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# **Poverty and Insecurity: Reflections on the Role of Education**

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## **Abstract**

The challenges we have today in Nigeria, be them education, security, economy and so on, are no doubt the fallout of frustration of poverty, insecurity of any nature, corruption, unemployment, bad governance. Interestingly, these arrays of challenges are beyond one social malady or the other. The authors unarguably aver that distinguishing these threats and understanding their multifaceted dimensions require a strategic, concerted, collective and coordinated action of government and security agencies, traditional and religious leaders, multi-national agencies, the media and members of the public.

## **Introduction**

Poverty and insecurity are two heavy weight challenges that can cripple a nation. Their causes are multiple while their effects are debilitating. They can enthrone a culture of violence, kidnapping, killings, family instability and other deviant human behaviour. Government and security agencies must stop paying lip services on this social malaise and win the confidence of the citizens on this and embark on a meaningful development on all sectors that matches international standards.

## **The Concept of Poverty Explained**

Poverty is a complex and multidimensional concept with dynamic properties. It is a perennial and global phenomenon that threatens the developmental efforts of nations, governments and the survival of humanity. It is a process of socio-economic and political deprivation that affects communities, households or individuals, resulting to a lack of access to basic necessities of life<sup>1</sup>. The Federal Republic of Nigeria<sup>2</sup> explained the concept from three perspectives viz: conventional, characteristic, and specific.

Conventionally, poverty is viewed in terms of insufficient income for securing the basic necessities of life such as food, water, clothing, shelter and effective means of transportation. Characteristically, it is seen as a vicious circle of deprivation manifested in low economic activity, low production and productivity, low income, low savings investment, and low standards of living. Specifically, poverty is a condition of not having enough to eat, poor drinking water and nutrition, unfit housing, high rate of infant mortality, low life expectancy and educational opportunities, inadequate healthcare, lack of productive assets and economic infrastructure, and inability to actively participate in decision making process. The consequences of these tripartite phenomenon include the state of powerlessness, helplessness, despair, and thus, the inability to protect oneself against economic, social, cultural and political discrimination and marginalization, deprivation and lack of right, defenselessness and insecurity, vulnerability, and exposure to risks, shocks and stress (World Bank)<sup>3</sup>. For Bradshaw<sup>4</sup>, the hub of poverty is inequality. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)<sup>5</sup> explains it as the denial of opportunities and choices that are most basic to human development to lead a long, healthy, creative life and to enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity, self-respect and the respect of others. Thus, UNDP<sup>6</sup> views poverty as involving tripartite perspectives of income perspective, basic needs perspective; and capability perspective. Under the income perspective, poverty revolves around low income as criterion. Income represents command over goods and services to meet minimum needs. The lack of income therefore means poverty in terms of basic needs such as food, shelter, and clothing. An accepted budget for basic needs for a society is called poverty line. Poverty line is the value of income or consumption necessary for the minimum standard of nutrition and other “necessities”. This implies that poverty lines are usually estimated using income or consumption data. The World Bank adopted one dollar a day as a global poverty line. This means that people are said to be poor or are struggling to survive if their poverty line is below one dollar a day. Poverty line can be distinguished through the concepts of absolute and relative poverty.

Absolute poverty is a situation where the income of a person or a household is insufficient to secure the minimum basic needs required for physiological survival. According to Aliyu<sup>7</sup>, it is the condition where an individual or group of people is unable to satisfy their basic requirements for human survival in terms of food, shelter, clothing, energy, education, health, employment, transportation and recreation. Elements of these basic human needs include food, water, clothing and shelter which correspond with the lowest level of Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. These needs must be satisfied if one is to survive. It is in this sense that poverty is absolute and thus, forms the basis for the specification of poverty line. The headcount and the poverty incidence are the two indices of absolute poverty. The headcount is the total number of people below the poverty line while poverty incidence is the proportion of the poor to the total population. Expectedly, the concept of absolute poverty attracted considerable criticisms. Prominent among them is the difficulty in uniquely determining the minimum requirements of the basic needs for survival. In other words, absolute poverty is based on the assumption that there are minimum basic needs for all people in all societies. A similar criticism can be made of attempts to define absolute standards for shelter, education, and information. Such needs vary from time to time and from place to place so that any attempt

to establish absolute, fixed standards becomes problematic. Another weakness of absolute poverty is that it is quite limiting in the sense that it cannot form the basis for interpersonal, inter-temporal, international and even spatial comparison<sup>8</sup>. Interestingly, it is from the weakness of absolute poverty that the several theories of poverty emerged. Also, it is the type of poverty that policy makers and other development partners are striving to eliminate.

