



## SOCIAL JUSTICE IN NIGERIA: A DIALECTICAL DISCOURSE

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper examined the nexus between social justice, national development, and nation-building in Nigeria. It adopted the qualitative and historical descriptive method of analysis because, by its nature, the topic was not amenable to quantitative analysis. One of the important findings of the paper is that though Nigerian citizens have remained together within the same political space in spite of many challenges, there are obvious cases of inequality and glaring examples of the negation of the principles of social justice by the leadership class. The result of the breaches of the constitutional provision for social justice is Nigeria's inability to consolidate its diversity to achieve national development and nation-building, as is the case in other heterogenous federations like the United States. The paper concluded that a possible way out of this quagmire is for the federal government to adopt concrete official measures to encourage attitudinal and behavioural changes among both the leaders and ordinary Nigerians in order to ensure faithful adherence to social justice, which is considered a panacea for the challenges of national development and nation-building.*

**KEYWORDS:** Equality, justice, national development, nation-building, rule of law,



## INTRODUCTION

Every society, community or country is made up of different groups whose interests and goals are not always compatible. This is why conflicts and misunderstandings are largely inevitable in and among such entities. Since every society, community, and country can only make progress in an atmosphere of peace and unity, it puts in place certain mechanisms for addressing conflicts and ensuring that every group's demands, interests and goals are satisfied to some reasonable extent. Yet, peace alone cannot guarantee stability and progress unless justice is done and seen to have been done in interpersonal and inter-group relationships and interactions.

Therefore, national development can best be assured for a country like Nigeria when there is equality and justice among its components of heterogeneous societies. Put differently, with more than 250 ethnic groups, Nigeria has great diversity in cultures, values, orientations, and general worldviews. Therefore, to make meaning out of this maze, the Federal Government should be run inclusive if national development must be achieved as a realistic goal. This means that all ethnic, religious, social, and regional groups should be equally represented in all three arms of government at the Local, State, and Federal levels.

Therefore, every Nigerian citizen should enjoy equality of rights, obligations and opportunities, irrespective of the person's ethnic, social, cultural, or religious background. It was on the basis of this that the Federal Character Commission was set up. Among the important constitutional duties of this Commission is to monitor adherence to the principle of federal character by ensuring that recruitment, appointment, and promotion in all positions in the public services of the Federation and the States, as well as the Armed Forces, the Police, and other relevant government Ministries, Agencies, and Departments, are done in an equitable and just manner.<sup>1</sup> A second arm to the Federal Character Principle is the "quota system", which is also put in place to ensure the proportional representation of states in admission into federal institutions of learning (secondary and tertiary), recruitment into the federal civil service, the military, police, as well as the distribution of development programmes.<sup>2</sup> However, the quota system predated Nigeria's independence in 1960 and was introduced basically to create opportunities for some so-called disadvantaged states in Nigeria.<sup>3</sup>

### Justice and Social Justice: An Overview

Justice is a general virtue. For Christians, it connotes, among other things, righteousness, for example, in not maltreating one's neighbour(s). It also implies a duty to perform group and individual acts of social reparation, welfare, and assistance. Justice is also valuable to the extent that it insists on equal treatment of all society members. It is also concerned with the distribution of good and evil in the society.

Justice originates from the works of Plato (*The Republic*) and Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics*). Both Greek philosophers saw justice as a social and political virtue. While Plato believed that justice would be realised if each Greek city-state concentrated on its affairs and refrained from meddling in the affairs of others,<sup>3</sup> Aristotle saw justice as having to do with the regulation of the state's rules to determine what is right or wrong.

In any given society, the members have some vague idea of what justice involves and regard it as one of those values that should be pursued. It is regarded as a moral value which emphasises equality. There are two forms of justice known to the law, namely, procedural justice and substantive justice. There is a positive correlation between these two. Thus, the



former prompts and promotes advances in the latter. For instance, whereas unfair trials in a law court would aggravate the laws that discriminate against a certain group in a given community, fair trials and impartial tribunals would commit other groups in such a community to the full vindication of equality and human dignity. Conversely, procedural injustice not only accompanies substantive injustice; it also aggravates its cruelty.

