
Poverty, Inequality and the Effects on Nation Building Processes in Nigeria

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Abstract: *This paper titled “Poverty, Inequality and the Effects on Nation Building Processes in Nigeria” is an attempt to dissect the negative effects of poverty and inequality on the nation building process in Nigeria. The paper argues that, nation building which represents achieving political stability and economic development cannot be achieved through narrow approaches such as the teaching and learning of Nation Building as an academic subject in schools and colleges alone, without addressing issues of poverty headlong. The paper therefore concludes that, if the aim of uniting the people of Nigeria together which by logical will lead to attending political stability and viable economy growth must be achieved, then, there is a dare need on the side of government to vigorously pursue programs and projects that can take majority of Nigerian population out of the poverty lane. The research utilized multi-disciplinary approach in analysed its findings.*

Key words: *Inequality, poverty, national building processes*

Introduction

There is no doubt that the Nigerian Nation-State is a colonial. Creation, it began when in 1914 the Southern and Northern protectorates hitherto created by British colonialism, were amalgamated into a single geopolitical entity called Nigeria. Prior to colonial enterprise in the Nigeria area, there existed several polities which were either centralized or decentralized in nature. While some of the polities were Confederal in nature others were simply ethnic defined. For instance there were the Hausa States of Daura, Kano etc, Kanem Borno Empire, the Yoruba States of Ijebu, Owo, Ife among others, and the decentralized States of the Tiv and Igbo societies, as well as those of the Jukun, Idoma, Alogo among others. But from 1800 however, the fate of these polities and their citizens came under the political umbrella of Arab and European colonializing missions including missionaries, traders, government agents and explorers. After the Berlin conference in 1885 Britain officially assumed the position of sole colonizer of the Nigerian area at the exclusion of the Arabs and any other European nation. British colonialism in the area ensured that the over three hundred clearly identified ethnic groups were brought together to form a single nation. Since its creation, the Nigerian nation has faced the problem of integrating the diverse elements into one national consciousness in spite of the various efforts been made by the government and political leaders towards sustainable nation building enterprise.

The state is viewed from different perspectives including that of being primarily involved in the provision of goods and services in order to meet the needs of the citizens. The Nigerian nation is also duty bound to provide services, good, and enabling environment that would enhance people’s capabilities in order to enhance their well-being. Efforts in this regard also bounds as the Nigerian State has proved over the years¹. Here too, in spite of the effort been

made sustainable development of the country is yet to be achieved which has manifested in wide spread severe poverty among Nigerian citizens, and the wide gap in economic status between the classes-the haves and have not. In this paper, therefore, an attempt will be made to investigate the relationship between widespread poverty and the challenges of nation building. How has widespread severe poverty affected nation building efforts in post-colonial Nigeria? What is the nexus between low levels of integration and poverty? Why has Nigeria achieved success in nation building less than other countries of the world? What can be done to address these challenges? These puzzles and other related issues form the crux of this essay.

Conceptual and Clarification

The concept of nation building stems from 'nation'. A classical definition of nation refers to an ethnic group in which its members share common language, culture, religion irrespective of their geographical compactness. However, a nation in modern sense implies "a set of people living in a defined territory, inspired by a sense of unity, common political aspirations, common interests, common history and common destiny though they may belong to different nationalities" (Gaubu 2003:125)². That is to say that a group of people with different cultures, languages etc may occupy a defined geographical space, live together and become united as citizens of the same nation or state. In this sense nation connotes state which physical elements include population, territory, government and sovereignty. A nation/state very often comprises of diverse peoples, or even when it is made of one set of people in terms of culture, language and religion there are always individual differences. Consequently the state embarks on deliberate nation building enterprise in order to promote integration of the different cultures and individuals. Nation building is a normative concept that has been viewed differently to different people. More recently it is seen as programs in which dysfunctional or unstable or "failed states" or ceremonies are given assistance in the development of infrastructure, civil society, dispute resolution mechanisms, as well as economic assistance; in order to increase stability (Stephenson 2005)³. This definition sees nation building from the theory of exogenous perspective. Accordingly, exogenous theory also known as international relations school view state building as the activity undertaken by external actors to build or rebuild the institutions of a weaker, post conflict or failed states (State-in-Development-wky-paper.pdf)⁴. In this regard the roles played by the UN, AU etc in crises imbedded states like Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan etc can be interpreted from the exogenous perspective of nation building.

