Poverty and Insecurity in Nigeria: Implications for National Development

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Abstract

Poverty in Nigeria has been so pervasive despite several anti-poverty campaigns. Meanwhile, the dual crises of poverty and insecurity have contributed to the deepening conditions of the people in the midst of plenty. This paper which is descriptive and qualitative in nature relied on the Frustration-Aggression hypothesis for its theoretical orientation to explain the nexus between poverty and insecurity in Nigeria. Corruption, bad governance, lack of political will and policy inconsistencies in the country have affected the situations adversely. This paper concludes that related government and private agencies should actively engage the youths in productive jobs. More so, the nation’s economy should be diversified to include other sectors such as the agricultural sector which once accounted for about 61% of the country’s export in the 1960s. The paper recommends that justice and equity should be a cognate principle in all facets of national life. More so, the issues that have given rise to the security threats should be addressed holistically and government should go beyond lip-service in its poverty reduction campaign to implement existing policies that would enhance and proffer permanent solutions to insecurity and poverty problems in Nigeria.

Key words: Frustration-Aggression; Insecurity, National development, Political-economy, Poverty

1. Introduction

The main causes of conflict are poverty and underdevelopment, especially the lack of basic necessities. The best way to resolve conflicts is to address its root causes.

Deng Boqing, Ambassador of the Republic of China to Nigeria.

Poverty is the reason for insecurity. - Shuaibu Idris, is a two-time governorship aspirant in Kaduna State, Nigeria.

The assertions above are not only true, but also show the two sides of the same coin. While the first is an international assertion, the latter is a local one, which suggests that poverty, insecurity are not attributable to local settings alone, but also cut across international landscape. For reasons that need not detain us here, it is already an established fact that poverty looms in Nigeria and the resultant effects have manifested in the insecurity of lives and property, underdevelopment, corruption, bad governance and failure of government institutions. Despite several anti-poverty programmes that have been initiated and established by various Nigerian governments to quash the quagmire out of the system, all efforts have yielded insignificant results thereby deepening the menace and poor conditions of the people (Felix & Osunmakinde, 2014; Aigbokhan, 2000).
Nigeria has remained a mix of plenty and poverty. This paradox is expressed in the rich natural and human resources the country is endowed with, yet it is one of the poorest countries of the world; contrary to the expectations and dreams nourished by her citizens and neighbours that the endowments of the country is supposed to bring them fortune rather than hardship. A few political classes have used the apparatus of the state to siphon the resources meant for the development of the state to satisfy the private and selfish gains of themselves and their clients. This has created an economy of corruption where the citizens struggle for the remaining resources for their advancement. Sometimes this struggle takes on violent tone which results in the destruction of lives and property. This becomes a ‘survival of the fittest’ syndrome which characterized the ‘state of nature’ in which Thomas Hobbes (1588 - 1679) the 17th century political philosopher describes as ‘one of constant war of “all against all”’ (Okeke, 2009).

IKEJIaku (2009) argues that poverty is a multidimensional problem that goes beyond economics to include among other things, social, political, and cultural issues. Citing John Burton (1997) Ikejiaku agrees that there are conflict and instability in developing countries because people are denied not only their biological needs, but also psychological needs that relate to growth and development. He further argues that social strife and revolutions are not brought out by the conspiratorial or malignant nature of man; rather revolutions are derived from poverty and distributive injustice. Therefore, when the poor are in the majority and have no prospect of ameliorating their condition, they are bound to be restless and seek restitution through violence. Oshita (2011) adds that there are multiple factors that predispose a society to violent conflictual relationships these include resources, ethnicity, politics, religion, marginalization, insecurity and exclusion. No government can hold stability and peace when it is created on a sea of poverty.

In explaining the above terms in their causal effective to poverty and insecurity, it is argued that where such (i.e poverty and insecurity) take upper hand in the society without adequate control, might make conflict penetrable into the society. Nigeria’s multi-ethnicity makes it susceptible to conflict and insecurity especially when a group claims that the others are marginalizing it or when ethnic or religious minorities are systematically excluded from governance or political representation, they may resort to open revolt against the system (Oshita, ibid). Campbell (2010) opines that Northern Nigeria’s escalating poverty is as a result of its declined access to oil because it lost political power to the South. His idea is that control of political power equals access to economic power. This perhaps may appear to be the root cause of the crises in Northern Nigeria which some have argued is an attempt to malign the leadership of the country being headed by a south-south representative. These crises have claimed hundreds of lives and property which has imposed high cost on governance. The Boko Haram insurgent activities have not only been detrimental to Nigeria but for Sub-Sahara Africa. This Sums up Osita's (ibid) argument that intra-state conflict especially in Africa does not only have internal consequences but consequences for global peace and security.

