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Democracy and Endemic Poverty in Africa: A focus on Nigeria

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Abstract

Poverty is a global phenomenon which many governments in democracies and nondemocracies are battling hard to eliminate and repositioning their resources for the benefits of the teeming population from untimely death. As a parasite turned a killer disease, poverty has eliminated and still eliminating people across the breath and length of countries. But the cankerworm must be exterminated totally from this generation and to prevent future occurrence. Doing so will mean that an average person should live without hunger and would not suffer early deaths. Presence of healthcare system, living salaries and wages, access to shelters, drinkable water, motorable roads, qualified doctors, quality and affordable education, wealth, housing, among others are ingredients of poverty eradication and national development. The relied on qualitative approach and elite theory as the theoretical framework. The paper observes that despite the advent of democratic governance, the menace of poverty in Nigeria has rendered several people dead and some at the verge of dying. The government programmes on poverty alleviation hardly resolve the challenges. Similarly, corruption has contributed largely to the success of these programmes. The money voted for socio-economic and infrastructural construction and maintenance have ended up being unaccounted for and Nigerians suffered amid plenteous resources. Yet, the projects remained uncompleted. The paper concludes that political will and deliberate willingness on the part of the Federal, the State and the Local governments and the involvement of non-state actors with incentives to create job opportunities and employment for Nigerians is essentially necessary to move the country out of the state of uncertainties, wretchedness, hopelessness and without options that the citizens must make food 'time-table' before they eat in a day.

Keywords: Democracy; Poverty; Government; Development; Nigeria.

Introduction

The acceptance of democracy in some countries of the world particularly in African States has answered the questions of eligibility and legality as well as who is qualified and saddled with the responsibility to address the socio-economic and political challenges (Yagboyaju & Akinola, 2019). The elected heads of state and heads of governments including all the democratic institutions are expected to articulate and aggregate policies and programmes that will galvanize meaningful and positive effect on the lives and well-being of the people. Being an inclusive government, democracy is touted to usher in a government that is accountable and

transparent. There is a relationship between the elected government and the citizenry in a democracy. The relationship ensures that the government cannot afford to fail in its obligations by providing socio-economic infrastructures, goods and services. But when these demands are met, the anxiety of citizenry is allayed (Shively, 2008).

Across the African states, the demand for democratic governance along democratic expression, freedom, liberty, free association and the formation of political parties as the platforms of representative government constantly contributed to the crises of governance and dilution of democracy and democratic institutions. The institution of political party as only mechanism to attain democratic dividends have been



polluted as party politics turns into a do or die affairs (Ake, 2001). The elected, appointed and the king makers politicians have capitalized on the absence of political culture of the people to cause economic havoc, disillusionment and alienation. Godfathers' politics coupled with selection or anointment of candidates is substituted for internal party democracy and political mediocre to run the affairs of the national, state and local governments. For the citizens, democracy became illusion and the government of the few elites. The few elites in the corridors of power in African states including Nigeria have preferred politics to governance (Amuwo, 2015).

Amidst the wave of democratization in Africa, coup d'états have become order of the day. The military intervention is only or perhaps to current misgovernance, mismanagement of the economic and resources, revitalization of abandonment of infrastructural development, and national resources or commonwealth in the covers of the local bourgeoisie. Yet, the military rule, although regarded as an aberration and characterized with prescription of the constitutional order, civil liberty, freedom, and denunciation of all democratic institutions. The questions that come to the mind is that, do states in Africa prefer democratic government to other forms of government, that is, the military rule? Is democratic government along the constitution and constitutionalism including all the indices of liberal democracies suffice? In Nigeria, these and other questions are begging for systematic and methodological answers. The country has been fortunate that the military has not usurped the power of the civilian rule and swept them away from the seats of power since the country returned to democratic rule in 1999. The indices of failed state have dominated governance across the federation. The level of corruption is high, poverty and inflation has reduced purchasing power of Nigerian workers and informal sector of the economy. Insecurity and insurgency including killings, arson, kidnapping, money ritual are the reflections of unemployment, poverty and the 'japa' syndrome.

