

The Scourge of Socio-Economic Insecurity in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, and the Challenge of Global Relevance

Lateef A.yinla ADENIRAN
Department of History
Emmanuel Alayande College of Education, Oyo Oyo State, NIGERIA
Email: lateefadeniran@yahoo.com
Tel: 234-8035060494

Abstract

On May 29, 1999 Nigeria experienced the inauguration of an elected president after an unbroken spell of sixteen years of military rule. This relief raised expectations of improved living standards, given the rather trying times which Nigerians were subjected to under authoritarian rule. Goodwill from the international community, as well as the returns from its major export earner, crude oil served as veritable bases for better prospects for the people. Paradoxically the people have had to contend with harsh socio-economic conditions leading to the deterioration in their living standards. Safety of lives and property have been threatened more than ever before. This development has tended to undermine the corporate existence of the nation. The increasing rate of youth unemployment, collapse of manufacturing industries, inability of infrastructure to match rising needs, sectarian and ethnic clashes, assassinations and kidnappings as well as bombings have created high sense of insecurity. These have tasked the capabilities of government institutions to extent that the credibility of leaders have been seriously eroded. This feature of contemporary Nigeria, seriously detracts from the national objective of guiding the nation to become one of the twenty leading nations on the global scene by the year 2020. It equally makes Nigeria less-competitive among the countries seeking to represent Africa in an enlarged membership of the security council at United nations. The high sense of insecurity has the potentiality of eroding Nigeria's relevance as an anchor country. Underlying this state of affairs is the leaders' culture of impunity.

Introduction

The phenomenon of political instability in Nigeria seems to have been overcome given the smooth transition from one elected leader to another from 1999 up to date (2012). A stable government by its nature is supposed to be a key element in the development of a nation. It would be recalled that the Nigerian military had hitherto been a major source of political crises³ and the attendant socio-economic challenges which had bedeviled nation building since independence. Thus, the opportunity of a return to civilian rule was supposed to be in tune with global trends which set criteria for good governance and consequently, the promotion of socio-economic development. Deriving from the above, the inauguration of an elected president, after an unbroken spell of sixteen years of military rule brought relief and raised expectations of conducive atmosphere for government to bring about improved living standards for the people of Nigeria. To complement this prospect, the nation's main foreign exchange earner, crude oil, brought in returns at an unprecedented level. In addition to that, civilian rule has the propensity of attracting goodwill from the international community. This feeling was anchored on the belief that an elected government would be able to facilitate security for the mass of the people; in terms of being responsive to the needs of the people, as well as providing a conducive environment for the safety of the capital investment, through the instrumentality of rule of law.

Given this background, it would not be out of place to attempt a conceptualization of the issue of security at this point. Conventionally, security has been associated with militarist tendencies such that it entails the threat, or the application of force, to suppress any action that tends to undermine governance or a particular interest. This approach to the issue of security has however been challenged as can be deduced from the admonition of a former World Bank President, Robert McNamara thus:

Any society that seeks to achieve adequate military security against the background of acute food shortage, population explosion, low level of production and per capita income, low technological development, inadequate and inefficient public utilities,

and chronic problem of unemployment, has a false sense of security (Anonymous, 2005:8).

In the same vein, *The South Magazine*, in one of its editorial comments contends that, 'The threat to national security is not from neighbours. The real predators are poverty, inequality and exploitation' (SOUTH Editorial, 1989:8). One can go further in buttressing this position with George Marshall's tenet that: 'Real security must rest on economic prosperity' (SOUTH, 1989:15).

In spite of Nigeria's favourable conditions, the nation has experienced unprecedented socio-economic crises which have tended to undermine the corporate existence of the nation. The increasing rate of youth unemployment, kidnapping, ritual killings, worsening health conditions, collapse of manufacturing industries, decaying social infrastructure as well as the widening socio-economic gap among the citizens, sectarian and ethnic clashes and assassinations, have created high sense of forlorn hope among Nigerians. This feature of contemporary Nigeria seriously detracts from the national objective of guiding the nation to become one of the twenty leading nations on the global scene by the year 2020. It equally seeks to undermine Nigeria's competitiveness among the nations seeking to represent Africa in the proposed enlarged permanent members of the Security Council.

