



IMPACT OF POVERTY ON NIGERIAN YOUTHS AND SECURITY DILEMMA: A THEORETICAL APPROACH

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ABSTRACT: *The paper examines the impact of poverty on Nigerian youths and security dilemma, having a theoretical linkage. It also analyses the political process of Nigeria and how it manipulates the youths in contributing to insecurity. With the aid of historical-descriptive research from the secondary methodology, findings show that since independence, Nigerian politics has been characterized by various forms of violence such as ballot snatching, thuggery, bloodshed and assassination. The level poverty has also created extremist and terrorist groups, some with religious coloration and some with ethnic and regional affiliations. This in most cases has led to a condition of insecurity. In all the violence that surrounds Nigerian politics, poverty and youth linkage is the root cause, because youths are the perpetrators of every violent political act in Nigeria as influenced by the political predators. The paper concludes that Poverty is believed to be the root cause of all violence especially in a society where youths population is significant. Nigeria has been engulfed at different intervals by political, religious and ethnic conflicts engendered as a result of poor youths' handling where they are swayed by little cash and drugs. This menace cannot abate without a greater youth empowerment, education and drastic national orientation. The paper recommends that massive employment opportunities be provided, the inflow of foreign direct investment be promoted and constant workshops, seminars, conferences should be periodically organized for religious and political elites to acquaint them with current and usable information on how to curb the menace of youths' poverty and insecurity in Nigeria.*

KEYWORDS: Impact, Poverty, Insecurity, Youth, Theoretical, Approach, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The poverty trend in Nigeria since return of democracy in 1999 suggests that the level has escalated more in the northern part of the country and the North east recorded the highest incidence in the year 1999– 2014. The government has been criticized severally by the people in the North as they believe the government has not done enough to further reduce the upsurge of poverty in the country. This therefore has motivated both youths and groups to pick up arms as a means of calling the attention of the government to their plight. The picking of arms has resulted into several attacks surfacing mostly from the north such as the incident of post 2011 General election crisis (Achebe, 1985). The incident is traced back to general Abubakar Abdussalam political transition program on May 29th 1999 that handed over power to elected civilian leaders, where the country became pulverized by inter-communal clashes, violent agitation by the youths especially the youth vanguard of Nigeria, student unrest, strikes,



demonstration etc and violence became the norms of social and political life. The country has relished in the culture of violence and virulent repression of its citizen. Nigeria as a democracy has been experiencing violent ethno-religious crisis, constant contract killing and political assassination, inter and intra party fracas, civil disobedience and insurgency (Abdullahi, 2004).

Insecurity can be attributed to failure of leadership on the part of the leaders in power vis-à-vis lack of fulfilling campaign promises to the youth. From 1999, Nigeria has been subjected to different administrative style ranging from Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, Alh. Umar Musa Yar'adua, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan PDP led government (Afolabi, 2011) where the situation became worst using the youths to seek a re-election by all means through the use of youth to kidnap school girls to be used as suicide bombers to cause crisis and confusion in the society to achieve their political gains. The Buhari administration is not an exception, insurgency and terrorist attacks continue especially in the Northern part of the country such as Borno state, Katsina, Zamfara and Adamawa, Taraba among others (Alkali, 1996).

It is in line with the above that Adeniyi (2003) posits that, the use of youth as thugs in Nigerian politics has not only led to waste of human resources but has also resulted in the death of able-bodied men who might have been useful for the betterment of the country. There is no doubt, Nigeria politics since independence has been characterized by thuggery and violence, little wonder politics is conceived as a dirty game and an exclusive right of thugs and hooligans. Consequently, Nigerian politics manifest in acrimony, assault intimidation, harassment, maiming and killing of innocent souls (Anifowese, 1982). This is not a new phenomenon, but a culture that has been with Nigerians for the past four decades. Immediately after independence the politicians, in an attempt to capture exercise and retain power within their regional settings involved themselves in various acts that were politically immature, unwise and disastrous. They adopted a style that was antithetical to democratic tenet and good governance; they recruited, trained and empowered youths to harass, intimidate and victimize perceived political opponents and opposing views against their political ambition. This culture of hiring youths for violence has not only been imbibed and sustained as part of the country's political culture since independence to the present movement, it has been one of the potent courses of insecurity in Nigeria polity. In the words of Obasanjo (2003): "We fight and sometimes shed blood to achieve and retain political power because for us in Nigeria, the political kingdom has for too long been the gate way to the economic kingdom" (Awe,1992).

The current insecurity in Nigeria could be traced back to 2003 general elections when youths referred to as cultists and militia groups were groomed and armed by madcap politicians to rig the election. After the elections, both rural and urban communities in the area witnessed sporadic gunshots; rival groups also engaged each other in shoot out on the street. Many killed, maimed and injured or displaced, many of the people and whose properties destroyed were actually innocent (Dudley, 1973).