The paper is meant to interrogate the democratic governance as well as the endemic poverty even within the advent of democratic rule and abundance of man-power and natural resources available to the country. The rest of the paper is divided into concept of democracy, poverty; and the underpinning theory. Also included in the present study is the analysis of Nigeria and endemic poverty and conclusion.

Understanding Democracy

The origin of democracy is traced to ancient Greek city states particularly at Athens. The entire people in the city usually converge together to take decision on the issue that affect them collectively. Although, the people are small in number, but arriving at decision is simply simple. According to Gauba (2011, p. 472) the salient features of Athens polity included equal participation in the common affairs by all freemen; public decisions were arrived at under a free and fair atmosphere; and lastly, an established order and general respect for laws and procedures. These features accompanied the success of the Greek political system because the Greek

themselves took pride in the existing "customary law" as against the "arbitrary rule prevalent among the barbarians".

This system of government as an "ideal rule" became ubiquitous that several political systems even the dictatorial leaders coveted its utilitarian values. The trait of democracy generated and indeed led to interrogation of the term as a "most popular form of government" where citizens participate actively in political process (Johari, 2009, p. 329). Defining democracy, Seeley quoted in Mahajan (2013, p. 719) "a government in which everyone has a share". Mill (1960) expatiates the definition further. According to him, democracy is a system where "the whole people or some numerous portions of them, exercise the governing power through deputies periodically elected by themselves". Both definitions confirm an earlier version given by the former American President Abraham Lincoln that it is the government of the people, by the people and for the people. Democracy as a people government or what Johari (2009, p. 329) describes as "an ethical idea or a way of life" ensures that citizens in a democratic society not only "obey the laws and be enthusiastic citizens that they will also and at the same-time be critical citizens" (Shively, 2008, p. 186, 187).

As a critical citizen, democracy allow individuals to vent their opinion on the issues of national, state and local interest because the power of any government is largely vested on the members of the polity "this means in communities which act by voting that rule belongs to the majority, as no other method has been found for determining peaceably and legally what is to be declared the will of the community which is not unanimous" (Bryce quoted in Kapur, 2008, p. 375-376). Beyond the citizens participation in the election of who to govern them, democracy is not just a means to an end for a better society, but make elected government official responsive and accountable as well as to be controlled by the people under the constitutional provisions (Sartori, 1965; Lipset, 1959).

The uniqueness of democratic government particularly the liberal democracy is anchored on the government by consensus and consent, entrenchment of public accountability; majority rule as well as the minority rights; and constitution and constitutionalism. These principles emphasize what is expected in democratic states. The principles lay claim to other parameters as a kernel which democracy is built upon. These parameters are: more than one political party; competitive electoral system; availability of public or elective positions not skewed to class or certain groups of people. Others are periodic election; universal adult suffrage; independent electoral body; an arbiter that is, judicial system; one man, one vote; freedom of association, expression; free press; presence of non-governmental associations; obedience to electoral laws and regulations. Shively (2008) articulates any success of a democracy to tolerance of one another; existence of opposition parties; political parties and supporters; active participation of the people that is, party system and supports; citizens must have interests and be informed on what is trending on political issues, party candidates, and political parties; and the support both the

state, the regime; and display of high moral standards among the political parties and their leaders.

In developing democracies, despite the utility of democracy and its ubiquitousness, it has suffered a setback. This is largely so, because the use of money has perverted administration of legislative governance; politics turned to trade and for the highest bidder. Democracy is now for gain and not for service; extravagance or jamboree; party internal democracy turns into selection process with mediocre elected as government officials; abuse of principles and doctrines of equality; buying of votes of electorates (Gaubu, 2009). This however has not discouraged the scholars to appreciate and to say that “democracy does make a difference” (Shively, 2008, p. 150).