Justice, therefore, becomes evident in the sense of injustice. In this context, the concept of justice involves preventing or at least remedying what would arouse the sense of injustice. In other words, the meaning of the term 'justice' comes alive whenever one confronts injustice and does justice, for, after all, the experience of a sense of injustice incites people to join with one another in perceiving danger, in resisting it, and in exulting over an achieved success. All these are public acts of solidarity.

Law and justice have much in common. Though a moral principle, justice is always best understood in relation to law. This is because the main requirements of due process or procedural justice in courts of law include elements common to justice and law. For instance, procedural justice demands that in the law courts, no one must be accused of violating a rule of behaviour unless he/she committed the alleged act. Also, when accused, a person is entitled to know the charge(s) against him/her, as well as the evidence adduced in support of the charge(s), and to have a fair opportunity to collect and present his/her own evidence through counsel.

Put differently, the notion of justice demands equality before the law. The judge or other arbiter must be disinterested, unbiased, and attentive. Even if a person is found guilty of any offence, procedural justice requires some way to reconsider the case later and correct any serious error that comes to light eventually. Justice is, therefore, invariably associated with legal proceedings. Law upholds justice and either imposes liability on an offender or gives redress to the offended person.

Thus, men in society turn to justice whenever they confront real or imagined instances of injustice. Since individuals in modern societies cannot easily resort to violent self-help, the law makes provision for redressing acts of injustice in an impartial manner. It is in this sense that justice and law relate to each other. The special work of law, in this case, is to identify acts of injustice. Justice, therefore, creates a nexus between law and morality,<sup>4</sup> and since value considerations are sometimes used to direct law in order to harmonise social relations, the law should secure justice; that is, the law should be a good instrument for upholding justice.

Social justice has been defined as "Justice that conforms to a moral principle, such as that all people are equal".<sup>5</sup> The central emphasis of justice in general and social justice in particular is equality, that is, fairness in the treatment of members of any society, especially in the area of having equal access to social privileges, wealth, health, and opportunities. Social justice becomes obvious when fairness manifests in a given society. There are, basically, five principles of social justice. These are access to resources, equality, diversity, participation, and human rights.

It is important to point out here that social justice originates from the Industrial Revolution of the early 19th century in Europe as a concept. At that time, there were obvious instances of the working class people's exploitation by the rich industrialists. The idea of social justice, therefore, sought to create more egalitarian societies where the exploitation of the workers by



their employers could be minimised. Over the years, however, the concept's scope has widened to include other aspects of social life with manifestations of inequality or discrimination.

### **Individual and Social Justice in Nigeria**

Individual justice is anchored on the philosophy that the individual human being should be allowed to develop his/her personal faculties with minimal interference by the state, society, or community to which such an individual belongs. Social justice, on the other hand, is a concept that implies placing some institutional restraint on the liberty or freedom of the individuals in their societies. Therefore, social justice is concerned with equality, while individual justice is concerned with liberty or freedom. One way of ensuring progress in any given society is to reconcile individual and social justice demands.

Social justice in Nigeria is a constitutional guarantee. Section 16 (1a-d) and section 16 (2, a-d) of the 1999 constitution (as amended) explicitly provide, among other things, that the Nigerian state shall:

- a) Harness the resources of the nation and promote national prosperity and an efficient, dynamic and self-reliant economy.
- b) Control the national economy in such a manner as to secure the maximum welfare, freedom and happiness of every citizen on the basis of social justice and equality of status and opportunity.

Sub-section 6(2b) of section 16 of the constitution states that the policy of the Federal Government shall be directed towards ensuring that the economic system is not operated in such a manner as to permit the concentration of wealth or the means of production and exchange in the hands of a few individuals or of a group.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, section 17 of the constitution is devoted to the whole idea of social justice. Sub-section 3(a), for instance, provides that the Nigerian government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that “all citizens, without discrimination on any group whatsoever, have the opportunity for securing adequate means of livelihood as well as adequate opportunity to secure suitable employment”. The fundamental rights of Nigerian citizens are copiously enunciated in chapter IV of the constitution. These rights also come with responsibilities which, in a way, restrain the employment of the individual’s freedoms. Such rights, for instance, could be defined in two circumstances, namely, where it is in the interest of defence public health to restrain the employment of such individual rights. Secondly, the rights and freedom of any citizen could be denied for the purpose of protecting the rights and freedom of other citizens.<sup>7</sup>