Governance and Public Goods

The essence of governance rests on the premise that it would serve as a facilitator in advancing the cause of members of its constituent units. It must be appreciated that society is made up of various individuals with varying qualities, in human failings and consequently varying interests. These qualities and weaknesses account for the variations in the levels of socio-economic attainments. It is therefore these divergent elements that lead to conflicts. In order to advance human civilization, there is the need for a moderating agent. Herein lies the relevance of the social contract theory. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), in his *The Leviathan*, posits that organized government came into being with the primary objective of instituting social order, in contrast to the state of nature where anarchy was prevalent. Under the latter situation, Hobbes avers, the life of man was 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short' (as cited in Appadorai, 2004:22 and Wayper, 1974: 54). John Locke (1632-1704) had a more liberal approach towards the basis of the constitution of the political society. He argues that 'the end of government' is 'the good of the community' (as cited in Wayper, 1974:75). In other words, government should exist to promote the welfare of the people. In line with this thinking, Harry Eckstein identifies the functions of the State as distributive, regulative and redistributive. He however isolates the redistributive as the key essence of the State, adding that the redistributive is the most conflict-laden realm, 'the realm of winners and losers, of haves and have-nots' (Eckstein, 1979:17). This position reinforces the fact that the main function of government is to serve a mediatory role by reconciling the differences among the people, as a means of ensuring harmony. It must be appreciated that in a developing country like Nigeria where poverty is commonplace, it is imperative that the machineries of government be deployed to ensure that resources are justly distributed. When governance is premised on equity, the bases of friction and conflict can easily be checked, while more resources would be channeled towards development. This has been established in a study carried out by Dethier, where he submits that, 'Recent developments in welfare economics have shown that issues of efficiency and distribution cannot be separated... high levels of inequality generally tend to reduce efficiency' (Dethier, 1999:13).

Arising from the above positions, it can be said that the relevance of governance is determined to the extent that it succeeds in securing for the citizens the good life. A society can be said to be secure if governmental process is fair and humane. One therefore finds that good government is driven by the objective of delivering what in contemporary terms is called 'public goods'. Public goods are wide ranging issues that include compulsory education, access to health facilities, employment opportunities, checking poverty, reducing socio-economic inequalities as well as guaranteeing the fundamental human rights of the people. It is these issues that lie at the core of the security of any political set up. The failure of government to guarantee these socio-economic values has been the source of violence and destruction of lives and property. It is this latter development that can generally termed to be insecurity.

The Socio-economic Environment

References to Nigeria generally draw attention to its abundant resources- human and material. With a population of over 160million, it is the most populous African nation. Its endowment of crude oil accords it the opportunity of being considered to be of strategic interest to some western nations, particularly the United States. It has been estimated that Nigeria accounted for about 12% of crude oil exported to the U.S. in 2007 (Ngwube, Deborah,

Keshi, John & Adibuah, 2009:177). One needs to add that this level of commitment has been steady. Crude oil has for more than three decades, served as the main foreign exchange earner for Nigeria. Apart from that, the country is endowed with about thirty-two solid minerals. In addition to that it has extensive arable lands. These resources place Nigeria at a vantage position to be a key-player on the global scene. Nigeria, and two other African countries- Egypt and South Africa are reckoned with as anchor countries in line with other developing countries like China, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Thailand, Brazil, Mexico and Turkey (Taube, 2006:200). Consideration of this categorization was based on the argument that these countries '...are crucial powers in their respective regions. They influence stability, prosperity and poverty reduction in neighbouring countries'(Taube, 2006:200). With the above background, one would want to ask the question, Since the return to civil rule, has Nigeria succeeded in creating enabling environment that would guarantee security for the citizens?

There is need to appreciate the socio-political conditions under which Nigerians operated during the military era. Studies have established the fact that government hardly operate with efficiency under authoritarian rule. In one of such studies Jean-Jacques Dethier reveals that 'In a non-democratic system, it is hard to conceive why a political elite and its allies would willingly transfer large amount of public resources to the poor and weak segments of the societies' (Dethier, 1999:19). Thus under military rule, Nigerians were subjected to serious material deprivation as well as gross abuse of their fundamental rights. As the military rulers saw themselves as above the law and not accountable to the people, governance was not guided by the very basis of government- the security of the people. Rather, the guiding principles were self-survival and perpetuation in power. The inauguration of Olusegun Obasanjo on May 29, 1999 as the first president of the Fourth Republic was therefore seen as propitious for the nation, as it was believed that political leaders would be more accessible and responsive to the aspirations of the people. It was believed that the new dispensation would operate by consultations and adherence to constitutional provisions. In addition to that democratic rule has the propensity of attracting foreign investments which will in turn stimulate economic development. It was partly in the realization of these expectations that the then American President, Bill Clinton paid an official visit to Nigeria in August 2000.