Today’s democracy has liberated citizens from the tyrant leaders, one party system, sit-light-rulers and affords the people liberty, freedom and essentialities of constitution and constitutionalism “is regarded not only a form of government, but as a way of life. That is why there is demand for democratization at all levels, including factory, office, school and family” (Gaubu, 2009, p. 491). How much more at the level of governance where the socio-economic and political matters and its delivery system to end consumers must be deliberated before articulation and aggregation.

Meaning of Poverty

“Poverty” has its origin in the Latin word, *pauper* (Westover, 2008). The term itself is relative which means a different thing to different people. In the words of Tazoacha (2001), it is an oldest and most dreaded and resisted virus disease that is prevalent in modern states particularly in developing countries whose rate of killings cannot be compared to any disease or an induced war internally or externally. The United Nations Human Development (1998) observes that poverty is a complex phenomenon including incapacitation and miserable condition. Defining poverty, the United Nations Organization (UNO) (1998) quoted in Ucha (2010, p. 46), means:

A denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. ...lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. ...not having enough to feed and clothe a family, not having a school or clinic to go to; not having the land on which to grow one’s food or a job to earn one’s living, not having access to credit. ... insecurity, powerlessness and exclusion of individuals, households and communities. ... implies living on marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation”.

The position of UNO (1998) is in tandem with Balogun (1999) description that poverty is a condition where a country or people therein barely survives on daily subsistence along with physiological factors including clothing, food, standard accommodation, and minimum standard of living. For instance, the World Bank record shows that about 9.2% or 719 billion people across the world are extremely poverty ridden, and live on \$2.15 per day (<https://www.google.com/search?g=poverty+rate+in+the+world&rlz=kiwnoo>). Englama and Bamidele (1997) capture the

state of poverty as a circumstance where an individual is not able to make available for himself or herself necessary requirements for daily living like food, shelter, clothing, accommodation and shelter. Such individuals are poor without employment, skills and economic resources for self-well-being. Fallavier (1998) observes that the structural segregation, denial of access to social-economic productive activities substantially limited the capacities of people for economic and financial independence to move from subsistence to commercial productivity, which reenforce the state of poverty. In other words, the society is largely responsible for restriction on social infrastructure as well as financial capacity which contributed to their impoverishment. According to Haushofer and Fenr (2014), the dysfunctional institutions and other obstacles including inconveniences expose the poor people to violence and crime and lack of access to good healthcare, quality education, drinkable water, sanitation and motorable roads.

From the interrogation above, we deduce that poverty is an underdevelopment state and condition whereby there is a wider gap between the elite and the masses, rural and urban inequality, unemployment among the people unabated, malnutrition that deeply exists, death rate increase but not limited to these alone, inflation runs rampant as a result of lack of essentiality of life and pleasures that other people within and outside their borders usually taken for granted. The poor lacked opportunity, empowerment and security to conform with their counterparts elsewhere and this limited their socio-economic rights in all aspect of life and are vulnerable to societal challenges such as diseases, social and political violence, crime, and other vices coming from within and outside their domains. The state of being poor, the World Bank Organization says “is hunger. ... lack of shelter. ... being sick and not being able to see a doctor. ... not having access to school and not knowing how to read. ...not having a job, is fear for the future, living one day at a time” (quoted in New Brunswick,

https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/esic/overview/content/what_is_poverty.html).

These indicators are readily available in all political systems. Haushofer and Fenr (2014, p. 862) observe that where there is “lack of financial means has far-reaching consequences”. Although, the continent of Africa including Nigeria once described as ‘a land flowing with milk and honey’ is housed to innumerable crises particularly poverty with an “average person dead 21 years earlier than in Europe, one-third of the population is illiterate and one in three children is stunted in growth”. The absence of minimal food on the tables of Africans affected their living standard because many of them are “living in squalor dying early, and raising children who face similar prospect”. Thus, poverty if not addressed will further entrench, perpetuate and affect one generation to another (Patterson, 2000; Haushofer & Fenr, 2014).

