

## **POVERTY, CIVIL UNREST AND DOMESTIC DEVELOPMENT CRISIS OF NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper investigates the interconnections between poverty, civil unrest, and domestic development crises in Nigeria, a country often marked by juxtaposed wealth and poverty. It examines the root causes of these phenomena, the socio-economic ramifications, and potential solutions. Employing a comprehensive literature review and relevant theoretical frameworks, findings show that there is a drastic nexus among the aforementioned variables. The research underscores the urgent need for coordinated policies to address the intertwined nature of these issues.*

***Keywords: poverty; civil unrest; national development; domestic crisis; development crisis***

## Introduction

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, has significant cultural and economic resources. However, it grapples with high levels of poverty, persistent civil unrest, and substantial developmental challenges. Nigeria's development trajectory has been hindered by poverty, civil unrest, and domestic crises. With over 200 million people, Nigeria accounts for approximately 25% of Africa's population. Despite its rich natural resources, the country struggles with endemic poverty, inequality, and social unrest. The Nigerian government has implemented various initiatives to address these challenges; however, progress remains slow. Despite its vast oil reserves and agricultural potential, Nigeria ranks among the poorest nations globally, with significant segments of the population living below the poverty line. This paper aims to explore how these socio-economic conditions foster civil unrest and hinder development, creating a cycle of instability.

## Conceptual Definition

1. **Poverty:** Poverty refers to the state where individuals lack sufficient financial resources to meet their basic needs, including food, shelter, and healthcare. In Nigeria, poverty is characterized by a combination of low income, unemployment, and limited access to education and healthcare services.
2. **Civil Unrest:** Civil unrest encompasses a range of activities, including protests, riots, and other forms of public disorder, often driven by grievances against perceived injustices, such as inadequate governance, economic disparity, and social inequalities.
3. **Domestic development crises:** This term refers to the various challenges that impede a nation's socio-economic progress, including inadequate infrastructure, poor healthcare and education systems, corruption, and ineffective governance.

## Methodology

This research employs a qualitative methodology, utilizing a comprehensive literature review of academic articles, government reports, and policy documents. Case studies of recent civil unrest events in Nigeria are analyzed to establish a correlation between poverty and civil unrest.

## Literature review

Nigeria is a nation blessed with intellectuals, technocrats, and abundant mineral resources, yet the majority of the citizens live in abject poverty. In recent times, Nigeria has witnessed amongst others the following forms of crimes; financial crimes, transnational organized crimes, armed robbery and other related types of stealing, kidnapping, farmers herdsman clashes, political assassination, vandalization of government infrastructures, insurgency by Niger Delta Militant and terrorism by Boko Haram Sect (Adegoke & Osawe, 2015). Poverty is one of the factors responsible for the emergence of a militia group involving the use of a heavy weapon and improvised explosive devices

(IEDs). It has become a major problem widely acclaimed nationally and internationally as demanding urgent attention especially in Sub-Saharan African countries, Nigeria inclusive (Abati, 2006; Ikyase & Namo, 2018). In Nigeria today, the poor living conditions of the majority of the citizens have reached phobic dimensions and have defied all solutions offered due to the institutional fragility of the state and high level of corruption in the country. Poverty is easily cited in Nigeria like an elephant in a river. It is another form of modern slavery in Africa. The effect of poverty is pervasive. A poor man is a problem for society and even unto himself. He is always angry, never productive and seeks succor in militia activities for survival. Poverty is a product of economic marginalization, unemployment, inequality and uneducated is the root cause of the rising spate of insecurity in Nigeria today and recent xenophobic attacks in South Africa. The notion that poverty breeds civil unrest has been a contentious issue within the academic arena. While some scholars believed that there is a direct link between poverty and civil unrest, others argued that insecurity is caused by other factors. Empirical evidence suggests that poverty and inequality breed conflict, ill-feelings and insecurity (Awojobi, 2014; Oduwole, 2015; Etim, Duke & Ogbinyi, 2017). Good governance is the primary function of an efficient, visionary, transparent, trustworthy and credible leadership whose driving force is an improvement in the collective well-being of the citizenry through well-conceived, effectively implemented economic policies and human development programs (Oluwa, 2010 cited in Awojobi, 2014).