In order to set the machinery of government on a sound footing, Obasanjo carried out series of reforms in the public service. As a means of effecting the envisaged transformation of the Nigerian public service, he constituted the National Council on Reform (NCR) which was presided over by the president (Shala, 2005: 20-21). After Obasanjo left office at the expiration of his two terms of eight years, he was succeeded by Umar Yar'adua who died in office on May 5, 2010 before he could complete his first term in office. He was in turn succeeded by the incumbent Goodluck Jonathan. With this feature of smooth transition and political stability, it was expected that the socio-economic development would receive due attention. It was observed that the nation's socio-economic conditions continued to deteriorate. In spite of the continuous rise in revenue accruing from the sale of crude oil, the decadence of socio-economic infrastructure continued unchecked. For instance, as part of the findings undertaken by the US State Department, it was revealed in what it titled 'Economic Confidential' that:

Over #34trillion entered Nigeria's coffers, between 1999 and 2009; yet the country has the second poorest standard of living in the world; only17percent of Nigeria's population has access to portable water...the systematic failure has been traced to pervasive influence of corruption in government and the public sector (Obadare, 2010:10).

The above disclosure had far-reaching implications for the well-being of a large section of the Nigerian society, particularly the less-privileged who formed a sizeable population. It led to harsh socio-economic living for the people. This can be illustrated when attention is drawn to the various aspects of the Nigerian life, particularly as it has been captured by The World Bank's research findings as well as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which latter agency came up with its annual Human Development Index (HDI) as a mirror of well-being of about 192 member countries of the United Nations. For instance, in its Human Development Index (HDI) report of 2009, Nigeria was ranked 158, behind Ghana (which is far less endowed than Nigeria) which was 152 on the global ranking (UNDP, 2009:12). Similarly, Bloomberg, while citing the United Nations, the World Bank, and the World Health Organization rankings of the health status of 145 countries in 2012, ranked Nigeria 132 as against Ghana, Senegal, Eritrea, Kenya, South Africa, and Mali which were 102,109,112,118,123 and 129 positions respectively(Bloomberg, 2012). This low rating of Nigeria can be attributed to the prevailing socio-economic challenges bedeviling the nation.

The issue of low level socio-economic development can be traced to bad governance. Nigerian political leaders had since the onset of the Fourth Republic, expressed their determination to raise to a substantial level, electric power supply to the nation, to the extent that a sum of about \$16 billion (PUNCH Comment, 2010:15) was appropriated in that regard. In addition to that, succeeding leaders had equally committed much State resources towards boosting the nation's power supply, as a means of improving the socio-economic infrastructure. One by-product of the failure in this regard was the arrest of economic growth. The manufacturing sector in particular was adversely affected. With reference to the crisis that hit the manufacturing sector, the Executive Secretary of the Manufacturing Association of Nigeria (MAN), lamented what he called the 'harsh operating environment' such that out of the 150 registered membership in 2002, it was depleted to just 50 by 2010 (PUNCH Comment, 2010:15). In citing the case of Kano, it was equally revealed that 'out 350 manufacturing entities in 1987 only 103 are presently in business' (PUNCH Comment, 2010:15). Some of the industries that closed down relocated to neighbouring West African nations, particularly Ghana. Among other debilitating effects on the socio-economic life of the nation, the folding up of industries meant the worsening of unemployment level. Annually, the nation's tertiary institutions graduate thousands of youths who go into the labour market which was not stagnant but rather shrinking. A reflection of this progressive decline of the Nigerian economy was manifested in the 2012-2013 World Economic Forum's (WEF) Global competitive Report which ranked Nigeria 115th among 144 countries studied in terms of conducive economic climate. (W.E.F 2012/2013 Global Competitiveness Report). Among other things, the Report indicated that Nigeria's economic situation was grim, adding that its situation was similar to those of oil-producing sub-saharan African nations as:

They exhibit the largest infrastructure deficit in the region, their institutional quality is similar to that of fragile economies, and they perform considerably worse than other countries in the region in educating their young population and providing good conditions for a healthy work force' (Yishau, 2012:9).

The situations cited had dire consequences for its citizens especially the youths. According to the Nigerian Bureau of Employment, by the end of September 2010, there were about 10 million unemployed people in Nigeria.⁴ Such a large pool of unemployed youths has the tendency of fueling socio-economic crises. Inability to put into use, the training which they had been exposed to, was a means of stunting their individual development and by extension, their individual contributions to national development. Apart from that, frustrations arising from failure to be meaningfully engaged made them susceptible to anti-social activities.