However, practice is different from theory as far as social justice in Nigeria is concerned. It is obvious that the constitutional provision on equal sharing of the country’s wealth has been obeyed more in breach than in adherence. In other words, social justice in Nigeria has not achieved its constitutional objectives because of the implementation of several policies that negate its essence. The structure of the Nigerian economy and the pattern of national politics are largely to blame for this. That is why Nigeria has been rated as one of the world's poorest and most corrupt countries. Bad leadership, selfishness and corruption have combined to make Nigeria’s claim as the giant of Africa laughable. On the contrary, the country was 2018 declared the world's poverty capital in a report by the Brookings Institute,<sup>8</sup> with a majority of its estimated 200 million citizens living below the poverty level of one U.S. dollar per day. About



86.9 million Nigerians live in extreme poverty,<sup>9</sup> which is almost half of the entire population. Ironically, and as H. Assisi Asobie has rightly observed:

While poverty grows, expands and deepens in Nigeria, the revenue available to the nation, derived from its rich stock of natural resources, especially oil and gas, increases by leaps and bounds.<sup>10</sup>

### **Social Justice and the Rule of Law**

The rule of law is the legal principle which stipulates that regular law must be supreme to arbitrary powers: that is, every citizen is subject to the state's ordinary (constitutional) law. It is also known as the supremacy of the law. It envisages a scenario where two things are obtainable: (a) that everyone respects the law and (b) that the law has to be obeyed collectively and individually by both the citizens and the state. Impliedly, in Nigeria, the rule of law means that not only will there be no exercise of arbitrary power but also that the fundamental rights of citizens must be protected in line with the provision of Chapter IV of the 1999 constitution. The government's social contract with the citizens is also bound by the constitution, which is the supreme law of the land. In other words, the rule of law implies that no citizen is above the law and that every citizen of whatever rank, status or condition is subject to the law of the land and the jurisdiction of ordinary courts.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, the rule of law is the platform on which states and powerful individuals are restrained in the use of their power in their relations with the citizens. It, thus, sets the rules which guarantee the protection of human rights. Put differently, there is a nexus between human rights and equality under the law, as well as fairness and accountability. Human rights can, therefore, only be protected where there is a strong adherence to the principles of the rule of law. The relationship between the two concepts is intrinsic, as both seek to ensure the freedom of individuals to live in dignity.

It has been rightly observed that:

--- the rule of law is not just what courts do. It also encompasses what every other public and private institution does. A country where there is a rule of law is not just a country where the court decides disputes without official interference, and citizens comply with the judgment of the court. It extends to how institutions of a state are structured, and the written and unwritten rules that guide interactions between the state and citizens and between state institutions are observed and enforced: the rule of law permeates every facet of life of the citizenry and government.<sup>12</sup>

In Nigeria, the law has not been applied equally to all classes of citizens. For example, ordinary Nigerians are convicted and jailed for petty crimes, while members of the political elite and top civil servants who habitually misappropriate public funds are hardly ever prosecuted.<sup>13</sup> On the contrary, they are usually rewarded with national honours awards and higher political appointments. For instance, politicians, especially state governors, often decamp to the political party in power in order to avoid prosecution for corruption. In fact, a former chairman of one of the country's major political parties publicly announced that once any corrupt politician from another party decamps to the ruling party, the person's sins would be forgiven.<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, hundreds of members of the Boko Haram terrorist group have been captured but are rarely convicted. Rather, they are often sent to so-called rehabilitation centres and later freed



and re-integrated into society. This has been criticised by many victims of the Boko Haram insurgency who have been displaced and still live in internally displaced peoples (IDP) camps in parts of Northern Nigeria.<sup>15</sup> The rehabilitation programme of the Buhari-led federal government (which it calls “Operation Safe Corridor”) negates the requirements of justice as they relate to crime and punishment. Universally, the ultimate goal of the justice system is to reform deviants. But this does not diminish the importance and relevance of applying deterrence and punishment for heinous crimes, such as the ones perpetrated by the Boko Haram insurgents.