Therefore, the task of ending poverty and insecurity in Nigeria is to accelerate the pace of economic development and Consideration should be given to making poverty alleviation an explicit constitutional issue and be incorporated in the nation's overall development/policy management framework. The perception of what institute poverty has unfolded over time and varies amongst nations in size and scope. Therefore, universally accepted definitions have become very difficult to emerge (Akwara, Enwuchola, Adekunle & Udaw, 2013). However, there are universally accepted indexes of what constitutes poverty. These indicators are group into three broad categories as contained in the universally accepted definition to mean absolute, relative and material poverty. Absolute poverty means the inability of a person or group to provide the material needs for physical subsistence and protection of human dignities such as food, shelter, clothing, potable water, healthcare services, basic education, transportation, and gainful employment. Relative poverty means the inability of certain sections of the society to satisfy their basic needs as well as inadequate income to enhance active participation in societal activities to the extent that it limits the actualization of one's potentials.

Material poverty is the absence of ownership control of physical assets such as land and other resources that land produce or the subsists on land such as animals and birds (UNDP, 1996 & 2010; UN, 1999). In a nutshell, poverty is a lack of access to empowerment, income and healthcare services. To be poor is to be powerless (Nwagwu 2014) . It also means being despised and looked down upon. It means being treated unfairly. Most significantly, it means being lacking things that translate into good, physical and mental health. Karl Marx noted that the key to the class structure is economics. The extent of an individual's wealth is the determining factor for success in a number of crucial areas, including the chance to live and the chance to obtain possessions and education that are highly valued in society". Poverty, therefore, is an abject state of being in which an individual is incapable of utilizing resources around him to improve himself economically, socially,

politically or otherwise. Poverty means a man's inability to afford decent food, shelter, clothing and recreations which are the basic necessities of life without these basic necessities, life is miserable and short (Jolaosho, 1996). Poverty is caused by what may be called 'exogenous forces' or forces outside an individual's control such as overpopulation, high standard of living, high cost of living, inadequate education, unemployment and environmental degradation, and is also caused by forces that operate within the victims as exemplified by individual responsibility and welfare dependency, and are thus self-created (Adefolalu, 1992). Poverty can also arise from changes in average income or changes in the distribution of income when there is cut in salary, loss of job or source of living or even retirement from well-paid service, then poverty is obvious (Garga, 2015).

### Causes of Poverty in Nigeria

1. Economic Factors: Several economic challenges contribute to poverty in Nigeria:

unemployment and Underemployment:-According to the NBS, the unemployment rate reached 33.3% in 2020. High unemployment rates, particularly among youth, exacerbate poverty levels. Many individuals are engaged in informal sectors with limited job security and low wages, contributing to underemployment.

- Economic Instability: Fluctuations in global oil prices directly impact Nigeria's economy, given its heavy reliance on oil exports. Economic downturns lead to reduced government which affects funding for social services, infrastructure, and job creation programs.
- Inflation: affects low-income households.

### 2. Social and Political Factors

- Corruption: Corruption in government and institutions hinders effective policy implementation, misallocates resources, and erodes public trust. Corruption diverts funds meant for public services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure. When resources are mismanaged or siphoned off, it deprives the vulnerable populations of the support they need to escape poverty.
- Poor Governance: Inefficient government policies and lack of accountability can exacerbate poverty levels. A lack of commitment to public welfare initiatives often limits access to essential services for those in need.
- Conflict and Insecurity: Ongoing conflicts, particularly in the northern regions of Nigeria, disrupt economic activities and displace communities, leading to loss of livelihoods. Insecurity, driven by factors such as terrorism, banditry, and ethnic tensions, further hampers development efforts.
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### 3. Educational Factors

- Limited Access to Quality Education: Many children in Nigeria do not have access to quality education due to insufficient school facilities, poorly trained teachers, and inadequately funded educational programs. In rural areas, the lack of schools can make education inaccessible to many children, limiting their future opportunities.
- High Dropout Rates: Economic pressures often force children to leave school prematurely to work and support their families. This lack of education perpetuates a cycle of poverty, as those without formal education are less likely to secure better paying jobs.

