Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB) and Community Banks were also established in 1986 and 1989, respectively. Also in 1986 and 1989, the Directorate of Food and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI) and the Mass Mobilization for Social and Economic Reconstruction (MAMSER) were respectively established by the Federal Government (Agbamu, 2006).

The small and medium scale enterprise development agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) was established in 2000 and also in 2000 the Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) was established to ensure improvement in the socio-economic status of farmers and rural dwellers. The National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), which has as its main objective to improve the socio-economic well being of rural people, with a properly structured organizational frame-work for its achievement, is an offshoot of (PAP) and it was established in 2001 (Aliu, 2001; Joseph, 2005; Gumwa, 2009). The government of Yar'adua 7 point agenda also have its cardinal objectives to fighting poverty. The Goodluck government's Transformation agenda had put up strategies to curbing the scourge of poverty in Nigeria.

In spite of all these efforts, poverty is still manifested in different sectors of governance in Nigeria. Unfortunately, poverty alleviation programmes of the government have not translated to meaningful growth and poverty reduction, as Nigeria ranks among the poorest countries in the world. In addition, many Nigerians have continued to wallow in abject poverty, while more than 50 percent live on less than US\$2 per day. Couple with this, is dilapidated infrastructure (especially roads and power supply) that has led to the collapse of many industries, including high level of unemployment. Moreover, macroeconomic indicators like balance of payments, import obligations, inflation rate, exchange rate, and national savings reveal that Nigeria has not fared well in the last couple of years.

The alarming rate of insecurity is not less disturbing in spite of the reforms undertaken and substantial share of national budgets allocated to the security sector. There have been serious and continuous threats to national and individual security in the form of organized crimes, election related violence, and violent extremism, including oil bunkering and kidnapping initially

associated with the Niger-Delta Crisis but which later spread to the other parts of the country following the amnesty deal in 2009. There have also been alarming incidences of armed robbery, car snatching and ritual killings. The most recent instances are the post-election violence which broke –out across many of the northern states and the fearsome insurgence of the deadly “Boko-Haram” in northern Nigeria especially the North-East (Shehu, 2011). Why is the rate of poverty and insecurity high in Nigeria in spite of the efforts made to fighting the twin-evils? What are the causes of poverty and insecurity in Nigeria? Is there any relationship between poverty and insecurity in Nigeria? How can the incidence of poverty and insecurity be reduced in Nigeria?

The Concept of Poverty

Poverty is complex and multi dimensional. Therefore, it is a dynamic process of socio economic, political or other deprivation which affect individual households or communities and usually results in lack of access to basic necessities of life. It affect many aspect of the human condition, including physical, moral and psychological. Different scholar’s defined poverty in different way.

Townsend (2000) defines poverty as lack of resources to obtain the type of balance diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary in the societies to which people belongs to. The World Bank (2002) defines poverty as hunger, lack of shelter, being sick and not able to see a doctor, not been able to school and not knowing how to read. Poverty is not having a job, is fear for the future, leaving one day at a time. Poverty is losing a child to illness brought about by unclean water. Poverty is powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom.

According to Gazali (2000) poverty is a condition or situation of being poor or unable to meet the basic needs of life. Ahmed (1999) opines that poverty in developing countries are basically in income determined. It is seen as a result of lack of access to basic things of life like food, safe drinking water, security, healthcare, education and housing. He added that at community level poverty is often seen as a lack of community resources manifested in adequate infrastructure and basic social amenities, limited employment and income opportunities, inadequate access to agriculture input and a degraded environment. At the individual level, poverty is perceived in terms of inability to eat or cloth oneself adequately, lack of assets and inability to meet social and cultural obligation.

Central to the quest for policies and programmes that will reduce poverty is the issue of the conceptualization of poverty. Conceptually, three dominant views are identified as the meaning of poverty in the literature. The first view sees poverty as a severe deprivation of some basic human needs at the individual or household level. Put differently, poverty is a material deprivation and this can be assessed in monetary terms. While this conceptualization of poverty makes the quantitative analysis of poverty straightforward and permits comparisons over time and between countries, it fails to recognize non-material forms of deprivation such as illiteracy and social discrimination among others. Aliyu, (2002).

