

# Poverty, Corruption and Nation Building in Nigeria

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## Abstract

Poverty can be said to be a good corollary of corrupt practices when bad and irresponsible leaders are at the helm of affairs. It is obvious that in a corrupt society like Nigeria, a coterie of people sit atop the collective patrimony, thereby making provision of essential services very difficult or impossible for the citizenry. Nigeria with a population that is well over 180 million people, has found it difficult to forge oneness and unity among its heterogeneous population. The paper takes a close look at the impacts of the dialectics of poverty and corruption on nation building as a project. Poverty reduction for the umpteenth time has been at the front burner of successive governments' agenda, however, virtually all efforts to alleviate poverty have turned to be a conduit pipe for corruption which ends in a vicious circle of generation of poverty. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2010), Nigeria opines that about 69% which is about 112.47 million live below poverty line. Despite this eye opening information, Nigerian politicians and civil servants continue to entrench poverty wittingly by virtue of their corrupt practice, with the resultant effect of making ineffectual the project of nation building in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Poverty, Corruption, Nigeria and Nation Building

## INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, a country that gained independence from the British colonisers in 1960, has been trapped within the web of poverty amidst plenty with insensitive leaders manning different political posts. This parlous state of common man in Nigeria is made worse by the barbaric and Nigeria is blessed with a number of natural resources that if well harnessed can make Nigeria the envy of the top countries in Europe and America. But due to the avaricious tendencies of Nigerian leaders who steal for their yet unborn generations, poverty has been distributed to most family as a *dividend of democracy*. It is so bad that countries that saw Nigeria a model in the 70s and 80s such as Ghana and some other countries, with better economy now despise and treat Nigeria and Nigerians with contempt due to the parlous state of our prostrating economy occasioned by visionless leaders.

There has been so much dichotomy within the main and minority ethnic nations in Nigeria, due to pervasive poverty and corruption. This of course has inevitably precipitated a situation of mistrust and paranoia that gave birth to the civil war that ravaged Nigeria in 1967 to 1970.

Nigeria was indeed a buoyant economy in the 70s, with oil revenue in the sky and Nigeria benefited immensely from this windfall (Udoji money). It was not as if corruption was not with us then, but it was minimal but with the present crop of politicians and leaders, corruption has been raised to an enviable height such that, when a person gets either an elective or appointive position; his kinsmen will see him as a goldmine and the *national cake* must come to them through him. According to an Action Aid Report (2015), corruption has the tendency to exacerbate and cause conflicts, promote poverty and impacts negatively on the use of human and natural resources. In other words, corruption can engender poverty. The study starts with an introduction and inexorably proceeds to explaining basic concepts in the study and poverty and corruption nexus and concludes with recommendations

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### POVERTY

Explicating poverty in this study has become a desideratum in view of its cardinal importance to the study. According to Mahatma Ghandi 'Poverty is the worst form of violence'. It is indeed an irony that Nigeria as a country, is rich but her citizens are poor. Etymologically, the word poverty emanates from a French word. It is *poverte* and it also has its Latin equivalence in *Paupertas* which translates to, to be poor. Poverty basically translates to a state of want, lack or need. But put more pungently, poverty is when an individual lacks money or other necessities of life. There is relative and absolute poverty. Poverty is said to be relative, when one compares ones state of being poor to other people. It is absolute however, when there is deprivation of the basic necessities of life (Aidelunuoghene, 2014). Adam Smith cited in Aidelunuoghene, submitted that, poverty is the inability to afford. This shows the limiting capacity of poverty. The World Bank perceives poverty as pronounced deprivation in wellbeing and comprises many dimensions (World Bank, 2001)

From all the above, it can be gleaned that, poverty is a condition of financial incapacitation to muster the financial muscle to prosecute the basic necessities of life. Ucha (2010) contended that poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon. Corroborating this, the United Nations (1998) conceptualises it as:

The denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. It

means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and clothe a family, not having a school or clinic to go to; not having the land on which to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living, not having access to credit. It means insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. It means susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living on marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation

Nigeria is a country with a huge chunk of the population living below poverty line and in parlous condition. A poor person will lack the capacity to receive quality education, which can hamper the capacity of such a person to excel and come off in flying colours with which to get a high paying job, which can catapult such a person from the shackles and manacles of poverty. With this in mind, it is believed in some quarters that, poverty begets poverty and riches begets riches.