#### 4. Health Factors

**Inadequate Healthcare Services** A significant portion of the Nigerian population lacks access to basic healthcare, resulting in high morbidity rates from preventable diseases. A weak healthcare system exacerbates poverty because health issues prevent individuals from working or earning a stable income.

- **High Disease Burden:** Nigeria is faced with numerous health challenges, including malaria, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and other communicable diseases. These health crises not only undermine the workforce but also lead families to incur substantial medical expenses, further deepening poverty.
- **Malnutrition:** Food insecurity and malnutrition are prevalent in Nigeria, leading to stunted growth and poor health among children. Malnutrition affects cognitive development and productivity in adulthood, creating a vicious cycle of poverty.

#### 5. Government Corruption and Mismanagement

- **Misallocation of Resources:** corruption leads to the misallocation of funds intended for social welfare programs, infrastructure development, and public health. When resources are siphoned off by corrupt officials, the promised benefits never reach the intended recipients, leaving vulnerable populations without support.
- **Poor Public Services:** Corruption results in inadequate public services, such as education, healthcare, and sanitation. The lack of quality public services disproportionately affects the poor, who rely on these services to improve their living conditions and economic opportunities.
- **Regional Disparities:** Nigeria is characterized by significant regional imbalances in resource allocation and development. Northern regions, particularly those plagued by insurgency, face higher levels of poverty compared to the more prosperous southern regions. This inequitable distribution perpetuates cycles of poverty and limits opportunities for growth in disadvantaged areas.

#### 6. Social Factors

##### □ Insecurity and Violence:

The rise of terrorism, particularly in the northeastern region of Nigeria due to groups like Boko Haram and civil unrest in various areas, has significantly affected economic activities. Insecurity hampers agricultural production, disrupts markets, and drives away investors. Communities often suffer from displacement, further exacerbating poverty and limiting education and health service access.

**Ethnic and Religious Tensions:** Nigeria is highly diverse, with numerous ethnic and religious groups. Tensions among these groups can lead to conflicts that disrupt social cohesion, hinder development, and create barriers to economic progress. These conflicts often have historical roots and can be exacerbated by competition for resources.

#### **Historical context of civil unrest**

The concept of civil unrest is not quite different in this case, several definitions have been drawn up to describe it and several authorities have termed it with different synonyms ranging from civil disorder, civil disobedience, civil disturbance etc. “Civil disturbances arise from acts of civil

disobedience. They occur most often when participants in mass acts of civil disobedience become antagonistic toward authority, and authorities must struggle to wrest the initiative from an unruly crowd. In the extreme, civil disturbances include criminal acts of terrorism. Civil disturbances, in any form, are prejudicial to public law and order" (Field Manual of the United States Army 1985) . It is noteworthy that civil unrest and/or civil disobedience are different from insurgency but usually they there is an interconnection. Civil unrest is typically intended to be a demonstration to the government, but can escalate into insurrection or insurgency (Black 2007). While this is not the same nor should be compared with State Motivated Violence as was the case in the southern Lagos state of Nigeria in year 2020, during which young protesters against Police Brutality in the "EndSARS" campaign were met by armed soldiers and security operatives, who shot indiscriminately at these peaceful protesters thereby killing a score of them, taking away the bodies while yet arresting and brutalizing others (Vanguard Daily Newspaper, July 2021).) This is usually because the purpose of civil disobedience is not met with peaceful solutions or the groups involved decide to employ violence as a means of achieving their goals. A very common effect of civil unrest in Nigeria is displacement of individuals and forced migration. Large groups of Nigerians live outside their places of origin and residence today because of the constant cases of civil unrest that plague the nation. Of all the social menace in Nigeria that caused internal population displacement, Boko Haram insurgency was the most single social epidemic that caused contemporary national challenges of internally displaced persons IDPs (Letswa & Isyaku 2018).