II. Theoretical Orientation: The Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis

There are competing paradigms that seek to explain the cause of poverty and insecurity not just in Nigeria but in developing countries generally. While the situation might be different with other countries, that of Nigeria is one that is mare with complexities and paradoxical. This is because as mentioned earlier, Nigeria is a mix of plenty and poverty. Therefore the premise on which this argument is based for its theoretical foundation is the Frustration-Aggression hypothesis.
Aggression though is a key concept developed by biologists and psychologists for the explanation of conflict. Dollard, Dobb, Miller, Mower, and Seers (1939) who are credited with popularizing the frustration-aggression hypothesis state that when circumstances interfere with a goal response, it often leads to aggression. This concept of frustration-aggression suggest that individuals turn aggressive when there are perceived or real impediments to their route to success in life, basically when their material basic needs are not met (Faleti, 2006).

The concept of frustration has featured prominently in the analysis of aggression because of the widespread assumption that the high conflict potential of developing countries is rooted in frustration caused by economic deprivation and political marginalization (Justino, 2002; Berdal & Malone, 2001; Goodhand, 2001; Collier & Hoeffler, 2000; Anderson & Dill, 1995, Esman, 1994). The hypothesis which is situated under the microcosmic theories of violent conflict originally was limited to the assumption that aggression is always a consequence of frustration. The corollary of this is that whenever a barrier is placed in between persons and their desired goal, an extra amount of energy is mobilized. Such energy mobilization, if continued and there is no success, there is the tendency that it will flow over into generalized destructive behaviour as the case in Nigeria.

In the view of Dolland et al (1939), the strength of instigation to the aggression is expected to vary with the strength of the frustrated response; the degree of interference with the frustrated response and the number of frustrated response-sequence. Thus, when grievances are not met, the poor and deprived in the society will riot, question the leadership as well and even join rebel groups (Ikejiaku, 2012).

III. The Political Economy of Pre-independence and Post-independence Nigeria

Nigeria, the most populous black nation and the seventh most populous country in the world seats on the land mass of 923,768 km² and boosts of a population of over 173.6 million. It shares boundaries with Chad and Cameroon in the east, the Republic of Benin in the west, Niger in the north. Its coast in the south lies on the Gulf of Guinea in the Atlantic Ocean (World Bank, 2014). Though rich in both natural and human resources, has come under siege - siege in political, economic and social life. Osaghae (2011) argues that Nigeria's political nature since independence is a long-drawn-out decay or decline whose empirical elements are first political instability occasioned by high turn-over of governments - regime structures, institutions and personal - leading to military coups, inconclusive and contested electoral outcomes, frequent changes in policy, political violence and crisis of legitimacy. Second a low level of national cohesion which defiles every element of healthy ethnic competitions and third economic crises, all of these reinforcing one another.

The experience of post-independence Nigeria as argued by Osaghae (2011) is a carry-over from pre-independence Nigeria. The colonial political economy was one which had an exploitative character without having the development of Nigeria and indeed the African Continent in mind. Ekekwe & Azu (2011), Ekekwe (1986), Ake (1981) suggest that the intension of colonial lords tended towards the disarticulation and incoherence of the different sectors of the Nigeria state. The colonizers could exploit the colony's wealth at all cost without recourse. Every sector of the colony in which the colonizers invested in, were of important interest to them. The railway system and the port for instance were not built to yield any maximum benefit to the development of the country but were built to satisfy the selfish interest of the colonizers. Groundnut export from the Kano region showed an increase within two years of almost 1,000
percent from less than 2,000 tons produced in 1911 before the arrival of railway system, to about 20,000 tons in 1913 a year after the railway reached Kano.

The Agricultural and Manufacturing sectors also witnessed disarticulation line of production in these sectors was mainly on commodities that benefited the colonizers. Priority was given to few export crops like cocoa in Ghana. Meanwhile, Ghana had not started exporting cocoa until its colonization, such that by 1901 the country was already the largest producers of cocoa in the world (Ake, 1981). Education under the colonial state followed an imperialist ideology which informed the roles played by the state. On the other hand, the foreign missionary group which brought formal Education to Nigeria complemented the activities of the state since the mission schools provided the state with some qualified manpower, while the state provided security for the missionaries "in this imperialist mission, both maxim guns and the Bible found mutual support and benefits" (Ekekwe 1986:35). There was no attempt to liberalize education since at this time in Britain; education was largely a restricted commodity. To them (colonial state), education was more important for its consequence and orientation than, for the number of students who received it, therefore they continued to show little interest in that direction.