However, the endogenous school or developmental theorist see nation-building as the efforts of newly independent states, and the developing countries, notably those from Africa, Asia, Latin, America, and the Balkans in achieving political stability and economic development within their domains. The colonized countries upon securing independence from colonial and imperial domination initiated activities aimed at sustaining national sentiment which they evolved during their struggles for independence. The Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia in this regard argued that in the modern era nation referred to the efforts of newly independent nations in totally the nations of Africa but also in the Balkans to redefine the populace of territories that had been carved out by colonial powers or empires without regards to ethnic, religious, or other boundaries (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia)⁵. Similarly, Mzee Kwame Agyei Akoto define nation building as "the conscious and focused application of our people's collective resources, energies, and knowledge to the task of liberating and developing the psychic and physical space that we identify as ours. It involves the development of behaviours, values, language, institutions and physical structures that elucidate our history and culture, concretize and protect the present,

and insure the future identify and independence of the nation. Nation building is the deliberate, keenly directed and focused and energetic projection of national culture, and the collective identity⁶.

This work defines nation-building the perspective of developmental theory “as the deliberate acts of a state enshrined in its laws and pursued by the leaders and political elites to develop national community through articulated government policies, programs and projects, aimed at uniting the people in order to achieve political stability, and viable economy in the long run”. The developmental theory or endogenous school sees state building as an indigenous, national process driven by state-society relations. It believes that nations cannot engage in state-building according to the endogenous school is a “political” process involving the threefold dynamic of: (a) political which comprise of elite deals, (b) the prioritization of core government functions and (c) the willingness to respond to public expectations⁷.

Unarguably, the above definition demonstrates the central role of government that is the state and those responsible for her public administration in nation-building without which the exercise will be a futility.

Poverty and development are concepts that are intertwined and represent the two sides of a coin, each influences the other. Poverty implies lack or insufficient access to the things including, those that are tangible and non-tangible, quantifiable and non-quantifiable that are capable of causing human wellbeing. These include lack of material possessions, access to services, participation in decision making, denial of self-esteem, exclusion, lack of knowledge, environmental degradation etc. Development is the progression of an individual or group of people from a lower plane of life to a higher one that entails and guarantees quantitative and qualitative wellbeing. Development in most recent times is seen from human development that is the development of human capabilities that can make them what they can be and what they are (Amartya Sen)⁸. The capabilities approach to development entails that focus should be development planners to the things that would ensure that citizens exploit their potentials to the maximum in order to achieve sustainable productivity, but not just to ensure growth of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In this regard Dudley Seers (1972) defined development when he presaged that:

The questions to ask about a country’s development are therefore: what has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If all of these have declined from high levels, then beyond doubt this has been a period of development (124)⁹

Unemployment, inequality, lack of access to material and non-material things including social and economic infrastructure, etc are manifestations of poverty, and underdevelopment. However, their availability are not ends in themselves, rather they are the means to ends. For instance employment does attack poverty it is what that employment can make one to do in attacking poverty that becomes the end. Inequality is the condition describing the differential level that prevails among the socio-economic classes in a society. For instance the difference between the wealthy and non-wealthy, between political power holders and non-political power holders etc. Cumulative is the gap that exist between rich and poor in all ramifications of life among human beings.