Civil unrest in Nigeria is a multifaceted issue that can be significantly attributed to poverty. The relationship between poverty and civil unrest is complex and involves various social, economic, and political factors. Below is an exhaustive analysis of how poverty contributes to civil unrest in Nigeria. Civil unrest is a term that is typically used in law enforcement to describe disorders caused by a person or group of people (Schurink, 1990). It is typically a symptom of, and a form of protest against major socio-political or economic problems in a state. Examples of civil disorder include: parades, sit-ins and other forms of obstructions like rallies, marches, riots, sabotage, among others. Civil unrest is typically intended to be a demonstration to the government, but can escalate into insurgency (Black, 2007).

#### **Socioeconomic factors contributing to civil unrest**

- **Youth Unemployment:** A large youth population, with limited job opportunities, leads to frustration and a sense of hopelessness. This demographic is often at the forefront of protests and civil unrest.
- **Lack of Basic Services:** Poor access to education, healthcare, and infrastructure fuels discontent. Citizens may resort to protests when their basic needs are unmet.

**Corruption and Mismanagement:** Corruption in government and misallocation of resources contribute to poverty. Citizens often feel that their tax money is not being used for their benefit, leading to anger and protests.

#### **Political factors contributing to civil unrest**

- **Weak Governance:** \_Ineffective governance and lack of accountability can lead to civil unrest. Citizens may feel that their voices are not heard, prompting them to take to the streets.

- **Ethnic and Religious Tensions:** Nigeria is home to diverse ethnic and religious groups. Poverty can exacerbate these tensions, leading to conflicts that manifest as civil unrest.

### **Failure of democratic institutions**

The inability of democratic institutions to address the needs of the populace can lead to disillusionment with the political process, resulting in protests and civil disobedience.

### **Case Studies of Civil Unrest in Nigeria**

-Civil Wars and Conflicts:

Previous conflicts, such as the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), have had long-lasting effects on the nation's social fabric, contributing to ongoing tensions and unrest.

#### **EndSARS Movement (2020)**

The protests against police brutality were fueled by broader issues of poverty, unemployment, and systemic corruption. The movement highlighted the frustrations of young Nigerians who feel marginalized.

#### **Boko Haram Insurgency:**

The rise of Boko Haram in the northeast can be linked to poverty and lack of education. The group has exploited the grievances of impoverished communities, leading to violence and unrest.

#### **Farmers-Herders Conflicts:**

Competition for resources, exacerbated by poverty and climate change, has led to violent clashes between farmers and herders, further destabilizing regions and contributing to civil unrest.

### **Consequences of Civil Unrest**

- **Economic Impact:** Civil unrest can deter investment, disrupt local economies, and lead to increased poverty levels, creating a vicious cycle.
- **Social Fragmentation:** Prolonged unrest can deepen ethnic and religious divides, leading to a fragmented society that struggles to unite against common challenges.
- **Human Rights Violations:** Government responses to civil unrest often involve heavy-handed tactics, leading to human rights abuses and further alienating the populace.

### **Potential Solutions to civil unrest**

- **Economic Development:** Addressing poverty through job creation, education, and infrastructure development can mitigate the root causes of civil unrest.
- **Strengthening Governance:** Improving governance, accountability, and transparency can help rebuild trust between the government and the populace.
- **Community Engagement:** Engaging communities in decision-making processes can empower citizens and reduce feelings of disenfranchisement.
- **Conflict Resolution Mechanisms:** Establishing dialogue platforms for different ethnic and religious groups can help address grievances and reduce tensions.

### **Development Crisis in Nigeria**

Development crisis is a common phenomenon in Nigeria and other developing countries of the Third World. The case of Nigeria is centered on the various crises of poverty, leadership trust,



technological artefacts, education, industrialization, health, transportation, governance, welfarism, and the general social and economic dimensions. Nigeria development crisis can be explained from three perspectives, colonial legacy, corrupt leadership and democracy leads to economic growth, the colonial legacy perspective argues that the problem of underdevelopment is traceable to the origin of colonial authority and the exploitative nature of Nigerian colonial and post-colonial experience. Similarly, the concept of leadership believes that corrupt and mismanagement on the part of leadership has been the bane of development in Nigeria. Analysis of the leadership problem in Nigeria is located within this framework, lack of effective management of human and material resource as a result of leadership problem in the country (Achebe 1983).