## **CORRUPTION**

Corruption is a phenomenon that ravages both the advanced and the third world. The difference lies basically in the intensity and perpetration of corrupt acts in these climes. In the advanced countries of the world, corrupt practices are not often swept under the carpet unlike the third world, where corruption has almost become a second nature. Corruption in the opinion of Abdul-Ismael (2007:3) cited in Alafuro averred that derives from Latin word, which is *rumpere* which translates to, to break. Alafuro (2011) defined corruption as the breaking of the established codes of behavior for the benefit of the perpetrator. While in the opinion of Toyo (2006:2) it is the acts of embezzlement of public funds, bribery, nepotism, fraud whether on a small or large scale, impairment of integrity or departure from accepted societal norms. In conclusion, Awolowo in 1967 at the Convocation Lecture at the then University of Ife now Obafemi Awolowo University described the phenomenon as *an abuse of office for private gain*. To say that corruption is a disservice to a society is indeed stating the obvious. The Dictionary of Social Sciences conceptualized corruption as the use of...power of...profit, preferment, or prestige, or for the benefit of a group or class, in a way that constitutes a breach or law or standards of high moral conduct. The above aptly describes the manner of corruption in Nigeria.

Shah (2007) categorized corruption into four basic classes. They include;

**Petty Corruption**-This at the individual level, here, public officials take kick -backs, divert public funds for private use, they give favours not for altruistic purposes but for personal benefits that will accrue to them.

**Grand Corruption**-This is at the higher level than the petty one. At this level, government officials and bureaucrats engage in gargantuan theft or misuse state resources to their advantage at the expense of the state.

**State Capture**-This is a situation whereby private individuals connive with public officials for personal benefit.

**Patron-Client Relations**-This is also known as Prebendalism, it is when the office of an official is used as a platform for the distribution of prebend, to family member, friends, in-laws as a payback for their past or impending support.

## **NATION BUILDING**

This is indeed a buzz word in the developing world, especially in countries with heterogeneous population and such population have elements that tend to separate rather than unite them. Kanu (2004) observed that, it is a dialectical phenomenon in which the individual and society interact with their physical, biological and inter-human environments, transforming them for their own good and that of humanity at large and being transformed in the process. Nation building basically approximates efforts to forge oneness through a *port pourri* of efforts such as having a unifying symbols, embarking on integrating schemes and programmes e.g the National Youth Service Scheme (NYSC) among others.

## **POVERTY IN NIGERIA**

Poverty is not an exclusive preserve of any locality, where people are lazy or they mis-manage the resources at their disposal, poverty definitely will remain their lot. According to Nigerian Poverty Profile documented by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the percentage of Nigerians that were classified as extremely poor over the last three decades are as follows: 6.2% (1980), 12.1% (1985), 13.9% (1992), 29.3% (1996), 22.0% (2004) and 38.7% (2010) (NBS, 2012). Ucha noted that there are certain factors that contribute to the exacerbation of poverty in Nigeria and they are as follow:

### **Unemployment**

It is indeed stating the obvious that, there is a direct correlation between unemployment and poverty. Education once seen as the surest, undisputed gateway to employment, no longer looks so certain (Teshome, 2008). This goes without saying that, getting a good education, let alone a half- baked one is not a guarantee for employment. It is discovered that unemployment that emanates from this, often generate vices in the society. These include: advance fee fraud (419), internet fraud (Yahoo Yahoo) among others.