Poor governance in Africa and by African leaders even with “the richest natural resources and yet it is poor and stagnant in growth and development” (Addae-Korankye, 2014, p. 147). The socio-economic underdevelopment in rural areas is

hampered by unemployment, lack of commercial banks to give soft credit facilities, ATM; physical assets like land, capita and labour; problem of migration and absence of youths; infrastructural development in rural areas such as electricity, pipe bone water, recreation centers, technologies like as internet, tractors for farming, farm settlements, water irrigation, motorable roads, access to markets, commercial farmers, insecurity, government housing and settlement; educational system such as standard schools, libraries, among others. The little development in the urban centers is over-stretched to the extent that the city centers are being suffocated as a result of demands emanating from the people.

Poverty as a disease as we observed earlier, is not limited to one part of the world, but spread across political boundaries, is reinforced in political and economic crises by which citizens trooped to the major roads and capitals to demand for good governance including the creation of infrastructures for the elimination of challenges that are associated with ill-health, education, commensurate salaries and wages, healthcare, goods and services. They ask for housing, living wages and salaries, better work conditions, insurance inclusive social welfare, means of labour, capita, rent, credit facilities, etc. All these will eliminate what Lewis (1970) and Patterson (2000) describe as culture of poverty not only in African states but across the world.

Theoretical Framework – Elite Theory

Vilfredo Pareto (1935), Gaetano Mosca (1939), and Robert Michels (1962), Mills (1976) among others are known as elite theorists. These scholars argue that the elites are a small minority group of citizens that controls a large sum of socio-economic and political power in political systems. The process of governance cannot be separated from the interplay between the governing and non-governing elites as well as their roles in modern societies, because politics being the struggle for power functions within social groups “is the configuration of competing and struggling interests organized into groups” (Macridis, 1964, p. 139). However, for this paper, Pareto (1848-1923), an Italian sociologist in his *The Mind and Society* (1935) notes that concentration of power in the hands of a few is an inevitable fact of history and social life in any society, while power lies with the active few, the masses remain mere passive, manipulated pawns in a political system. The first class is the few or less numerous with quantum of resources, “elite can be identified with any trait or attribute that can be measured on a scale of superiority and inferiority” (Scott, 2016, p. 12). In other words, elites’ possession of power is simply because they are “more fitted” for governance role with special qualities such as abilities and talents which make them the ‘natural’ leaders and holders of power in the society, perform socio-economic and political functions: monopolizes power and enjoys the advantages accompanying their positions in power, whereas the masses lacked such qualities which make them less able and hence unfit to govern. Truly, in all political systems, elites are unrestricted social ability and consist of the most talented and deserving individuals. They are those most adept at using the two modes of political rule, force and persuasion, and who

usually enjoy important advantages such as inherited wealth and family connections (Higley, 2008).

Elite is a cohesive, conscious, conspiratorial, and monolithic entity. They are drawn from the same social formations and/or shares an identity of interest, while the masses are atomized, apathetic and politically irrelevant and incompetent. They are a concomitant of the complex formation of social organizations such as political parties. The control of the parties is held firmly by leaders because of the financial contributions, control of the press as well as the elected candidates. Nigerian leaders have taken the advantage of the poverty in the land to buy the mind of the masses. The elites provide tokenism for the masses in terms of rice, salts, money, bread, among others to the people to get their political mandate and support before and during elections. Despite promises made to the masses, the living standard of the majority of the people have continued to deteriorates.