It is also unjust for Fulani jihadists (who have been classified by the international community as one of the most vicious terrorist groups) not to face trials for the many heinous crimes they have been committing, especially in the North-Central geopolitical zone since 2015. Because the jihadists masquerade as cattle herders, their activities are often misconstrued as “farmers/herders, conflicts” or “inter-communal violence”. They routinely target Christian communities in central Nigeria, particularly in Benue and Plateau states. Their victims number in the thousands.<sup>16</sup> In a 2020 report by Jose Lius Bazan, an independent researcher and analyst based in Brussels, Belgium, Fulani extremists were blamed for the majority of kidnappings and terror-related deaths in Nigeria, which were targeted at mostly Christian farmers.<sup>17</sup> According to Intersociety, a research and investigative rights group, under the administration of Muhammadu Buhari (2015-2023), 31,350 Christians were killed<sup>18</sup>. In its report titled “Martyred Christians in Nigeria”, Intersociety also asserted that Buhari did not do much to combat the killings and kidnappings perpetrated by Fulani jihadists.<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile, security agencies led by the Nigerian army were alleged to have killed at least 1,400 unarmed residents and razed about 1,000 homes in 100 communities in the South-East geopolitical zone in under 14 months. About 4,800 civilians were arrested, while 1,000 were missing and could not be accounted for within 14 months spanning October 2020 to December 2021. While the victims were mostly Igbo Christians, the perpetrators of the killings were security forces structures along northern Nigerian Muslim lines and purposely deployed to Igboland ostensibly to fight members of the irredentist group known as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB).

The situation in the build-up to the 2023 presidential election is another example of how the law is applied differently to different Nigerians. In Lagos state, one Musiliu Akinsanya (MC Oluwo) publicly threatened Igbo people residents in Lagos should they vote against the All Progressive Congress (APC). Despite promises by the police to investigate the matter, nothing happened. Meanwhile, when an Igbo community leader in Lagos, Fredrick Nwajagu, threatened to invite the IPOB to protect Igbo businesses in Lagos following Akinsanya’s threat, he was promptly arrested by the police and the DSS on charges of terrorism.

Insecurity thrives where the rule of law is not respected. As the Nigerian case has shown, non-adherence to the principles encapsulated in the concept of the rule of law is an open invitation to anarchy. To curtail insecurity, therefore, the wanton and flagrant breaching of the provisions of the constitution by highly-placed citizens should be curtailed. Otherwise, the ethos of military and brigandage occasioned by decades of military rule may continue to threaten national security and development.



## Social Justice and National Development

As an analytical concept, development has been the subject of varied definitions. For instance, during the years of ideological warfare between capitalist countries (the West) and communist states (the East), the concept became politicised as each of the opposing sides gave it its own connotations. To scholars with Marxist ideological orientations, development was (and is still) seen as:

... a dialectical phenomenon in which the individual and society interact with their physical, biological, and inter-human environments, transforming them for their own betterment and that of humanity at large and being transformed in the process... Development is, first and foremost, a phenomenon associated with changes and man's humanity and creative energies, not in things.<sup>11</sup>

On their part, Western or so-called liberal scholars see development basically as the propensity to save and accumulate capital, with the marginal output ratio as the determinant of growth rate and technology as an essential part of the development process.<sup>12</sup> In other words, from this perspective, development is measured in terms of qualitative increases in capital formation and industrialisation. The human element in the development process is, therefore, largely underplayed in the Western conception of development, whereas Marxist scholars see development, first and foremost, in qualitative terms; it is focused on human beings and should not be preoccupied with abstract terms or concepts.

In this paper, however, national development is seen as being concerned with the ability of a given nation to introduce changes that will accelerate economic growth and reduce inequality and poverty among its citizens. To do this, such a nation must have a visionary and dedicated leadership that will initiate the reorganisation of the social and economic systems and a reorientation of the citizenry by way of attitudinal changes through reformations in the political, economic, administrative, and social institutions in the country.<sup>13</sup> Development cannot, therefore, be equated with simple growth of national wealth in terms of output but should be a continuous process involving qualitative changes in man, his society, and the environment in an interdependent manner.