### **Corruption**

This is the massive corrupt practice being perpetrated by political office holders, who deny the masses the needed benefits of governance. Whenever these people corner public resources, it often has a multiplier effects on the suffering masses. To this end, whatever amount of money being stolen by politician, there are people who are going to suffer for it.

### **Over-dependency on Oil**

This parochial and primitive reliance on a singular resource can be referred to as *Dutch Disease*.

Before the discovery of oil in commercial quantity in Oloibiri present day Bayelsa in 1957, agriculture used to be the main foreign exchange earner of Nigeria. But with the discovery of oil and its pecuniary benefit, the South-South zone of Nigeria has therefore become the golden cheese that lay the golden egg. An average undergraduate in the university hopes to get a job upon graduation in the university. This is done to the detriment of the economy, because any shock in the price of oil in the global market definitely will affect Nigeria's fortune. And true to type, in recent time, the fluctuating price of oil in the world market has made a mess the Nigerian economy and this has tripled down to the average man on the street. The dwindling fortunes of the Nigerian state, has affected adversely the capacity of state government to pay salaries for months, with the corresponding poverty among Nigerians..

### **Inequality**

This is yet another factor contributing to poverty in Nigeria. The Nigerian system has invariably dichotomized the society into the haves and the haves-not. Inequality basically implies a state of concentration of distribution whether one is considering income, consumption, or some other welfare indicators (Oyekale, Oyekale, and Adeoti, 2007). The type of job people do invariably put inequality among people.

## **CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA**

Corruption cannot be said to be a new phenomenon in Nigeria. It can be said to be innate in man because in the assertion of Thomas Hobbes analysis of the state of nature. The need for self- survival pushes man to the point of being aggressive, cunning and deviant in the pursuit of daily means of existence. Any attempt to understand the problem of development in Nigeria, one must come to grips with a good understanding of what corruption is (Ogundiya, 2009). Ogundiya further contended that, the state is very central to the analysis of corruption in Africa. Corruption can be said to be a huge albatross to public administration in Nigeria. This is because, it clogs the wheel of progress of the society. Its as if, as Nigeria gained independence, corruption was adopted as a state policy. It manifested in the 60s (Ogundiya, 2009), but grew rapidly in the Second Republic (Aiyede, 2006). The Second Republic was so notorious for corruption that the government led by Sheu Shagari was described by Bangura (1986:31) as "the government of the contractors by the contractors and for the contractors". Several of Shagari's ministers were accused of having corruptly enriched themselves by the probe panel set up by Buhari's government later.

As if that was not enough to snuff life out of the Nigerian state, the military came on board and corruption became "institutionalized" (Aiyede, 2006: 37). Babangida regime came and raised corruption seemingly to a state policy, as some of the accused and jailed politicians by his predecessor were released by Babangida and he had their cases reviewed (Ogundiya, 2009).

Gboyega averred that

The benign treatment of corruption in the early years of Babangida administration foretold a much more conscious instrumental use of corruption to ensure regime stability. For a military administration, Babangida's government was unique in its unconcern about corruption within its ranks and among public servants generally; it was as if the Government existed so that corruption might thrive (Gboyega, 1996: 5).

Several corruption cases were leveled against Babangida's government, part of which is the, mismanagement of the \$2 billion Gulf Oil windfall in 1991, 400 million naira wasted on the Better Life project, a pet project of the wife of the Head of State, Mariam Babangida among others (The News Magazine, December 20, 1993. With the expiration of Babangida's government came the Abacha, which was the most illegitimate (Ogundiya, 2009). Abacha was not only corrupt but can be said to be a personification of corruption himself, despite some cosmetic corruption fighting programmes put in place, such as War Against Indiscipline and Corruption (WAIC). It must be emphasised that each successive government after the demise of the dark glasses wearing despot has been retrieving his stolen monies across the globe.