### **The era of Colonialism in Nigeria**

It is not possible for us as Nigerians to have a proper grasp of the nature of religious and communal clashes, riots, conflicts and violence in Nigeria today, without understanding our primordial, religious, cultural and colonial past, what we were before the arrival of Islam, the colonial masters and Christian missions, and what we became during and after the Islamic, colonial and Christian, and post-colonial eras. It is not possible for us to solve contemporary religious and communal clashes, riots, conflicts and violence in Nigeria without correcting the inherited primordial, religious and cultural, and colonial structures and negative values and redressing these legacies.

Nigeria is a country in Africa that has experienced colonial rule and the present situation in the country can only be examined from historical antecedent and prior to the period of colonialism in Nigeria there were different systems of governments based on culture and values of Nigerian society. As a result of industrial revolution in Europe and perhaps the outward expansion of capitalism beyond the border of Europe that led to economic subjugation of African countries as well as political subjugation, colonialism took place in Africa and the foundation of development crisis was successfully put in place (Blanda; 2001). The history of Nigerian development crisis started from colonial period as many scholars are of the opinion that African predicament can only be attributed to colonialism and based on comparative standards, Africa today is underdeveloped in relation to western Europe and a few other parts of the world; and that the present position has been arrived at, not by the separate evolution of Africa on the one hand and Europe on the other (Rodney;1983).

### **Post-colonial Experience**

The period of decolonization in Nigeria was greeted with much optimism. Therefore, Nigeria march to sovereign state was a conquered one, marked by anti-colonial struggles, crises, coups, counter-coups and a thirty-month agonizing civil war between 1967 and 1970. According to Nwabueze, Nigeria has passed through five different phases, era of colonial autocracy and absolutism, that is, period of formal colonialism till October 1 1960, when the country gained 'flag' independence (b) emergence of constitutional democracy- (1960-1966) (c) the return of military autocracy and absolutism- (1966-1979); (d) restoration of constitutional democracy(1979- 1983) and (e) second coming of military and absolutism- (1983-1989) (Ojo;2006)The period between 1950 and 1960 was regarded as golden age in Africa .Most of African countries attained their political independence during the period and it was surprising that after colonial masters departed from the continent most of African countries emerged as trouble zone, most especially Nigeria. The post-colonial era in the country has been characterized with different crises, ranging from civil war,



coups and counter coups, the annulment of June 12 presidential election as well as failure of Nigerian leaders to enhance the living standard of its people makes the struggle for development to be an endless one and Nigerian predicament can be analyzed from different perspectives.

The Nigerian economy since the post independent era could be described as neo- colonial economy, which served the interest of the ruling elites at the expense of the majority. The state, foreign entrepreneurs and few wealthy Nigerians such as politicians, business tycoons, military officers, top echelons of the Nigerian police and contractors dominate the economy which has been ossified by years of rigid control and inflexibility (Adesina, 1997) The Nigerian entrepreneurs could develop only within the narrow limits defined by the state. Such limits are characterized by inadequate infrastructures, high taxation, lack of funding of private initiatives, and threats to lives and properties. The traditional socio- economy system dwindled as the state led economy came to limelight. Arising from this cultural lag is underdevelopment of labour with low skills and incomplete knowledge of productions. Basically, the colonial and neocolonial political economy set in motion for socio- economic conditions, which make human development a mirage (Lawal, 1997) Obviously, socio- economic hardships in Nigeria remain despite different regimes of development programs (Akeem,2013).

The socio-economic indicators of development in Nigeria were ranked below average for developing countries. Over 50 % of the population lived in absolute poverty with 52 years life expectancy and high infant mortality. Nigeria economy stop flourishing since the 1980s partly due to poor implementation of extant developmental policies. This trend generated development crises that rendered Nigerians vulnerable to socio- economic hardships. As a result of this government has embarked on different developmental policies without any impact on Nigerians. The developmental policy of the 1960s and 1970s failed to yield a desired results as well as the National Development Planning (NDP) that was designed to make Nigeria a united, strong and self-reliant nation; a great and dynamic economy; a just and egalitarian society: a land full of bright and full opportunities for all citizens and a free and democratic society.