Party politics along the liberal democracy and governance has been an elite conspiracy in Nigeria. The elites in the party system exhibited ethnicity and centrifugal forces, as against being the building block for party members and mending forces in the Nigerian state. Under them, governance is reinforced in a personal rule whereby individuals take precedence over majority rules. The officeholders are not committed to public rule and office because they change the rule of the office as well as authority in line with idiosyncratic interests. The rulers and their appointed leaders also take precedence over the formal rules of the political game and public rules fail to regulate political behavior, while the people, cannot predict or anticipate good conduct from the rulers. The Nigerian state became a government of men, and not of laws (Oyovbaire, 2007). The party elites hold sways and formidable team against the masses who are encumbered by socio-political and economic challenges. The elite inhibit any genuine efforts to advance ‘good’ governance in wealth creation, employment, energy, among others. The challenges in the Nigerian party system, Madunagu (2005, p. 1) asserts, “the dominant fraction of the Nigerian ruling classes does not use the wealth they loot... for the benefit of ‘their people’”. They were fragmented, fractionalized, factionalized and segmented along ethnic, regional and religious cleavages as situations and circumstances demand (Ebohon & Obakhedo, 2012). The position of these theorists is that all societies are divided into an undifferentiated elite and as well as atomic mass. The elite decides on behalf of the masses in Nigeria.

In every case, however, an organized minority – a political class, defining ‘political’ in a wide sense took the real decisions. A king’s decisions were always taken with the participation of his advisers, in an aristocracy, a smaller group of activists made the policies issued in the name of all the aristocrats and democracy, the sovereign electorate was manipulated by the politicians (Parry, 1971, p. 24).

Nigeria and Endemic Poverty

Adejumobi (2000) observes that 1980s witnessed a gradual but several political efforts to correct political despair and disillusionment that hitherto confronted African states because

there was a political demand by the people for participation through the mechanism of political pluralism and democratization. Several years of misgovernance characterized by bad governance as well as personalized political regimes and ruthless dictatorships put many African states politically demobilized and economically decapitated with poverty, illiteracy, and disease became the order of the day. The deficit of governance such as poverty, diseases, displacements, institutional inefficacies, civil strife, corruption, hunger, among others, accentuated a common demand for democracy and inclusive governance by the people.

The quest for democracy in continent of Africa not only centered freedom, constitution and constitutionalism, political representation but to improve the lives and living standard of the majority of people through the provision of basic infrastructural facilities and common good (Mamdani, 1987). The crisis of governance saw the economy declined, debt burden greater than total economic output and equals about 300% of Africa's export of goods and services, where about 50% in almost half of the countries live below the poverty line, while illiteracy rate is about 60%, infant mortality is 96 per 1000, and life expectancy at birth is 52 years (Conable, 1991). Davidson (1992) argues that the people are in miserable state and not different from what they experienced during the colonial rule because the harsh governments cum dictatorships rule over peoples who distrust them to a point of hatred and usually for good and sufficient reasons, and all too often, one dismal tyranny gives way to worse one. Despair rots civil society, the state becomes an enemy, bandits flourish. These conditions changed the trend of politics in Africa and the need to provide good governance led to socio-political reforms, which "took a variety of forms and were multidimensional in their thrust; also involved in the active, open, and spontaneous engagement of broad cross-sections of the populace on a scale and with an intensity not seen in many countries since the historic defeat of colonialism" (Olukoshi, 2007, p. 1). He observes further that the period witnessed several activities undertaken to realize the objective of broad social renewal and entailed the mobilization of public opinion in ways that made the polity increasingly ungovernable and, in so doing, compelled ruling elites to effect changes in the broad constitutional arrangements that governed political life. The attendant reforms that followed were based on liberal democracy, including the rule of law, electoral system, constitutional reform, and multiparty system, among others. These reforms took cognizance of all the segments of the polity. Political parties as a part of governance are seen as the key to other developments. What followed the wave of democratization (Huntington, 1991), was the quest for the inclusion of people-centered governance. The people-centered governance was followed by political liberalization and formations of political parties which became the order of the day in Africa as many African states democratized and opened political space for citizens to participate in evolving new order (Olukoshi, 2007). These reforms, Bratton and Walle (1997) observe, a good number of a single party or quasi-military governments embraced multiparty systems in

Africa as a means of governmental representatives through the platforms of political parties and party system to articulate and aggregate governance.