Political succession under the colonial state was heavily tampered with as there was an attempt by the colonizers to establish their dominance in the country. Following the destruction of the natural economy and the imposition of the colonial state, the traditional notions and processes of political succession based on hereditary as in those of kings and chiefs, was consigned to oblivion. Ekekwe & Azu (2011), citing Warioba (2010) write that the colonial state in a bid to consolidate its role interfered with these systems and processes in order to gain political control; thereby destroying the sanctity, moral and cultural basis which traditionally attached to the succession process without regard to the implications for political succession in the future.

While we may appear at the risk of blaming colonial rule for the current misery of the Nigerian state, it is important to establish that the sorry condition in which the present Nigerian state is intrinsically linked to the experiences of the colonial era. The establishment of some private British orientated company such as the CSOA, JOHN HOLT, UAC, PZ, UTC and Multinational corporations are plows to deepen and further perpetrate the colonial evil to maintain the status quo for their selfish interest which is described as the new colonial relations between the national economy and foreign capital. This is responsible for the "decapitalization, technological backwardness, structural distortion, political instability, cultural degradation and environmental devastation of the third world" (Alapiki, 2006; Ekekwe, 1986).

IV. Emerging Economy for Post-Independence Nigeria

For the Nigerian political elite, the challenge is between private accumulation and social accumulation, although they may have learnt from colonial rule, they could have also changed and stopped what they decried at that time to be the exploitation of the local economy without due regard for future development. But that was not the case as they were more interested in private accumulation which has metamorphosized into several crises in the state. While few have used the apparatuses of the State to satisfy their private gains, others are left to wallow in abject poverty which has translated into the present sectoral crises which has bedeviled the Nigerian state. The political elites on one hand have invented an interest-specific leadership style that aimed at satisfying their private gains, instead of development-specific leadership style that makes for an opportunity for growth and development. The social miscreants on the other hand have created an emerging economy occasioned by extensive smuggling of arms, theft and sale of crude oil, kidnapping of foreign and local expatriate, destruction of oil company property and
installations, human rights abuses, thereby creating for themselves a self economic empowerment programme which to them out-weighs any government empowerment programme (Eti, 2014).

Every attempt by the political elite to put a stop to these self economic empowerment programmes by these social miscreants has resulted into conflicts between government forces and the social miscreants. While we may agree that the study of insurgency in the Northern part of Nigeria is as weighty as the region itself and that for want of space which we may not locate within the scope of this study, it is imperative to state that such insurgency has increased the poverty and insecurity level of the lives and property of Nigeria, therefore some suggestion have being provided to serve as succor for these menaces in Nigeria.

Again the view held by many that colonialism would lead to peaceful African states did not stand, because after independence, the African continent has witnessed a plethora of conflicts which has contributed to the continent’s “backwardness”. Colonialism left a system that imposed high cost of governance because it was poor and too weak to manage it affairs (Ikejiaku 2009).

Part of the emerging economy of post-independent Nigeria, is the client-patronage relations which characterizes the Nigerian political economy. Here, the political leader in a clientele environment grants privileges to a selected potion of the society as compensation for their obedience and corporation. These clients determine what happens to the creation and distribution of resources within the state (Yagboyaju 2007). They are neither trained on the tenets of governance, nor do they possess any skills to understand and drive the objective policies and public goals of the state. While these clients and patrons assert themselves in office and use the apparatus of the state to promote and protect their parochial egocentric interests, the rest of the aggrieved citizens are left with no other choice than to engage in violent activities which sometimes results in conflict situation between the state and rebels, to improve their poor livelihood.

Issues of corruption, bad leadership and weak institutions are negatives that have crept into governance in the emerging economy of post-independent Nigeria. Political leaders lack the capacity to formidably drive the ideal agenda of the state; which is growth and development. Growth and development is not only related to the economy; say fiscal growth, but an economic growth properly harnessed by political leaders which enhances political, social and economic welfare of the citizens.