The second view defines poverty as the failure to achieve basic capabilities such as being adequately nourished, living a healthy life, possession of skills to participate in economic and social life, permission to take part in community activities to mention a few. This conceptualization forms the basis for the belief that ‘poverty is multi-dimensional’. Although, the capabilities framework offers many advantages over the income/consumption conceptualization, yet it is argued that it requires a greater variety of data and that no consensus exists on how capability deprivation at the household level is to be computed. (Senn, 1999).

The third conceptualization of poverty came into limelight in the 1990s and has a fundamentally different approach to the understanding of poverty: subjective poverty assessments. The core of this view of poverty is that poverty must be defined by the poor themselves or by the communities that poor people live in.

According to Chambers (1994), the view came out of the work on participatory appraisal of rural projects and has direct relationship with a publication known as ‘*Voices of the Poor series*’

The subjective view of poverty posits that, poverty has both physical and psychological dimensions. Poor people themselves strongly emphasize violence and crime, discrimination, insecurity and political repression, biased or brutal policing, and victimization by rule, neglectful or corrupt public agencies (Narayan *et al*, 1999).

Causes of Poverty

Yusuf (1999) stated three main cause of poverty in Nigeria as follows:

- i. Instability of certain key people in family to get or hold steady well paying jobs. This may be due to lack of expansion of productive activities in the economy and under capacity utilization due to excessive dependence on foreign inputs.

- ii. Economic forces and changes in labour requirement. For example, inflation reduces the quantity of goods and services a given income can purchase, which could lead to poverty.
- iii. Poverty is caused by man, or disaster, the natural cause comes in the form of disaster such as food, famine, drought among others. This is man made because according to him is several varying from one society to another. These include mismanagement of the economy, bad government, corruption, debt burden, low productivity, unemployment, high population growth rate and poor human resources development.

Holman (1970) and Nweze (1998) posit that poverty is as a result of an unequal distribution of resources brought about by social structure. Rodgers (1996) postulates that assets provides income directly, generate self employment and give a measure of security of their distribution is a major cause of poverty. Hurt (1986) posits that factors which lead to impoverishment of the rural people include unanticipated problems such as sudden death, accident, incapacitating bread winners and famine.

Chambers (1983) argues that “sickness can be one or several important factors which lead to the further impoverishment o already resources poor house-holds”. Evans (1989) added that the consequence of ill health adults include impairment of work capacity, that is, the area are able to farm will be reduced; their inability to generate income will diminish health and life expectancy of other family members.

According to De Haan (1997) poverty is partly as a result of urbanization as the number of urban poor is increasing at least in absolute terms. Olowu (1991) is of the view that “development programmes tended to benefit the urban sectors and others in the middle and upper income brackets while ignoring the pervasive problems of poor, especially those located in the rural areas “according to editorial of the IDS Bulletin (1986:1) “rural poverty in developing countries has seasonal dimension. There is simultaneous handwork, discomfort and poor food availability at certain times of the year, usually during the rains. This period before harvest (the hungry season) is one of considerate stress for the rural people exacerbating their poverty”.

The draft Nigerian National Policy on Integrated Rural Development (1996) recognized that most rural Nigerian remained impoverished as a result of urban bias of the development strategy, which the nation had adopted. It added that with Nigeria being a predominantly rural country, where most of its citizens depend on agriculture, poverty alleviation must be regarded as

major instrument for the attainment of the various interdependent components of the national development.

The Concept of Insecurity

To have a good understanding of what insecurity is, it is important to know what security is all about. Although, the provision of security to the lives and property of the citizenry is the primary purpose of the State (Mazrui & Mazrui, 1997) security is difficult to define with precision. Zebadi (2007) observes that the concept of security has always been associated with the safety and survival of the state and its citizens from harm or destruction. He further explains that security is not limited to the preparedness of the defence and security forces while subsuming the safety of the citizens to the state. It is in view of this that Fayeye (2007) asserts that security of a nation requires moving away from the traditional militaristic and state – centric definition of security towards human security. To him, security encompasses the personal and communal state of being safe from a wide range of critical and pervasive threats. Concomitant to this, Nnoli (2006) sees national security as a cherished value associated with physical safety of individuals, groups and nation states. In an objective sense, it denotes safety from threats, anxiety and danger. It is also subjective and psychological to the extent that it can be measured by the absence of fear that threat, anxiety or danger will occur. Security is thus, physical and psychological, objective and subjective as well as multi-dimensional; social, economic, political and environmental (Zebadi, 2007).