As a matter of fact, there is a link between social justice and national development. For example, the 1999 constitution provides, in section 14(1), that "The Federal Republic of Nigeria shall be a state based on the principles of democracy and social justice". Sub-section 2(a)-(b) provides that sovereignty belongs to the people of Nigeria and that the people's security and welfare shall be the government's primary purpose. Furthermore, development involves not just the material well-being of the citizens but also the protection of their fundamental rights as enshrined in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, and the two international covenants on human rights, which came into force in 1976.<sup>14</sup> These two covenants further elaborate on human rights in legally binding documents and are replicated in Chapter IV of 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Social justice in Nigeria, as earlier pointed out, is constitutionally guaranteed and aims at allowing every citizen equal access to the country's wealth without any form of discrimination. This means that the social, economic, educational, and environmental objectives of the government and similar provisions in Chapter II (Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy) ought to be faithfully implemented for the overall benefit of Nigerian



citizens who, ab initio, provide the sovereignty on which all the powers and authority of the Federal Government hinge on.<sup>15</sup> In this sense, therefore, the nexus between social justice and development is that development should not only be viewed from the more conventional perspective of those criteria propounded by international financial institutions like the World Bank but also the criteria of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), such as the Human Development Index (HDI) which include such components as life expectancy at birth, education, income, and gender equality.<sup>16</sup>

Since national development is concerned first and foremost with the overall well-being of Nigerians, the country's biggest challenge is its appalling human development index over the years. Whereas a 2010 UNDP report ranked the country a lowly 142<sup>nd</sup> out of 169 countries in an assessment of human development indicators and put life expectancy at 48.4 years (below 17 other African countries), it put Nigeria's gross national per capita income below those of countries like Benin Republic, Cameroun, Ghana, and Sao Tome and Principe.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, in 2019, Nigeria's HDI value was 0.539, which put the country at number 161 out of the 189 countries surveyed. The HDI was created to emphasise the imperative of considering that human beings and their capabilities should be the ultimate criteria in assessing any country's development. It summarises the average achievement of individual countries in such key areas of human development as a long and healthy life, education, and standard of living.

An assessment of Nigeria's performance in these three dimensions is very important. In the area of health, the picture is both abysmal and worrisome. Nigeria's health sector is still wobbling despite huge spending by the government, international agencies, and donor organisations.<sup>18</sup> The country's infant and maternal mortality rates rank among the highest globally. As of 2021, the infant mortality rate under one year of age was measured at 58.23; that is, 58 deaths of children under the age of one per 1,000 live births.<sup>19</sup> The maternal mortality rate was put at 814 per 100,000 live births. This means, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO), that the lifetime risk of a Nigerian woman dying during pregnancy, childbirth postpartum or post-abortion is 1 in 22 as of 2021.<sup>20</sup> Primary Health Care Centres (PHCs) which were established in the rural areas as the third-tier of healthcare after General and Teaching Hospitals, continue to suffer from official government neglect and an inevitable lack of patronage by patients in the rural areas.

Education, which constitutes an important criterion in measuring the Human Development Index, has also had its fair share of official or government neglect and abandonment. Schools, books, furniture, as well as quality teachers are all in short supply. Millions of school-age children are out of school, and there is an obvious low morale among teachers in public primary and secondary schools. This has been worsened by inconsistencies in the country's educational policies.<sup>21</sup> Many rich parents now prefer having their children in private primary and secondary schools. The situation in tertiary institutions is equally disgusting and incomprehensible. In fact, it has been argued that "The [university] system has suffered from many years of neglect, and the rot will take many years of sustained generous investment in education for the situation to change".<sup>22</sup> No Nigerian university has so far been rated among the best by the Times Higher Education – Qs, which compiles the list of the best universities in the world.

The standard of living is the third important criterion for measuring the Human Development Index. Included as ingredients of this concept are the levels of wealth, comfort, material goods, and similar necessities available to any given country's citizens. For Nigeria and other Third World countries, food security (food availability, accessibility and utilisation) is a basic





necessity, along with gainful employment and shelter. In the area of food security, about 65% of the Nigerian population does not have access to the amount and variety of foods necessary for a healthy and productive life. Also, about 40% of children under five are malnourished, and another 25% are underweight. Meanwhile, Nigeria has millions of hectares of arable land for agriculture.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, despite her huge earnings from the export of crude oil, wealth is concentrated in a small group of politicians, oligarchies, and businessmen. At the same time, most of the population, mostly peasant farmers, artisans, petty traders and junior civil servants, barely survive.

What this means is that in Nigeria, social justice in the context of national development has remained an illusion because development programmes and projects in the country have, over the years, fallen miserably short as far as improvement in the standard of living of the citizens is concerned. Admittedly, Nigeria produces an exporter of primary products (mostly crude oil) whose world prices are unstable. At the same time, the country has remained a net importer and consumer of products from the advanced countries. The implication is that Nigeria has continued to depend on external market forces to stimulate its economic development.