1. General Abdulsalam Abubakar succeeded him and conducted an election that brought in the Civilian government of Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999. Obasanjo hit the ground running in abid to fight corruption, with the creation of corruption fighting agencies- the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). Despite all these

efforts at keeping corruption at bay, three Senate presidents were removed on allegations of financial mismanagement and corruption. Within that same dispensation, the first female Speaker of House of Representatives, Mrs. Patricia Etteh was removed on the allegation of wanting to repair her official apartment to the tune of N628m. The unassuming Sheu Musa Yar'Adua also ruled in life with the rule of law, despite the fact that he admitted that the election that brought him in was flawed. Death hit Nigeria and Nigerians a bad blow by untimely taking the Master's degree holder in Chemistry. Naturally, the mantle of leadership fell on his Vice, the Niger-Delta doctorate degree holder in Zoology, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan. His government was sent packing due to the massive corruption that marred his administration. From the Stella Odua gate to the Farouk Lawan financial scandal. He was seen by Nigerians as someone that cannot fight corruption, hence the Waterloo he met at the 2015 general elections. The incumbent administration has made fighting corruption its cardinal objective but Nigerians are skeptical about this. The administration's fight against corruption can be said to be one side, in the sense that, only the members of the opposition parties are being accused of corrupt enrichment but the moment such individuals jump ship to the ruling party, they become *saints*.

### **NATION BUILDING IN NIGERIA**

Magstadt (2009) poignantly submitted that, developing countries face four fundamental challenges, which are: nation building, state building, participation and distribution. He sees nation building as the process whereby which all inhabitants of given territory, regardless of individual ethnic, tribal, religious, or linguistic differences, come to identify with the symbols and institutions of the state and to share a common sense of identity. Much of the crises that have ravaged much of the third world, are emblematic of a state that is grappling with challenges that both on nation building. Nigeria is such a country that, a certain region is well endowed with what gives the country what she prides with before now (oil).

Alafuro (2011) averred that, the Niger Delta region of Nigeria occupies the centre stage in the nation's economic matrix due to the fact of the huge deposit of crude oil that is deposited in their land. The irony of it is that, they suffer neglect from both the government of Nigeria and the oil prospecting companies in their localities. So this has imbued them with a sense of indignation towards the Nigerian state. They are paranoid and crestfallen, they have lost that sense of belonging that should naturally be there. This has produced a number of activists in the region. From the legendary Isaac Adaka Boro, Ken Saro Wiwa, Joseph Eba, Ms Briggs among others. This feeling of marginalization resulted in the militancy that almost consumed that nation at the outset of civil rule in 1999. It took the amnesty programme of the peace loving Sheu Musa Yar'adua to extinguish the flame. Most of the militant groups that laid down their weapons, got compensated, some were empowered within the country; while some went for vocational trainings abroad. From the analysis of the above, forging unity with other ethnic stock by people who have gone through this traumatic experience. They were compensated with the presidential opportunity given to them via Goodluck Jonathan.

The South East people pose yet another difficult challenge at forging nation building in Nigeria. The experience of the civil war is still fresh in their memory. They have come up with a number of platforms for the agitation of their self-determination. From the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), to the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). Airebamen (n.d) opines that the dissatisfaction of these groups with the structure operation and power configuration, under the lopsided Nigerian federalism precipitated the activities of these groups. It took the deployment of the state apparatus of coercion to dislodge them. Even at that, it is not yet Uhuru.

The recent killings in North Central Nigeria, Benue State to be precise by the Fulani Cattle herders poses another challenge to nation building in Nigeria in recent time. This is more so, with the All Progressive Congress (APC) tepid handling of the incidence, this has made the people to lose interest in the nation building project of Nigeria. In the South West, among the Yoruba, it is a bit mild because religion is not seen as culture there, unlike in the north and south east where Islam and Christianity are seen as part of their cultures.