In contradistinction to absolute poverty and in order to redress some of its weaknesses, the concept of relative poverty emerged. Relative poverty is a situation where individuals or families are in command of resources which over time, fall seriously short of the resources commanded by the average persons or families in the community in which they live (National Poverty Eradication Programme)<sup>9</sup>. The concept of poverty as relative deprivation is thought of in terms of the resources available to individuals and households and the styles of living that govern how these resources are used. This suggests that relative poverty is dynamic because as the average standards of the relevant community increase, the relative poverty line also increases. Relative poverty eliminates the problem of limited comparison especially interpersonal and international comparisons. Another factor that favours the shift of defining poverty in relative terms is the thought that relative deprivation, economic isolation and inequality would remain although absolute poverty might disappear with economic growth and with more munificent income maintenance policies. Relative poverty also extends the scope of material needs beyond those of the lowest level of human needs. It is measured by the income gap or poverty gap. Income or poverty gap is the average income shortfall of all the poor as proportion of the poverty line or it is the additional income needed by the poor to rise above the poverty line<sup>10</sup>.

A major weakness of relative poverty is the lack of a scientific basis for determining how far a family's resources should fall below the average for it to become relatively poor. The difficulty in responding to this question unequivocally implies that there is considerable room for subjectivity and that the severity of poverty in relative terms depends on the investigator. Another weakness of relative poverty is that concentrating exclusively on income (as in the case of absolute poverty) to access a household's material situation will certainly lead to ignoring other types of resources that might be available. This follows that trend in income levels and distributions can take different directions and that the poverty gap can widen amid economic growth.

Form the foregoing explanations on the concept of poverty, it becomes glaring that many factors pose as the cause of it. Owolabi<sup>11</sup> gave such causes in Nigeria to include macro-economic distortions, effects of globalization, governance, corruption, low productivity, high population growth rate, poor human resources development and unemployment. Adegoke<sup>12</sup> pegged it on low wages or low purchasing power of the working class, inability of government to meet domestic food requirements, cultural taboos such as over-dependency on the rich, communal unrest or displacement which causes people to lose their means of livelihood and the difficulties in securing bank loans for investment purposes. For Ukwaba<sup>13</sup>, the possible causes of poverty are the rigidity of socially ascribed gender roles and women's limited access to power, training and other productive resources. The World Bank<sup>14</sup> attributed it to the lack of income to attain basic necessities such as food, shelter, clothing, acceptable levels of health

and education; sense of voicelessness and powerlessness in the institutions of state and society; vulnerability to adverse shocks, linked to inability to cope with them; and lack of assets.

On the adverse effects, poverty dislocates an entire system, subverts commitment and enthrones a culture of inefficiency. It brings about inequalities among social groups within the community and produces dishonesty, violence, prostitution, illiteracy, theft, thuggery, family instability, high rate of robbery, and other deviant human behaviours. Owolabi<sup>15</sup> observed that poverty destroys aspirations, hope, happiness and positive relationships.

### **Insecurity in Nigeria**

Insecurity denotes lack of security or uncertainty or the state of being subject to danger or vulnerability. According to Aluta<sup>16</sup>, it is the state of fear or anxiety stemming from a concrete or alleged lack of protection; or a lack of or inadequate freedom from danger. This definition reflects physical insecurity which is the most visible form of insecurity. The Nigerian Constitution of 1999 Section 14(2)(b) states that the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government. In other words, the essence of a country's security is the honest concern for the well-being, welfare and interest of all citizens, and the preservation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity against external aggression. It also suggests that security is the establishment of proactive and defensive measures to safeguard all persons, properties and materials<sup>17</sup>. National security will therefore mean all things done to eliminate distractions and abuse of safety so as to create a free, safe and convenient environment that is enough to attract investments and developments.

Violent uprisings in Nigeria are antithetical to the tenets of national security. They are fallout of frustration of poverty, unemployment and corruption. They are by product of state failure and bad governance. Nigeria has consistently ranked low in the Global Peace Index (GPI) and this signifies a worsened state of insecurity in the country. The GPI assesses countries on the level of societal safety and security, the extent of ongoing domestic and international conflict and the degree of militarisation. GPI is a report produced by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) which measures the relative position of nations' and regions' peacefulness. The GPI ranks 172 independent states and territories according to their levels of peacefulness. In its 2021 Global Peace Index, the Institute for Economics and Peace ranked Nigeria 146<sup>th</sup> out of 163 countries assessed<sup>18</sup>. This puts the country in the league of least peaceful countries such as Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria, South Sudan and Iraq. In Africa, Nigeria came 8<sup>th</sup> among the least peaceful countries. It came after South Sudan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Libya, Central African Republic, Sudan and Mali. Mauritius at 28<sup>th</sup> position in the world is the most peaceful country in Africa followed by Ghana, Botswana, Sierra Leone and Gambia. In many other global rankings, Nigeria performed poorly. The country is the third most terrorised nation in the world. In the 2020 Global Terrorism Index, Nigeria came behind only Afghanistan and Iraq which came first and second respectively. Nigeria is also the poverty capital of the world and emerged 146 out of 180 countries ranked on Corruption Perception Index in 2020.