Thus, the impact of trade on the effective productive capacity of the country has not accelerated in any significant proportion, the transformation process of the economy from dependence to equality and self-reliance, vis-à-vis the economies of her major trading partners. On the contrary, it does appear that there has been an unprecedented deterioration of services and falling standards of living among the majority of the Nigerian population. According to A. O. Sandra, Nigeria has been planning for growth without considering the human factor and the consequences of such growth. The result is the lust by Nigerians for economic or material prosperity and the decline in moral values.<sup>24</sup>

### **Social Justice and Nation-Building**

The idea of nation-building here entails employing the constitutional authority of a given state to construct a national identity by uniting its diverse and heterogeneous subjects to ensure a politically stable and economically viable country. Nation-building is, therefore, a process that involves committed and visionary leadership and a responsive and supportive followership. For the government to enjoy the support of its citizens in the task of nation-building, it is imperative that it embarks on development programmes and projects that have a direct bearing on the welfare and security needs of the people. These would include meeting their basic human and material needs, such as food, shelter, clothing, access to affordable medical facilities, and education, as well as the provision of such infrastructural facilities as motorable roads, pipe-borne water, and reliable electricity supply, among others.

As earlier stated, the 1999 constitution (as amended) unequivocally provides for social justice in section 14(1). Similarly, section 14(4) of that constitution provides for applying the federal character principle in the composition of governments at the state, local, and federal levels. This is a reflection of the need to harness the country's diversity to build a strong, united country anchored on the principles of social justice. However, these constitutional provisions are only high symbolically and have been repeatedly breached in terms of their practical application.

For instance, the Federal Character Principle was brazenly ignored and abused by the Muhammadu Buhari-led federal government (2015-2023). During this period, there was a



preponderance of Northern Nigerian Muslims as heads of security agencies, while the South-East had none of their own in the top six security agencies, namely, the Chief of Defence Staff, Chief of Naval Staff, Chief of Army Staff, Chief of Air Staff, Inspector-General of Police, and Director-General of the Department of State Security. The story was the same in the composition of the executives of the country's national oil giant, the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (now Company)–NNPC. Here, the top 20 executives of the Company were Northern Nigerian Muslims, while only three positions were allotted to the southern part of the country.<sup>25</sup>

Also, while the Buhari-led federal government ignored the resolution of the National Assembly to declare bandits and killer herdsmen and kidnappers (who are mostly Fulani like himself) as terrorists, the government, though the instrumentality of the Department of State Service(DSS) and the infamous office of the Attorney-General led by AbubakarMalami (another Fulani) was quick to arrest and rendition Nnamdi Kanu the leader of the IPOB (Indigenous People of Biafra) and detailed him against the order of a Federal High Court. The Buhari-led government also did not hesitate to force Sunday Igboho, the leader of the Yoruba Nation Separatist Movement, into exile in Benin Republic.

There are also cases of injustice and inequality in the agitation for resource control and fiscal federalism, with oil-bearing states in the south asking for a greater share of the control and proceeds from the exploration and sale of crude oil. However, the Northern Nigerian political elite has been consistent in opposing any revenue-sharing formula that will be to the advantage of the South vis-à-vis the North. Their argument is that whatever resources are found in any part of Nigeria belong to all Nigerians. Meanwhile, solid minerals that abound in the North are not wholly controlled by the federal government and, therefore, contribute only marginally to the national treasury.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, it is an aspect of injustice for states in the North to be allocated more revenue from the Value Added Tax (VAT), whereas they contribute far less than the states in the South. For instance, while Rivers State is said to have generated ₦15 billion in VAT revenue in June 2022 and got only ₦4.7 billion in return, Kano State generated ₦2.8 billion in the same month and got bank ₦2.8 billion. Meanwhile, Lagos State generated ₦46.4 billion in June 2022 and got back only ₦9.3 billion.<sup>27</sup>