Material and Method

The methodology used in this research paper is purely qualitative-descriptive research from secondary methodology derived from library instruments. The materials used are: books, journal articles, periodicals, newspapers and reports.



LITERATURE REVIEW

Poverty is a Multidimensional phenomenon; the World Development Report (2001) summarizes the various dimensions of poverty to generally constitute lack of opportunity; Lack of empowerment and a lack of security. The window of opportunity remains closed to the poor masses, and this makes them particularly inactive in the society. Their lack of empowerment limits their choices in almost everything and their lack of security makes them vulnerable to diseases, violence and so on. In a similar conception Babafimi (2002) argues that “Poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities; a violation of human dignity; it means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in the 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 a marginal or fragile environment, without access to clean water or sanitation.

Poverty can further be seen from two (2) different perspectives according to Geertz (1968) and these are: (1) “moneylessness” which means both an insufficiency of cash and chronic inadequacy of resources of all types to satisfy basic human needs such as, nutrition, rest, warmth and body care and (ii) powerlessness” meaning those who lack the opportunity and choices open to them and whose lives seem to them to be governed by forces and persons outside their control that is in positions of authority or by perceived “evil force” or” hard luck.” Poverty is also seen as a condition that is said to exist when people lack the basic needs to survive. These basic needs are “those necessary for survival” or broadly as “those reflecting the revealing standard of living “that is, those at the border line of nutrition, housing, clothing around others though adequate to preserve life but do measure up to those of the population as a whole (Gurr, 1970).

As it stands poverty has been associated with poor health, loss of lives, low level of education, low level of calories in one’s diet, lack of shelter and low level of employment. All these have been understood through the measurement of poverty which has aided in understanding the level of poverty. In Nigeria poverty is also associated with the inability of an individual, family or nation to secure basic needs even in the midst of general prosperity. This mainly is due to lack of some general attributes that would permit an individual to manifest himself. It is in line with the above that Hornby (2001) believes that the crux of poverty is lack of jobs that provide steady work at a decent wage. A wage that would enable people support themselves and their families. Unemployment is one of the faces of poverty that the higher the unemployment the larger the number of people living below poverty level (Huntington, 1968).

For years now, government retrenchment of workers has been on the increase, for example in 2005, over 400,000 public workers were retrenched. This defiantly posed more people into poverty. Abject poverty and lack of job is one of the reasons responsible for political instability in Nigeria. Poverty is a state of involuntary deprivation to which a person, household, community or nation can be subjected to. It is a worldwide phenomenon, and Nigeria is one of the poorest countries in the world with about 75% of her population living below poverty line coupled with extremely low per capital income (Morrison, 1972).

Following the current political dispensation since 1999 the spate of electorally motivated violence in Nigeria has quickly escalated as much as of the compensation that politicians



promised to the groups they financed and armed during the various elections (1999, 2003, 2007 etc) never materialized. Specifically, many of the youths recruited by the politicians to carry out electoral violence complained that they were promised cash payments and jobs after the elections (Mbah, 2001). There was however widespread complained among these youths that rather than fulfilling their promises their sponsors including the governors, senators, local government chairmen and even the president simply dumped them once comfortably ensconced in office. It is in line with this that according to Isyaku (2002), “the armed youths felt betrayed by the kind of contracts they made with the politicians since the current trend. They felt having participated in rigging the election, they deserved a stake”. The result of these broken promises was a rapid deterioration of relations between many armed and their former sponsors. Nigeria has since been a washed with guns since the return of democracy when politicians sparked the ongoing influx of arms into the country to arm their proxy gangs. Many of these alienated gangs have subsequently moved into using their weaponry to spark an ongoing wave of violent crimes, providing protection for or asserting control over oil bunkering operations and other criminal activities to make up for their loss lucrative political sponsors (Omeiza, 2009).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework adopted in this paper is the system theory. It explains how the political environment works and respond to the needs of the society. System theory was developed by David Easton and it was originally from pure science, particularly from biology and later used and developed in sociology by Herbert Spencer and Gabriel Almond among others (Verma, 1985). A system is comprised of an environment, input, conversion and output. As observed by Nnoli (1978). A system is an entry in which everything relates to everything else. In the parlance, systems are compressed components that work together for the objectives of whole and the system approach is merely a way of thinking about these components and their relationships. The basic features of the system approach are as a follows:

1. The Environment which consists of various subsystems-social, political, economic subsystems. these subsystems influence the administrative system which in turn influences them.
2. Input: consists of wishes, yearnings and aspirations of the masses which are demand from the administrative system.
3. Conversion: process refers to stage where inputs are processed i.e. the journalists, conveying the wishes and aspirations of the masses to the legislators for deliberations and processing of such yearnings of the masses.
4. Output: this process the administrative decisions, policies constitutions from the National Assembly by our legislators through the conversion process to the masses (environment).