The United Nations, at its historic Millennium Summit, outlined an eight-point Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) among which was the target of halving those living below the poverty line by 2015. At the onset of the Obasanjo presidency, the government established the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) with a view to addressing the challenges posed by the continuous decline in the living standard of the people, as well as acting in consonance with the demands of the MDGs. In order to complement and even enhance the activities of NAPEP, the government initiated the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). Adeniran (2005), while quoting the National Orientation Agency, stated that the NEEDS initiative was informed by the awareness that:

Nigeria faces a threat of not meeting the Millennium Development Goals if further major steps are not taken... projections from 1996 poverty data suggests that poverty incidence could be as high as 70 per cent.

Efforts of this nature, awareness of its implications as well as the billions of naira appropriated in that regard did not reverse the decline in the quality of living of majority of Nigerians. This was to the extent that a survey which was undertaken by a UK- based charity organization revealed that Nigeria, was identified with India, Bangladesh, Peru and Pakistan, as one of the five countries 'where half of the world's malnourished children live' (Augoye, 2013:3). Closely related to the citizens' state of health, which itself is a major contributory factor to a person's wellbeing, is the opportunity of access to feeding. According to the Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2012, which was published by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Nigeria was ranked among those countries with serious hunger situations (GHI, 2012:20). It is instructive to draw attention to the fact that, healthcare and provision of food are key elements of the UN's eight MDGs. It is however interesting to observe that while the situation of malnutrition was affecting children, the larger sector of the society had to contend with food importation to check the issue of hunger. In the process, the Federal Government observed that the nation was spending huge sums of money to import food items at a time when it initiated programmes

which would enable the government to ensure food security for its people. An instance of this was the realization that the nation was spending as much as #100billion annually on importation of rice (Subair, 2008:3). This could be seen to be counter-productive to the Federal Government's initiative of promoting rice cultivation in the country. As a way of appreciating the implication of the above development to the socio-economic development of the people, it is apposite that reference is made to a similar situation. In an editorial comment, the *Daily Independent* newspaper criticized the Federal Government's approval for the importation of dust bins to the tune of #927.6million. The paper avers that:

The absurdity of the decision is more obvious when situated in the present economic context of Nigeria: rapidly depleting foreign reserves, grossly depreciated naira, burgeoning youth and graduate unemployment, rising job and income losses from plant closures and staff downsizing, as well as plummeting manufacturing capacity utilization and the relocation of some major firms to neighbouring West African nations, among others. (DAILY INDEPENDENT Editorial, 2010:3).

Manifestations of poor management of the nation's resources took various forms with the above serving as an indicator of how a resource-rich developing country could undermine the well-being of its citizen by failure to utilize financial resources prudently. Deriving from the above, the National Bureau of Statistics, in its evaluation of the nation's economic performance in 2010 was quoted to have reported that 'the economy had exhibited a paradox of growth without job creation' (PUNCH Editorial, September 2010:14).

Security Challenges and Global Relevance

Consequent upon the failure of successive governments since 1999, to institute good governance that would secure the socio-economic well-being of the average Nigerian, there has been a resultant political backlash. The political leaders have been generally viewed to be insensitive to the yearnings of the people for a dignified life. The prevalence of hunger and poverty are enough dangers to challenge the legitimacy of any constituted authority. The two challenges, hunger and poverty, in particular, have been complicated by the growing youth unemployment as well as the systematic denial of the right type education to some other underprivileged members of the nation. The attendant frustration has given rise to further insecurity which is manifested in the violent sectarian clashes, ethnic strife, rising case of assassination as well as kidnappings for ransom. For instance in the editorial comment of *The Punch* of August 2, 2010 the paper reveals that Nigeria ranks sixth on the list of the countries where people can readily be kidnapped. The paper quoted *Reuters News Agency* as saying that in the first six months of 2009, about 500 people were kidnapped. The debilitating effects of these crises have accentuated into such centrifugal forces as demonstrated by *Boko Haram* insurgency in particular as well as other militant elements across the nation. This development tends to justify the theory that :

State weakness and poor governance, particularly the state's failure to manage natural resource exploitation effectively and equitably, also strongly influence the opportunity for and feasibility for rebellion as it affects the relative strength of the state being challenged (Development and Cooperation, 2003:443).