Socio-economic situations of Nigerians clearly showed that the second NDP produced unintended consequences that diminished their living standards. There were many programmes that recorded huge failure in Nigeria as a result of political instability, corruption, and exclusion of majority of poor farmers in Nigeria. The Operation Feed the Nation and other agricultural programs similarly suffered defeats, the government additionally set out the Green Revolution plan in 1980. This plan aimed to achieve self-sufficiency in food provision by 1985 when the fourth National Development Plan terminated, this plan emphasized the need for comprehensive development of the rural areas and other project while Green Revolution had a much more comprehensive character than the OFN ( Akeem,2013;12) Consequently, the adoption of the structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in Nigeria was followed by high incidence of poverty and inefficient infrastructure such as irregular power supply, inadequate water provision, erratic telecommunication services and poor transportation networks (Essein;2000).

The establishment of the National Accelerated Food Production Project (NAFPP) in 1972 was necessary to cushion the effect of food development Crises and Socio-Economic Hardships in Nigeria but there was shortage of food, which became apparent during and after the Civil War in

Nigeria (1967-1970). The civil war resulted in colossal loss of lives and properties as well as failure of the first development plan in post – colonial Nigeria. All these policies have not been able to produce a desired result as the country battle with crises of various magnitudes. With the political transformation from military autocracy and absolutism in 1999, the citizens were so optimistic that the new system will uphold their expectations. President Olusegun Obasanjo was the first president of the fourth republic and he recognized the socio-economic malady in the country while he also embarked in different reforms to enhance the living standard of people in the country.

Prior to 1999, Nigeria has also appeared among the top most corrupt countries in the world for many consecutive years and this made the task of development to be a mirage, . As a result of this the president established Economic and Financial Crime Commission as well as Independence Corrupt Practice Commission. Worse still, the restoration of democracy in 1999 has led to an unpardonable height of kleptocracy. Funds intended for developments have been diverted into private use by political office holders. (Oshewolo and Olanrewaju, 2011:13). Not only that, the government also embarked on different reforms in banking sector to enhance the living standard of the people also, the pregnancy of debt accumulation with the Paris Club was also aborted during Obasanjo's regime through various economic policies.

President Yar'adua did not live long in the office to actualize his seven-point agenda, he also recognized the crisis in the Niger Delta through the establishment of Amnesty Programme as well as Ministry of Niger Delta to install peace in the oil producing states.

### Theoretical Framework

Social movement theory explains how economic and social grievances fuel civil unrest (Tilly, 2003). The human development approach highlights the importance of addressing poverty and inequality for sustainable development (Sen, 1999). The connection between social movement theory, the human development approach, and the issues of poverty, civil unrest, and domestic development crises in Nigeria can be explored through the examination of grievances, mobilization, and the broader context of human well-being. Social movement theory, as articulated by thinkers like Charles Tilly, posits that civil unrest arises from collective grievances and the mobilization of groups to address these grievances. In Nigeria, there are significant economic and social challenges that can fuel unrest, including: Poverty, Corruption and Governance Issues, Ethnic and Regional Inequalities. The human development approach emphasizes the importance of improving the well-being of individuals, focusing not just on economic growth but also on education, health, equality, and empowering communities. In the context of Nigeria, this approach can be instrumental in addressing the root causes of civil unrest by: Addressing Basic Needs, Promoting Inclusivity, Strengthening Participatory Governance.

### Conclusion

Nigeria's poverty rate remains high, with significant disparities between regions and socioeconomic groups. Economic grievances, corruption, and poor governance drive civil unrest in Nigeria. Corruption, infrastructure deficits, and poor governance hinder Nigeria's socioeconomic progress. Poverty, civil unrest, and domestic development crises in Nigeria are interlinked. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach. Poverty Reduction Strategies. Implement

conditional cash transfers, vocational training programs, and social protection initiative, strengthen institutions, promote good governance, and combat corruption. Investment in Human development, Prioritize education, healthcare, and infrastructure development.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are crucial:

1. Policy Reforms: Implement policies addressing poverty, inequality, and civil unrest.
2. Institutional Capacity Building: Enhance institutional capacity for effective governance and service delivery.
3. International Cooperation: Foster partnerships with international organizations to address development challenges.

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