The African countries including Nigeria democratized in 1999 when the military government headed by General Abdulsalami Abubakar deliberately handed over power to the elected government, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in May 29, 1999. From then and now (1999-2026), the country has remained under a civil government with transfer of power from one government to another under the platforms of political parties. Before this period, Nigeria as a country was regarded globally as a pariah state with economic sanctions slammed on the military regime of General Sanni Abacha. *Ab initio*, the socio-economic and political situation was in comatose state with absence of constitution and constitutional order depriving the fundamental human rights of Nigerians. Under the military rule, Nigerians were not better-off. According to Momoh (2015), under the military rule, 70% of Nigerians lived in poverty; life expectancy was below 54 years, infant mortality and maternal mortality put at 77 per 1,000 and 704 per 100,000 respectively, 10% of Nigerians only had access to essential drugs, only 30 physicians attached to 100,000 citizens, 5 million adults affected by HIV/AIDS, 30% underweight, only 17% of children were fully immunized.

Shortly, after the handing over in 1999, the United Nations Human Development Index placed Nigeria 146th out of 174 countries surveyed. Few citizens had access to drinkable water (40% in rural areas, 80% in urban areas), 29% of Nigerians lived at risk of annual floods, 90% of the rural population relied on forests for livelihood and domestic energy sources, rural households spent an average of 1.5 hours a day collecting water and fuelwood, walking an average of one kilometer a day to collect water and fuelwood. The legacy of military governance was much more complex than imagined. The former Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa, Adebayo Adedeji observes that the state of economy is a scary inherence of poor governance, while Nigeria's political well-being will for some years be haunted by the state of its economic crisis and that unless immediate corrective measures are put in place including political will to arrest and reverse the trend from total collapse (cited in Obadina, 1999). Little wonder, Osumah and Ikelegbe (2009) see military government as a disaster because it is a government of weapon, punishment, harassment, impoverishment, oppression and intimidation.

Nigerian leaders have taken the advantage of the poverty in the land to buy the mind of the masses. The elites provided tokenism for the masses in terms of rice, salts, money, bread, among others to the people to get their mandate and support before and during elections. This scenario is largely based on the fact that there is massive poverty in the land, which makes the citizens to worship money and to lose their fundamental human rights and conscience. The ruling elites lacked character and integrity, honor, and pride but seek political power without consideration of what it will take and cause them; and the presence of few individuals with enormous

resources to buy and corrupt the system, including electoral system, security and judiciary as well as decide the electoral direction against the will of the people. The fact lay in Joseph's (1999, p. 55) "prebendal" politics in the country since the state power was treated as congeries of office, which can be competed for, appropriated, and then administered for the benefit of individual occupants and their support group. According to him, the purpose of public office becomes a secondary concern because "the procurement of office of a state has moved from the reward for loyal service to a lord to that of a promise of all the pecuniary office of a state". "Clientelism" or "patron-client ties," he said, is all about give and take as well as a channel through which one joins the dominant class, which is then seen as fundamental to the continued engagement of the prerequisites of that class.

However, the demand for accountability by the weaker segment of the society from the government representatives is largely caused by extreme poverty, disappointment with the political system, low levels of trust, and poor records, because they believe that political parties and elected and appointed representatives fail to see to their welfare and deprived them of quality education, habitable houses, healthcare services, the security of human lives and property, supply and stable energy, gender disparity, youth employment and empowerment. The people lacked essential infrastructural facilities and basic services which frustrated them to demand for accountability from their governments. The governments vis-à-vis the elected representatives lacked political will across the federation to work for the public good and well-being of all citizens. Instead, they exhibited selfish interest, personal gain, patronage networks, misused public resources, corruption, inefficient policy, and abuse of resources, and bereft "transparency, responsiveness and answerability" for their behavior and performance in the governance in Nigeria (Speijcken, 2012, p. 15).