Inequality also exists in the distribution of national wealth among Nigeria's social classes. Today, politics pays more than any other vocation because of the humongous emoluments attached to political offices. Corruption and defalcation, which are perpetrated by political leaders, have also accentuated the pitiable conditions of ordinary Nigerians in a country whose economy has continued to contract rather than expand. These ethical violations have impeded efforts at nation-building. They have also impacted negatively on Nigeria's international image perception. To give an example, Nigeria's multidimensional poverty index has been on the rise since 1999, and as pointed out earlier, in 2020, Nigeria was regarded as the poverty capital of the world. In fact, the 2020 United Nations Human Development Index ranked Nigeria very low (0.539) at number 161 below other African countries, behind Seychelles, Algeria, Tunisia, Botswana, South Africa, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Morocco, Cameroun, et cetera.<sup>28</sup>

In 2022, the National Board of Statistics (NBS) reported that 133 million Nigerians were multi-dimensionally poor.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the high rate of insecurity in Nigeria cannot, in all fairness, be divorced from the failure of governance at all levels. A situation where poverty has been systematically weaponized by the country's political elite is not only a mockery of the concept of social justice, but also inimical to nation-building. Lack of accountability and transparency



has steadily eroded the authority of the Nigerian state. This is because of the refusal of the political class to adhere to the provisions of the Constitution as they relate to the relationship between the state and its citizens. Declining economic and social conditions have invariably come to serve as springboards of insecurity, which is now pervasive in the country.

## CONCLUSION

There is a dialectical relationship between social justice, national development, and nation-building in Nigeria. Though there are constitutional provisions intended to sustain the link between social justice and development as encapsulated in section 16, Chapter II of the 1999 constitution, such provisions are not justiciable. This means that issues and claims by individuals or groups in Nigeria relating to the strict implementation of or adherence to such provisions as contained in sections 16 (1) (a-d) and 2 (a-d) are not capable of being properly examined in the court of law. The reason is that there are no judicial precedents to cite or invoke in support of such claims.

Corruption has been identified as a major obstacle to the realisation of the good life for most Nigerian citizens.<sup>25</sup> It has been defined as:

the act of doing something with an intent to give some advantage inconsistent with official duty and the rights of others; a fiduciary's or official's use of a station or office to procure some benefits either personally or for someone else, contrary to the rights of others.<sup>26</sup>

Nigeria has consistently been rated as one of the most corrupt country countries in the world. Corruption has remained a national malady despite the setting up of such anti-corruption agencies as the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

Indeed, Nigeria's past is replete with many instances of corruption, mismanagement, and flagrant abuse of the citizens' human rights.<sup>27</sup> It has to be restated that respect for human rights and the statutory provision for citizens to participate in taking political decisions affecting their lives are integral parts of social justice and national development. Unfortunately, the experience in Nigeria is that social justice and people-oriented development have been criminally ignored. Monies that should have been invested in human development have continued to be brazenly stolen through bogus projects by the Federal government. Examples of agencies dubiously set up to loot the national wealth include the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), the various programmes of the First Ladies of the 36 states, et cetera. These agencies have largely not been accountable to anyone, yet billions of tax-payers money are allocated to them to be embezzled by government functionaries and politicians. Meanwhile, educational and wealth facilities are grossly, deliberately underfunded, badly, and undemocratically managed.<sup>28</sup>

The lingering consequences of the failure to achieve people-oriented and people-propelled development in Nigeria are enormous. Among these are the current security challenges, acts of socio-economic depravity (such as ritual killings), political violence, and ethnic and religious intolerance.<sup>29</sup> Responsible and transformative leadership is a sine qua non for a peaceful and progressive Nigeria. The nurturing of a responsive, inquisitive, and bold followership will



strengthen the leadership's sense of commitment and urgently towards ensuring social justice and national development.

Most importantly, solving the insecurity problem in Nigeria has to, of necessity, involve efforts to accelerate the pace of development. In this connection, therefore, development embodies creating an economy with relevant social, economic and physical infrastructure for business activities and industrial growth to provide gainful employment, high-level education facilities and viable medical care for the populace, among other things. Furthermore, there has to be a paradigm shift of values from the current practice of placing materialism over and above spiritual well-being. Subjecting the citizenry to suffering, deprivation, and injustice will ultimately trigger dissatisfaction and disaffection, creating an insecure environment. A radical change in the value system of Nigerians is imperative in restoring security in Nigeria. In other words, a sustained fight against corruption and the entrenchment of social justice is one way of tackling the issue of insecurity in Nigeria because corruption is a clog in the wheel of progress and development.

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