Nation Building in Nigeria

Nation building process in post-colonial Nigeria involves the construction and restructuring of a national identity through use of state power. Such efforts at nation-building include the introduction of a unified currency, unified educational policies including the universal primary education and the universal basic education programs, the national anthem and flag. Others are the unified armed forces, the joint admissions and matriculation into Nigerian Universities, the introduction of the National Youth Service Corps, the National Character Commission. Again, the initiation of a Nigerian constitution and the establishment of federal government owned institutions in the areas of health, agriculture, education, etc are such avenues for nation-building. In spite of the concerted efforts at nation-building made by the Nigerian state by her respective leaders over the years, the achievements are far less than hoped. This manifested in the military coups of the 1960s through to 1990s, the violent political crises in the then Mid-Western region (1962) and that in the Tiv domains in the then Northern region (1964). Other manifestations were the attempt at cessation by the then Eastern region, for an independent state called 'Biafra' which led to the bloody civil war between 1966 and 1970. Other manifestations indicative of less achieved efforts in the nation-building enterprise include the various religious, political and ethnic/clannish violence that has beclouded Nigeria since independence, the crises of resource control, population census agitations, official corruption at all levels and tiers of government, the seat tight syndrome and winner takes all syndrome associated with the nations politics, formation of ethnic militias, bastardization of the constitution by the political class. The list is endless.

The inability of the state to achieve success in nation building enterprise less than required has opened up avenues for poverty to thrive. For instance the military coups; political; ethnic; religious violent and the activities of ethnic militias including movement for the emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Movement for the Actualization for the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Oodua People's Congress (OPC) among others caused insecurity situations in the country. The insecurity situations are forms of poverty, just as the hardship, physical torture, maiming and outright taking of human lives perpetrated by members of the groups are the manifestations of poverty. People were compelled by the activities of these sources of insecurity to abandon or suspend their legitimate economic, social or political activities which was their source of income/living.

The Poverty Situation in Nigeria

Upon the exit of colonialism in Nigeria there were high expectations by the citizens that the country will witness accelerated development where the masses would enjoy high living standards. The expectations are far from been achieved. In the 1970s, when Nigeria experienced the oil boom the expectations of Nigerian masses was that the leaders would use the oil money to position Nigeria on the path of long lasting development that would promote their living conditions. However, that was not to be as the leaders rather resorted to looting and frivolous squandering of the nation's wealth. When in 1980 the Third Republic set in, the economy of Nigeria was under strain, a condition which aggravated year in year out. The incidence of severe poverty took a rising trend as table 1 shows.

Table 1: the poverty level in Nigeria between 1960 and 2016

Year	1960	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2016
Incidence of poverty													67.1%
Population of Nigeria													167m
Population of poverty													112m

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (NBS)

The Source of Poverty and Inequality in Post-Colonial Nigeria

Much has been written concerning why vast Nigerians are poor in spite of the fact that Nigeria is richly endowed with both human and natural resources. Much of the reasons been adduced as the causes of poverty like lack of infrastructure, industries, healthcare facilities and undeveloped agriculture are rather manifestations of poverty. The actual cause of poverty and inequality in post-colonial Nigeria is the nature of political leadership which has enshrined extractive political and economic institutions (Agba 2017, and Acemoglu and Robinson 2012)¹⁰ respectively. Accordingly, the extractive political and economic institutions have ensured that the resources of the country are accessed by a few privileged class-the political elites at the expense of the larger masses. This has been achieved through coercion, exploitation, corruption and exclusion as the principles of liberal democracy have been turned upside down.

Implications of Poverty and Inequality on Nation-Building in Nigeria

The spread of severe poverty and the ever widening gap between the rich and the poor has impeded sustainable nation-building engineering enterprise in Nigeria. Generally, nation building cannot be with optional achieved results-desire in an environment where high inequality in statuses and severe poverty prevails.