The institutional weaknesses and insufficient legislation specifically the constitution, electoral law, and the practice of the federal system impeded democratic institutions such as the parliament and judiciary, which are supposed to provide formal oversight function and instill accountability across government agencies are themselves not only corrupt but these institutions harboring abating and aiding corrupt practices. Nigerian politics and dispositions of party elites can be situated in the thoughts of Graham Wallas who argues that "the study of politics is nothing without the study of man, for man's personality and behavioral patterns dominate the development of political actions" (quoted in Bamgbose, 1998, p. 8). Mosca (1939) and Pareto (1935) put the argument further that there is a prevalence of the governing elites in all societies. Party elites dominated party politics and governance processes. According to Bamgbose (1998, p. 8):

What we see glaringly is that in Nigeria, like in most of the African countries, the masses are those with least power. They have been rendered politically impotent but because of money and thuggery introduced into the nation's body polity, these poverty-stricken masses are often recruited by the political elite as thugs, most of the masses who regard themselves as

not belonging to the political elite group believe they have to sell their voting rights.

Despite promises made to the masses, in all the general elections held in the last 26 (1999-2026) years, the living standard of the majority of the people deteriorated. In Nigeria, exercising the socio-economic and political mandate, the political parties are supposed to comply with the Objectives of the State Policy vis-à-vis the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy as indicated in the 1999 Federal Constitution (as amended). The objectives and the manifestoes of the parties must also be in line with the Constitutional provisions. A chieftain and permanent member of the PDP, once says:

Governance, after the military rule, should be directed at lifting the people out of abject poverty and to make life more meaningful to Nigerians and create a middle class all over again and ensure that the act of governance is people-oriented. Major sectors – education, infrastructure, agriculture, and health services should be made easy and affordable, and available to common Nigerians (Interview with Chief Bode George, 2026)¹.

Specifically, the objectives /or programmes of the Nigerian political parties are in line with the Nigerian State's Objectives or programmes of the government of Nigeria covering political, economic, social, and cultural matters as expressed in Chapter II of the 1999 Federal Constitution (as amended). Section 14(1) Subsection 2(a-c); Section 15, Subsection 3(a-d), Subsection 4, and Section 16, Subsection 1(a-d), Subsection 2(a-d); Section 3(a-b); Section 17, Subsections 1 & 2(a-e); and Subsection 3(a-h). Similarly, Section 18, Subsections 1 and 2, Subsection 3(a-d), Section 19(a-e), Sections 20, 21(a-b) and Sections 22-23. Earlier, Section 13 under the same Chapter II recognizes that:

It shall be the duty and responsibility of all organs of government, and all authorities and persons, exercising legislative, executive or judicial powers, to conform to, observe and apply the provisions of this Chapter of this Constitution.

Under the PDP government which claimed for growth and development lacked social, indices, or developmental status. In other words, indices of the failed state continue unabated in Nigeria "the fact is that the president is not in charge. All the indices of a failed state are present in the country. Our economy is not doing well, the hospitals are still mere consulting clinics, security is a luxury, while oil theft is on the rise" (Daniel & Kumolu, 2013, p. 5). Surveying the PDP government, the Afrobarometer (2013) reported that about 85% of the citizens said the PDP government has not improved their living standards. In terms of job creation, the 84% surveyed indicated that job creation was "very bad" under the government of the PDP. Corroborating this assertion, a chieftain of APC, Chief M.A. Olagbayi observes the country under the PDP rule:

The PDP government as well as its party is coasting along, as someone rightly said 'Nigeria is on auto-drive. They live by

the day because there is no plan of action. They do not have a plan for you and they do not have plans for me. They do not have plans for education, no plans for roads, no plans for aviation, no plans for the financial sector. So basically, Nigeria just exists as a country without a target. If you ask the Chief of Staff or President of the State, a Governor what is your project for your country or state. Where do you hope to see Nigeria in the next two years or five years? They cannot give you specific answers. That shows that the government did not prepare for such (Interview with Chief M.A. Olagbayi, 2026)².