Insecurity situations in Nigeria are caused by many factors. Such are unemployment, corrupt politicians and judicial system, porous borders, terrorist groups<sup>19</sup>; illegal oil bunkering<sup>20</sup>; failed expectations of good governance<sup>21</sup>; organized criminal gangs, farmers-herders conflict<sup>22</sup>;

ethno-religious conflict, weak security system<sup>23</sup>. While the major effects of security failure in Nigeria include loss of lives and properties, economic stagnation and social tension<sup>24</sup>.

### **Reflections on How to Win the War against Poverty and Insecurity in Nigeria**

The poverty level and security challenges in the country are basically the result of failed expectations of good governance and the systematic neglect of some key sectors. Aluta<sup>25</sup> suggested good governance, socio-economic development, elimination of corruption and entrenchment of social justice, and radical change in values. Nzulumike<sup>26</sup> suggested education. These variables if properly harnessed, will bring about world-class development.

The war against insecurity and poverty can greatly be won through good governance. That is, raising governance standards where the government is responsible and accountable to the people. This means that security engagement cannot be separated from good governance and that peace and security are also determined by it. Good governance is therefore a function of effective, visionary, transparent, trustworthy, and credible political leadership whose driving force is an improvement in the collective well-being of the citizens through well-conceived and affectively implemented economic policies and human development programmes. This is in line with the philosophy or the underlying principles of good governance which is the focus on the people as the ultimate objective of governance.

The socio-economic development is another factor that is strongly considered as a major key to peace and security in Nigeria. The challenge in solving the insecurity problem in Nigeria is to accelerate the development of peace. Here, development consists of creating an economy with relevant social, economic, and physical infrastructure for business operations and industrial growth, to provide gainful employment, medical care for people, and high-level education facilities.

Corruption is the cog in Nigerian wheel of progress and development. It is the bane of our society; a social and economic monster. It is the cause of inequality and inequitable distribution of the nations' wealth, a situation that is responsible for the disaffection among Nigerians. Fighting corruption and winning the war will bring about an egalitarian society where fairness, social justice, and equal right for all will be respected; where every Nigerian will be treated and accorded position not based on tribe and sect but on merit defined in terms of the content of his character, mental capacity and ability to deliver; where there will be no discrimination.

Again, the complete overhauling of security institutions in the country to reflect international standards is a right step in tackling security challenges. This can be achieved with the best modern training in intelligence sharing, advanced technology and logistics. Security personnel should also uphold national values and professionalism in their call to duty and win the trust or cooperation of civilians as this according to Duerken<sup>27</sup> is one of the most essential elements of a successful response to insecurity.

Education on the other hand is a veritable tool in alleviating poverty and stemming the tide of insecurity. Education is the cultivation of the whole person. Cultivation in this context is for life and for living. This means that education is concerned with what makes a man to live and to function. It can contribute to economic development and raise the incomes of the poor. It is the route to poverty reduction because it provides people with basic knowledge, skills and

attitudes to improve their quality of life and increases the livelihoods of households through increased capabilities, assets and activities<sup>28</sup>. The Central Bank of Nigeria<sup>29</sup> observed that the importance attached to education by any dynamic society stems from the fact that education is a means to understanding, controlling, altering and redesigning human environment with a view to achieving and sustaining a better quality of life. For Udofia and Etiemana<sup>30</sup>, a variety of motivations can lead a society in providing strong support for schooling for her citizens and some of such supports are purely economic while others are driven by ideas of using education to improve political participation, social justice and more generally, developed society. This means that education is a human right and a key index of development. Education can also bring about empowerment, improves productivity, health, and reduces negative features concomitant with life. Nzulumike, Enemu, and Achugbu<sup>31</sup> put it thus: the goals of wealth creation, employment generation, value reorientation, and poverty reduction can be effectively pursued, attained, and sustained through an efficient, relevant and functional education system. For Fasokun<sup>32</sup>, no country has succeeded in eradicating poverty if it has not educated its people. Implicit in this submission is the very essence of education as an instrument. The education policy document of the Federal Republic of Nigeria<sup>33</sup> puts it thus: education is an instrument “par excellence” for effecting national development and the most important instrument of change. Hence, the national education goals are aimed at the inculcation of national consciousness and national unity; the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society; the training of the mind in the understanding of the world around; and the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live and contribute to the development of his society. Implicit in this is the role of education in weaning poverty and insecurity in the country. In other words, when people are not given the right kind of education, the society suffers the negative trickle-down effect. Hope<sup>34</sup> puts it thus: without the chance to learn, children will grow up in poverty (and by extension become a security threat) with no hope, no ambition and no future.

## Conclusion

The challenges we have in Nigeria today are no doubt the fallout of frustration of poverty, insecurity, corruption, unemployment, bad governance among others. These arrays of challenges are beyond one social malady. Distinguishing these threats and their multifaceted dimensions are essential for adapting customized solutions by all.

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