The system theory is referred to as Estonian theory which is made of different component parts working differently but interdependently and interrelated to achieve the desired goal of the masses which will be conveyed to the legislators through the conversion process (Nnoli, 1978). The legislators will deliberate on the demands and aspirations of the masses as presented by



the press men. If the deliberation is favorable, the masses will applause it and accept the legislative outcome (policies, constitution), but if the outcome is not favorable it will bring about uprising from the masses as witnessed in present day Nigeria (Samuel, 1978).

This theory made emphasis on interdependence and interrelationship of societal components. But as seen in Nigeria the relationship is only one way, the politicians depend on the masses to win the elections but once they assume office, they only concentrate on their personal affairs to the detriment of the populace that brought them to power. Lack of coordinated function of the different components of the society and lack of synergy that absorbs other vulnerable components results in deprivation, poverty, violence and insecurity. Thus, the interests of the masses as a component are not protected by the politicians as expected in an ideal society.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

One major great influence on insecurity is mass media propaganda and media War which entices the young people into vices. Abject poverty, mass unemployment, influence and interference by foreign governments, institutions and multinational corporations immensely contribute to the spread of the menace in Nigeria. From the findings, it is clear that political education and enlightenment is necessary for everybody, therefore periodic and adequate enlightenment campaigns on the dangers associated with deprivation, marginalization and youth segregation which results in insecurity in the society can help control and curb the menace across the country. The findings also show that there should be a law making it mandatory for all newly elected and appointed political office holders irrespective of the office they occupy to undergo orientation/workshop on the etiquettes and rules of the game of politics in order to create room for peaceful cohesion and stable polity.

The findings of the study also reveal that government at all tiers, schools, parents, media, NGOs, CSOs and other allied stakeholders have greater task for discouraging hatred, thuggery, violence, and to encourage hard work, transparency, patriotism and national brotherhood among the Nigerian youths which will lead to national development. The following findings are also salient in this research paper that are considerable:

- a) It was observed that youth poverty has many consequences on various endeavors in the country;
- b) Comprehensive political education and enlightenment should be routinely rendered to everybody particularly the youth irrespective of their status in the society in order to help in curbing the menace of youth violence and other related vices in the country;
- c) Newly elected and appointed political office holders at all tiers and organs of governance should be encouraged to partake in specially organized training/workshop on the cardinal etiquette politics and good governance;
- d) The findings also reveal that all stakeholders in the Nigerian project should join hands in building bridges of national unity, peace and stability of the polity which will obviously create room for stable polity, sustainable democracy, accelerated national growth and overall advancement of the country.



CONCLUSION

Poverty is believed to be the root cause of all violence especially in a society where youth population is significant. Nigeria has been engulfed at different intervals by political, religious and ethnic conflicts engendered as a result of poor youths' manipulation where they are swayed by little cash and drugs. This menace cannot abate without a greater youth empowerment, education and drastic national orientation. Governments at all levels and organs have a greater role to play in changing this trend of youth poverty that has become a widespread phenomenon with its attendant consequences all of which are posing great threats to the practice of sustainable democracy and enduring federalism in Nigeria and by extension the corporate existence of the country.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made in an attempt to find a lasting solution to the menace of youth poverty and related vices in the country:

- Constant workshops, seminars, conferences should be organized for religious and political elites to acquaint them with current, and usable information on how to curb the menace of youth poverty and insecurity in Nigeria.
- National integration and brotherhood should be actively encouraged and all forms of discriminations on the grounds of status, place of origin, religion, sex, ethnic or linguistic association or ties should be highly prohibited by very stiffer laws and other forms of legislations in the country.
- The federal ministry of Information and Communication in collaboration with the National Orientation Agency should be refocused, repositioned well equipped and financed to give much emphasis to socio-political and cultural education, enlightenment and orientation that will reach all nooks and crannies of the country especially the grassroots people in the languages they understand in order to foster national unity and integration.
- Comprehensively programmed community based, town hall meetings on vital national issues, major challenges confronting the communities, and political education and enlightenment should be routinely organized for Nigerians irrespective of their socio-cultural, economic, religious and political status in the society in order to eliminate or reduce the menace of youth poverty and other related national challenges in the country.
- Governments at all organs and tiers, parents, teachers and other stakeholders should form stronger and enduring synergy that will enhance the fight against insecurity and allied vices especially among the young ones in order to save the future leaders of the country and the advancement of the society in all facets.



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