Causes of Insecurity

The Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2009 and 2011) offers an operational definition of security at individual and national levels. At the level of an individual, security encompasses safety from domestic political persecution, social unrest and safety of the person. Others are freedom from violent crimes and human trafficking. At the national level, security means safety from cross-border tensions, government involvement in armed conflict and the extent of domestic armed conflict. It is also concerned with the number of political refugees and internally displaced people. From the foregoing definitions, insecurity denotes prevalence of physical and or potential threat of fear, anxiety or danger detrimental to the safety and survival of individuals, groups and the state at large. This can be economic, social, political and environmental. In Nigeria, this comprises of the rising incidence of armed robbery, kidnapping, and militancy in the Niger

Delta, the insurgence of the dreaded Boko Haram in northern Nigeria, electoral violence, communal clashes, ritual killings and oil bunkering among others.

The causes of insecurity are many and varied. These include the proliferation of arms from war-torn countries, local manufacturers and multi-national corporations (Okiro, n. d.). Bujra (2004) identified that the multi-ethnic character of most African states makes conflict more likely often leading to politicization of ethnicity, the distortion in the political economy of Africa and the activities of international arms merchants. Others are competition for scarce resources such as the extraction of oil in the Niger Delta and the resultant environmental degradation. The International Firearm Prevention and Policy estimates the increasing numbering of gun-deaths and injury in Nigeria from 1,255 in 2000 to 2,120 in 2001 and 2,550 in 2004 (Tell Magazine, 2012). Similarly, the large quantity of sophisticated arms and ammunition surrendered by Niger Delta Militants in the amnesty programme indicates the alarming rate of these weapons in the country and its security implications for the country (Tell Magazine, 2009). The nature of weapon displayed, used and obtained by the boko-haram insurgents attest to this fact.

Relationship between Poverty and Insecurity

Grinding poverty is the lot of half the world's population. Three billion human beings subsist on less than \$2 per day—\$730 a year—the equivalent of seven pairs of quality sneakers in the United States. In the developing world, poverty is not just a sentence to misery; it can often be a sentence to death. Hunger, malnutrition, and easily preventable diseases like diarrhea, respiratory infections, malaria, and cholera thrive in fetid slums that have no basic sewerage, clean water, or electricity, while desolate rural areas lack basic health infrastructure to provide prenatal care or lifesaving vaccines. According to UNICEF, 10.5 million children *under five years old* die *each year* from preventable illnesses—30,000 *each day*—ten times the number who perished in the attacks of September 11, 2001. The vast majority of these children succumb, in effect, to poverty. Children living in the poorest 20 percent of households are two to three times more likely to die than those living in the richest 20 percent in the same countries.

Basic intuition suggests that such pervasive poverty and grotesque disparities breed resentment, hostility, and insecurity. Nevertheless, a significant amount of punditry and even academic effort has been devoted to discrediting the notion that poverty has any security consequence for Americans. The most frequently invoked canards draw on oversimplified truisms, such as poverty does not cause terrorism, because the 9/11 hijackers were mainly

middle-class, educated Saudis; if poor people were prone to be terrorists, then Africa and not the Middle East would be the hotbed of terrorism; and poor people are too busy just trying to survive to do anyone harm. All these statements are superficial and flawed, but assume for a moment they are true.

Assume that an individual's economic impoverishment has nothing to do with his or her decisions about whether or not to engage in acts of violence. Would that be a rational basis for concluding that global poverty has no security significance to the United States? Some would have us believe so, but they would be mistaken.

For even if poverty *at the individual level* were of no security significance to the United States and other developed countries (dubious though that proposition is), poverty is highly significant *at the country level*. Poor states typically fail to meet the basic needs of many of their citizens—for food, clean water, health care, or education. Where human needs are great and service gaps persist, people tend to accept help from almost anyone willing to provide it. Sometimes, help comes from multilateral or bilateral aid agencies. Sometimes, it comes from secular nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). But in Africa and South Asia, food, clothing, schools, and health care are often provided by foreign-funded religious NGOs, Christian missionaries or mosques—sometimes with theological, even extremist, strings attached.