The emphasis must be made therefore that, nation building effort in Nigeria is being frustrated by the leaders and the political class themselves, either wittingly or unwittingly. The national flag, independence day anniversary celebration, the NYSC scheme among others which really are the variables that can help to cement nation building are but ineffectual.

### **POVERTY-CORRUPTION NEXUS**

Poverty and corruption can be likened to the egg-chicken conundrum, in that sometimes corruption breeds poverty and vice-versa. This is so because, when a society is being governed by a set of corrupt leaders, provision of basic amenities for the people will be affected and the welfare of the people will be affected. When this happens, schools will not be built, stalls will not be constructed, roads will be in bad state thereby affecting the economy of the state, and farmers will find it difficult for them to move their produce to the city centres for sale. The import of all these is that, the people will be impoverished and a hungry man has little or no conscience.

Such people will be will tools in the hands of exploitative politicians during elections, payment of tax will not be a priority for such persons and when there is need for them to produce their tax clearance for official purposes, forgery will be an option for such people. So it's indeed a circle. Aidelunuoghene, observed that, corruption has almost passed for state policy in Nigeria. This is so because corruption has been so institutionalized, in such a way that hardly can socio-economic and political system function well with it (Aidelunuoghene, 2014).

Corruption has a negative impact on economic performance, employment opportunities, poverty reduction, access to public health and police services (World Bank, 2001). The report further contended that a link exists between poverty and corruption, in that corruption affects the poor when resources meant for the populace is diverted from public utilities such as education and health care services. The Bank report concluded that, poverty is an outcome of economic mismanagement and corruption. According to Action aid Report, there are two perspectives to viewing the nexus between corruption and poverty. The first presumes that corruption is not a major cause of poverty. The second perspective contends that, there exists a correlation between corruption and poverty but that it is an indirect relationship (Action Aid, 2015 ). The second argument, presupposes that, corruption as a variable might not directly produce poverty, rather, it has an indirect way of interacting with certain intermediaries that will in turn will produce poverty e.g economic and governance factors.

The economic factor holds that, corruption can impact poverty by first impacting economic growth, income equality among others which will inexorably impact poverty level factors. In a country where investors have to bribe to get necessary documents registered before commencement of production or whereby bribery is needed before continuing production; this will affect profit margin and can put a natural stop to production when, such a facility cannot withstand the effect of bribery on its production endeavor, he will need to close shop. This inevitably will result to laying off of workers, which will create an army of unemployed workforce-poverty. Such business organisations could try to evade tax and this reduces what comes to the government for the provision of infrastructural facilities. On the political place, corruption obstructs good governance. This done by disrespects for the rule of law, impunity, nepotism, basic amenities that the hoi polloi can benefit from are handled with levity.

## CONCLUSION

The article has looked at poverty, corruption and nation building in Nigeria. From the above analysis, it is conspicuous that, Nigeria is still struggling with the nation building project. The distrust, insecurity, marginalization and nepotism that precipitated the first civil war are still present with us. Other countries of the world with heterogeneous population such as India have had less issues compared with us. It is in a bid to satisfy the different ethnic stock that the policy of rotational presidency was mooted and became operational. The National Orientation Agency (NOA) is saddled with the responsibility of coming up with programmes that will engender unity rather than put schism within the ranks of Nigeria. On the basis of the aforesaid, the following suggestions will be beneficial.

There should spirited efforts by the government across level to reduce poverty. This can be done by ensuring that environment is secure for investors, since government alone cannot create job foe the generality of the people.

Secondly, state must be discouraged from have anthems for example, Osun State. This reduces their loyalty to the central, rather it promotes their interest in the things that concern the units.

Thirdly, the corruption fighting agencies must do their work fairly and sincerely and the must be seen to be doing this religiously and conscientiously.

Peace must be restored in such a way that, citizens of .Nigeria must be safe anywhere in the country. A situation wher, a Yoruba man will feel insecure in the north or in Igboland is uncalled for and it works against the grains of nation building.

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