Apart from the threat to the very basis of government, the aftermath of the absence of satisfactory socio-economic security, has tended to erode the influence of Nigeria at the various forums the country could exercise political leverage or reckoning. The need for relevance has become pertinent in contemporary globalised political scene. In this regard, it would be relevant to draw attention to a remark made by the former US ambassador to Nigeria, Princeton Lyman while commenting on Nigeria thus:

'What does it mean that one in five Africans is Nigerian? It does not mean anything to a Namibian or a South African. It is a kind of conceit, what makes it important is what is happening to the people of Nigeria. Are their talents being tapped? Are they becoming an economic force? Is all that potential being used?'⁵ The implication of this is that Nigeria's quest on the global scene is contingent on its leaders' commitment towards ensuring socio-economic security for its citizens. This is particularly the case when Nigeria is competing with other regional powers like South Africa and Egypt for a seat on the proposed enlarged membership of the Security Council, United Nations. In this regard a former Director General of the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA), George O. Obiozor, submits that: 'Today, it has become a compelling National interest for Nigeria to keep her house in order. To do so means we must reduce the level of serious threats to the survival of

Nigeria as one nation, under one government and under one destiny by reducing the level of national crises that attracts international attention'(Obiozor, 1998:34). Nigeria needs to cultivate the goodwill of world leaders, which can best be done if its leaders demonstrate proven commitment towards respecting their rights towards decent living.

Culture of Impunity

Nigeria's heightening socio-economic challenges can be traced to a number of factors which in general terms can be attributed to poor governance. Deriving from this is the brazen manner in which corruption festers among those entrusted with public resources. In spite of the establishment of government agencies like the Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), which have been empowered to stem these practices, siphoning of public funds into private accounts continues unabated. Apart from selective instances when such personalities were prosecuted, a large number of such offenders manipulated the instruments of State to either circumvent justice or in a devious process, prolonged prosecution to the extent that public attention wanes on the course of justice in a manner that the court of law strikes it off. In certain instances personalities involved in corrupt practices were treated by the enforcement officers in a manner as to pervert the cause of justice of the land. The issue of the Halliburton bribery scandal is a reference point. The Halliburton case involved a United States multinational which offered a bribe to the tune of \$180 million between 1995 and 2004, to a number of Nigerian officials in order to secure contracts worth \$6 billion on the Nigerian Natural Liquefied Gas (Agbo, 2009: 34). While the U.S. government has sanctioned its citizens involved in the scandal, its Nigerian counterpart is yet to prosecute the Nigerians involved.

This trend reinforces the culture of impunity among public office holders. It is this trait of oppression and enslavement of fellow citizens that was emulated among some daring members of the Nigerian society who exploit such loopholes to inflict various forms of injustices among their fellow citizens. For instance, in the early days of August 2012, a number of Nigerian newspapers reported the interception by the Kogi State Joint Task Force (JTF) of truck loads of under-aged children numbering about 200, being transported from Benue, Cross River and Kogi States to some States in the western part of the country. Without doubt, movement of such a large number of children at a particular instance reveals the vulnerability of such victims, which calls for government's action. However, this matter did not receive any attention from either the government or any section of the society, who could prosecute the culprits. One particular development that establishes the extent to which Nigerian leaders treat the welfare of citizens with lethargy can be deduced from what has become the outcome of the Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission (HRVIC), otherwise known as the Oputa Panel. At the inception of the Fourth Republic, President Obasanjo set up the HRVIC, under a retired justice of the Supreme Court, Justice Chukwudifu Oputa. This was to be in the form of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission led by Bishop Desmond Tutu immediately after the termination of apartheid rule in South Africa. In spite of the revelations of atrocities and abuse of human rights revealed at the sittings of the Oputa Panel, nothing was done to redress or mitigate the injustices meted out to victims in the previous administrations. These instances, among others, tend to detract from the essence of the institution of political systems as the very basis through which citizens have secure environment to live decent lives.

Conclusion

It is an established fact that all human societies have to contend with one challenge or the other. In the case of nation-states, the issue of security is a core value that deserves primary attention. Real security entails meeting the basic needs of the people that could free them from poverty, hunger, illiteracy, diseases and social injustice. It is the deficiency of these values among the generality of Nigerians that has provoked recourse to violence. Internal socio-political crises do not only cause distortion in the management of resources, but equally has negative impact on its image externally. Thus it can be said that the Fourth Republic leaders in Nigeria are yet to come to terms with these challenges.

NOTES

1. As can be deduced from the following:

The *coup d'etat* of January 15, 1966 brought about the collapse of the First Republic. It also instigated the counter coup of July 29, 1966 the aftermath of which was the civil war of July 1967 - January 1970. *Coup d'etat* of July 29, 1975; botched coup of February 13, 1976; abrupt termination of the four - year old Second Republic on December 31, 1983; palace coup of August 25, 1985; foiled coups of 1986 and 1990; still-born Third Republic as borne out by the June 12, 1993 political crisis.

2. This is according to a news monitored by the author viz ‘News Commentary’ Gateway Radio (Abeokuta), 90.5 FM on Friday, October 1, 2012 6p.m. World News.

3. see: usafricaonline.com/.../Nigeria-usa-interests-princeton-lyman

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