In specifics, inequality and poverty breeds distrust, desperation and many other vices including corruption, anomie behaviour etc. The poor and lowly in the socio-economic ladder of the polity most often develop the feeling and sense of belonging. Their thought is that if they belonged to the nation which lay claim for their accommodating, why will they be that very poor and so lowly placed in society, whereas, others are stinky rich and enjoy the nation's resources unparalleled with them. Such thought causes them not to contribute their quota in their individual capacities to the whole development process of the state. They feel they don't belong to the system after all, but if they do, they are highly marginalized. The feeling of marginalization has manifested in ethnic, clannish and religious loyalties against national loyalty, the consequences been the numerous ethnic, religious, boundary etc violent conflicts that have plague Nigeria since independence¹¹. The violent conflict has at many times destroyed government infrastructures/facilities including roads, schools etc which are meant for nation-building, in the areas affected. A good example is the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War and Boko Haram insurgencies. Such destructions exacerbate poverty and create poverty-low ebb of nation-building vicious circle.

Marginalization leads to hatred the consequence which is the profound hatred for the state and the ruling/political elites and the well to do. The state and its ruling elites are detested by the poor. Owing to the conviction of the poor people that their poor nature is as a result of the actions and inactions of the state and the exploitative nature of the ruling elites, disunity therefore sets in between the poor and the state and her actors. The disunity in turn thwarts nation-building efforts. Alimeka (2000:13) explicated this in the following words:

...the attitude that the government is oppressive and indifferent to their needs; that life in their society is meaningless and unpredictable that there are no need....the current system in Nigeria generates intensifies and consolidates widespread poverty while enriching a few at the expense of the vast majority of the citizens, such a system cannot generate and sustain solidarity (13)¹²

The poor having the feeling of marginalization tends to develop an 'I don't care attitude' towards the state and in that circumstance stand to destroy state building infrastructure/services to vent their anger or call for attention. Many of the university students' demonstrations in some state owned universities across Nigeria especially in the 1980s and 1990s which led to this scenario. Again, there has been cases of protest by the masses against the then National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) but now power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) which at times leads to physical assault of the official as well to the vandalization of the organization's property, across Nigeria, for poor services rendered but exorbitant prices charged by the company¹³. Meanwhile NEPA is an institution aimed at fostering national identity and aiding socio-economic development.

The poor in some instance identify with themselves which in the end results into the evolvement of what Kornhauser (1959) conceptualized as mass society¹⁴. Accordingly, the mass society is a collection of very poor and highly marginalized citizens that are generally idle and without any stake in the existing order in the state. These conditions therefore makes them to become "available non elites" and are always willing to engage in anomic and anti-social vices like political thuggery, assassinations and murders, destruction of property etc. According to Adoh (2003:69) the growing scale of poverty in the country created an ever-widen pool of available non elites who for pittance are hireable to commit arson, carryout political thuggery, assassinations, cause general mayhem or destroy other innocent citizens property¹⁵. The above vices are antithetical to nation building process. The destruction of lives for instance eliminates nation builders and statesmen and in the long run effects nation building. The murders of Dele Giwa, Harry Marshall, Bola Ige, among others can be likened to this analogy.

Poverty of income has hindered people from optimal participation in and utilization of nation building structures and services like access to educational and health facilities created by the government. Many Nigerians have not been able to access education and health, and other infrastructural services like electricity, and before telecommunication when Nigerian Telecommunication Authority (NITEL) was the source telephone service provider, due to poverty of income. These category therefore are isolated from enjoying the services if when they are in need and therefore never values the institutions that have been created to provide the services. To them the institutions are needless and of no impact. In this many nation building efforts derailed.

Illiteracy is a major form of poverty meanwhile a good percentage of Nigerians is illiterate, this impact negatively on nation building efforts. For instance the illiterate person is

still stuck to his cultural values including those that impede his development. The refusal of some Kano residents in 2004 to present their children for immunization against poliomyelitis is a pointer in this direction. Again, is the issue of where in many Nigerian cultures, girl child education is almost a taboo. Illiteracy has restricted many Nigerians from participating in or enjoying nation building structures. The illiterate does not know the meaning and significance of the National Youth Services Scheme (NYSC) or that of the National Festival of Arts and Culture, or the national anthem illiteracy therefore a major bane to not only nation building engineering enterprise but also to Nigeria's general socio-economic development.