These same poor states that cannot fulfill their core responsibilities to provide security or sustenance to their own people may also fail to exercise effective sovereign control over their territory. Poor states often lack the legal, police, intelligence, or security sector capacity to control their borders and remote areas and to prevent plundering of their natural resources.

Poor states can be high-risk zones that in a rapidly globalizing world may eventually, often indirectly, pose significant risks to faraway countries. How? People, goods, funds, and information now traverse the planet with lightning speed. More than 2 million travelers cross an international border each day.

These threats could take various forms: a mutated avian flu virus that jumps from poultry to humans in Cambodia or Burkina Faso; a U.S. expatriate who unwittingly contracts Marburg virus in Angola and returns to Houston on an oil company charter flight; a terrorist cell that attacks a U.S. Navy vessel in Yemen or Somalia; the theft of biological or nuclear materials from poorly secured facilities in the former Soviet Union; narcotics traffickers in Tajikistan and criminal syndicates from Nigeria; or, over the longer term, flooding and other effects of global

warming exacerbated by extensive deforestation in the Amazon and Congo River basins. Weak states such as these can function *passively* as potential incubators or conveyor belts for transnational threats. Dangerous spill over from weak states could result in major damage to the U.S. economy. In a worst-case scenario, such as a deadly pandemic, they could result in the loss of hundreds of thousands—if not millions—of American lives.

The case in Nigeria however showed the nexus between poverty and insecurity is very strong. Starting with the crisis in the Niger-Delta region of the country which was largely associated with the frustration of the people manifesting in the form of impoverished standard of living: hunger, disease due to water and air pollution, environmental degradation, unemployment e.t.c. The arm revolt by the people was due to the injustice meted on them. Looking at the huge resources discovered in the region to the national purse, if translated, the region should be the most developed part of the country. But the contrary was the case.

In the northern part of the country especially the north east, people have tried to disconnect the crisis from poverty and relate it exclusively to religion. However, this is far from the truth. Though, these insurgents are sponsored by the rich and mighty in the society given the quality and quantity of weapons at their disposal and the tactics and strategy, one will not deny the fact that poverty is still the main cause of insecurity in the region. Recent ratings showed that the north eastern part of Nigeria is the worst hit by poverty. There is high level of illiteracy, diseases, hunger, almajirism e.t.c. These sets of individuals are vulnerable to the manipulations of the terrorist groups, because they tend to offer what the government failed to offer. So in the first place it is the failure of the state that have prompted and caused the vulnerability of most the members of the state. Frustration aggression due to unequal distribution of resources is the root cause of insecurity in Nigeria.

Poverty does not only cause an insufficient use of society's resources but also cause social and political instability in Nigeria. Poverty and its associated inequality have compounded ethnic tension. It has exacerbated centrifugal forces and heated up the polity. The inability of public institutions and economic uncertainty, especially within budding democracies, and, destroying otherwise favorable environment for domestic and external private investment. The Niger-Delta and Boko Haram crises and incidences of kidnapping and political violence are classic examples of responses to dissatisfaction with wealth distribution in Nigeria.

Conclusions

The paper have shown a strong connection between poverty and insecurity in Nigeria. The fact is that most of the conflicts in Nigeria are triggered by poverty. This as a result of the fact that the poor people are used to fighting for the rich in the Nigerian society. The study therefore concludes that there is strong linkage between poverty and insecurity in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the discussion above, the study makes the following recommendations

1. The Nigerian leaders should address the perennial socio-economic crisis in the country with urgency, otherwise civil unrest and crisis will continue to dominate the nation's political development. This can be done by improving the quality of governance in Nigeria.
2. The policies of government aimed at reducing poverty in Nigeria should be formulated on the bases of bottom-top approach and not top-bottom approached as we have had it. The bottom top approach will allow for community participation in drafting the policy documents.
3. A law should be put in place to punish anyone found inciting the poor people to fighting because of poverty. This punishment can be in the form of life imprisonment.
4. Poverty alleviating is for empowerment which should start from primary school. The education given should not be based on how to read and write but should focus on skills acquisition.

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