Population upsurge is another problem militating against governance in post-independence Nigeria. The tremendous increase in population in Nigeria has outweighs economic such that there is very little to cater for the teeming population and this has imposed a very huge challenge on governance. Over the last 50 years, very little economic growth has occurred and this has not been commensurate with the high increase in population; again this is another cursor to a conflict situation in Nigeria as citizens have had to scramble for the available resources to cushion the effects of their poor conditions.

V. Desideratum for Positive National Development

The eradication of poverty on one hand, and the achievement of national security on the other is accepted as primary objectives of developing countries affected by this dual crises. While it may be argued that successive Nigerian governments have over the years, introduced anti-poverty programmes that are expected to cleanse the State of poverty, the reality is that the issue is far from being resolved. Without sounding pessimistic, poverty keeps multiplying in several dimensions and creating more problems on governance. Perhaps the reason for such
failure is poor policy conception and lack of control mechanism which are derived from weak theoretical orientation that is anchored on “things rather than on people.”

GDP growth, inflation rate, balance of payment popularly referred to as graphical development seem to be the concentration of governance and not on the development of the people. Here, consumption, literacy and participation should be the ideal focus of governance. Nigeria’s GDP growth of $510 billion (in 2013) makes no impact on her citizens if such does not translate to tangibles and real development of the various sectors that make up the country – political, economic and social etc. Therefore a paradigm shift is necessary in this regard to put the country into proper perspective. In this sense, governance in Nigeria needs to be conceptualized to reflect the realities of the prevalent conditions.

It is rather unfortunate that the 15 years of uninterrupted democracy in Nigeria has not earned the country stability in political leadership; as core democratic values are yet to take firm root in Nigeria’s democracy. Thus political leaders must remain accountable, responsible and transparent in managing public finance. Rule of law, separation of powers, and independence of democratic institutions – electoral bodies, law enforcement agencies, the judiciary and other institutions, citizenship engagement in democratic process must be properly entrenched into the political system and governance structure because they are very crucial for the sustenance of her democracy.

Pre-independence Nigerian economy was largely agrarian with lots of expectations for development and even after independence, the agricultural sector accounted for over 61% of the total value Nigeria’s export (Adeyemo, 2002) and this placed the country on the trajectory of development. The 1970s came with it the “oil boom” period which expectedly was to provide more development deliverables for the country. Sadly, the “oil boom” led to “oil doom” that has succeeded in making Nigeria a “mono-cultural economy and more import-dependent” (Babawale, 2003). Its dependence on resources from the oil and gas sector has consigned the once-cherished agricultural sector into oblivion. Today, the biggest shocker of the economy is that it makes the economy very vulnerable to global shocks and weak in inclusiveness. For that reason, there must be transformation of the agricultural sector, but this transformation cannot be in isolation of infrastructure development and industrialization. The Nigerian agricultural market still ranks very low in the global market, robust support is required on the part of government to catch up with the global market and compete with international standards.

The education sector plays a vital role in the development of the economy. The Report of the Commission for Africa (RCA, 2005) notes that education is a means to fulfill individual aspirations and critical for economic growth and healthy population. The Nigerian University system should diversify on the content of their learning and instruction as well as establish entrepreneurial and vocational institutes which should serve the citizens who may not have the capacity to go through the university system in acquiring formal education, but are talented in business and skills. Other sectors – telecommunication, finance, real sector (manufacturing) must receive priority attention as well.

There must be concerted efforts and political will on the part of government to protect the rights of ethnic and religious groups. Issues that bother on the identities of ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria must be treated with the highest form of civility and managed adequately. There should be respect for expertise for professionals and technocrats who are in the capacity to
inform government on policy issues especially as they have to do with these identities not just in Nigeria but in Africa and beyond.

Finally, government must build capacity and restore confidence in her citizens. It must live up to its expectations and promises at elections and deliver on the ideals of democracy by providing for healthcare, basic education, safe water, shelter, food and opportunity to participate in political, economic and social life. Citizens on the other hand must appreciate government gestures by being law abiding citizens, shunning violence and supporting good governance in all ramifications.

VI. Conclusion

In spite of the huge resources of which Nigeria is blessed, the country has been regarded as the sleeping giant or as Osaghae (2011) puts it the ‘crippled giant’, and has remained amongst the poorest countries of the world. The slogan of “suffering and smiling” in the mist of plenty is now been replaced with “use what you have to get what you want”. The result is unending conflicts and insecurity. The people have been pushed to the wall. The sound guns are alarming on every part of the country. Time has come to attack poverty our common enemy in the land. Time has come to stop killing ourselves and move forward.

Reference