Another dimension of poverty which has hampered nation building in Nigeria is health poverty. Health poverty is simply a condition where an individual has health challenges which deprive him from optionally engaging in activities that would lead him to live a good life. Health poverty, just as illiteracy has impacted negatively on nation building as those suffering from health poverty are a times isolated from benefiting from nation building structures. In such circumstance they value the structures. In another direction, they as well are not able to contribute their quota to nation building.

Food poverty has also impeded nation building. In a variety of ways, for instance a hungry person cannot be able to engage in any productive activity and is therefore deprived of contributing his quota to nation building. Food poverty can also lead to health poverty with its consequences on nation building as has been discussed. A hungry man can as well be an angry man, consequently a food driven poverty individual has the potentials of engaging in social vices like theft, robbery, corruption etc so as to live all of which affect nation building. There is an intricate web of relationship between poverty and corruption. While poverty breeds corruption, on the hand, corruption causes poverty on the other. This essay has tended to examine the first relationship between poverty and corruption. A poor stricken individual has the potential of indulging or perpetrating one corrupt practice or the other in order to make up his areas of deprivation. Corruption is a multifaceted phenomenon that is perpetratable in all spheres of human life. However, this evork is more concerned with official or public corruption which simply defined "is the acts which an individual engages in acts that are abhorred by the general as going against the accepted norms of the society, for his selfish interest. Corruption is a major destabilizing factor in nation-building in Nigeria. Nation building structures have been many a times left uncompleted even when huge sums of money are invested in them. They become dysfunctional as such fail to evolve the material and or services which when utilized would have paved way for stability. Many federal roads have been abandoned like that. Other examples of abandonment of progress include the Ajaokuta steel company. Corruption still accounts for shoddy execution of state projects even when huge sums of money of money are voted and released for the projects. The Lima declaration against corruption explicated on the impact of corruption on nation building as follows

The erosion of the moral fabric of the society, violation of social and economic rights of the poor and vulnerable, undermining of Democracy, subversion of the rule of laws, retardation of development and denial of society particularly the poor of the benefits of free and open competition 16.

It is an adoubtable fact that all of the above are true of Nigeria's situation, and have truly worked against nation building efforts.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Nigerian state has made efforts towards nation-building since she gained independence from British colonial rule, in order to achieve a stable polity where the diverse cultural groups would be integrated into a whole with a common sense of identity. Unfortunately, this has not been achieved as desired of a nation, the result when manifests in ethnic, religions, clashes and most recently, political polarizations. It makes no sense when people fly party flags in their vehicles, homes, offices and business premises as against the national flag. The Nigerian state goes with its name but the nationalities that make it does not have that sense of common identity as every nationality feels and thinks of itself been above the Nigerian nation. Much of the reason why nation building has faced serious challenge in Nigeria is the wide spread severe poverty that has engulfed the Nigerian masses. The poverty has indoctrinated them with the idea of “we don’t belong to the nation and so there are no needs to develop that sense of common identity with the state”. It is no doubting the Nigerian state is enormously endowed with natural and human resources that are capable of removing Nigerians from the pangs of poverty. However, failed and exploitive leadership has thrown Nigerians into penury in their masses.

The paper therefore argue that virile nation building can be achieved only if good governance identifiable by the capabilities on the part of government to protect rights of the citizens, enforce the rule of law, effectively implement anti-corruption policies and achieve accountability, ensure democracy participation of the citizens, and to build the society, economy and polity towards meeting the basic needs of the people so that they are not driven by poverty and inequality.

Endnotes

1. Since independence Nigeria has evolved series of development/poverty reduction strategies for instance see Agalamanyi, C.U, major causes of massive poverty in Nigeria. An Analysis of some Federal Government Poverty Alleviation Initiatives” Journal of Nigeria Government and politics, Vol.1, (2006), 26-9
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