The citizens are detached from the state as well as from governments in the country. The Nigeria condition is low on the Human Development Index (HDI) ratings due to economic under-development, conflict, resource depletion, and the rise in Islamic fundamentalism, high levels of debt, endemic corruption, unemployment, political alienation, and exclusion with a large number of internally displaced persons, structural poverty and cyclical food insecurity, among others. These prevailing conditions have continued to “undermine public and state authority”. For instance, *the Guardian Newspaper* (October 13, 2006) decries that the state of Nigerian roads across the federation is a reflection of the level of governance in the country. Every sphere of national life is like the roads: pot-hole ridden, abandoned to the vagaries of nature, crying out loudly, for vision and difference. The roads are bad, the hospitals are ill-equipped, the school system is in disarray, access to health remains a problem, human life, in both the cities and the rural areas, is on the edge of despair.

In Nigeria, there is hardly economic diversification. The country is still a monocultural economy, relying on crude oil and no effort was made to widen the base of the economy over the past 26 years. There is no diversification of the economy, the economy still relies on crude oil to finance the fiscal budget. The national budgets have sometimes run into deficit crises. Honourable O.A. Bankole, one of the chieftains of APC compared Obasanjo and Jonathan administrations:

He (Obasanjo) paid all our debts at that time. But immediately this consumer that is, Jonathan administration came on board, they consumed everything; you can now imagine the enormous debts in the country (Interview with Honourable O.A. Bankole, 2026)³.

The performance of the PDP government in the country is not in tandem with the objectives that the party promised the Nigerian people at every election beginning from 1999 to 2015, because there are more unemployed people in Nigeria. For instance, many of those who were 40 years and above have not married, not because they do not want to marry, but because the resources are not there for them to marry. There is mass unemployment, abandonment of public utilities, and public utilities that have been sold to private individuals to the detriment of the people. A single individual was licensed to import sugar, cement, salt, fertilizer, among others, for about 180m Nigerians. The educational system has remained moribund as a result of regular strikes in our universities, and tertiary institutions. The tertiary institutions are in total decay.

Students learn under the trees. Nigerians students have gone to Ghana, Mozambique, Lesotho, South Africa, Europe, America, and Asian countries to get a better education because our school system has collapsed. Hunger has continued unabated. Poverty is on the increase daily because there are abandoned projects, loss of hope, and despondency everywhere in Nigeria. Health services are in disarray, energy has gone on sabbatical leave despite numerous resources expended on the sector. Insecurity has taken over the land. The government has failed since 1999 to secure the lives and property of Nigerians. The PDP had not done well while in power.

There is still a socio-economic and political gap between the rulers and the ruled. Inequality abounds. Poverty is well inscribed on the faces of millions of Nigerians, and many have become scavengers picking from dumpsites to survive. The platform of party system is the pool of scavengers because it is a platform for political offices, and many politicians only actualize their political dreams not to serve Nigerians. Nigerian youths have now taken to robbery, kidnapping, and other social vices because the government across the federation compromised in delivering dividends of democracy to them. The former Acting National Chairman of the party, Alhaji Abubakar Baraje described his party to have failed Nigerians “PDP has failed the people and I make bold to say that” (*The Guardian Newspaper*, December 30, 2013, p. 7). He further opines that the party, Peoples’ Democratic Party derailed because it has failed to fulfill the promises in its manifestos. “We told the people who voted us into power that we are going to give them economic freedom, we are going to give them employment, we are going to give electricity, we are going to give quality education, we are going to give food in abundance, you and I can answer to these whether we have been able to do these” (*The Guardian Newspaper*, December 7, 2015).

The economic growth has failed to reduce the poverty level which still remains 33.1% in the country. For instance, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation on Governance Survey rated Nigeria under the PDP government very low under 15 years rule with Nigeria rated 37 out of 52 countries in Africa. The Index of African Governance 2014 indicated that the country scored 46 percent in the overall governance index, 38 percent on safety and rule of law, while on participation and human rights, it scored 49 percent. The country scored 43.3 percent on sustainable economic opportunity, while she got 53 percent on human development. The report further indicated that Nigeria was scored 52 percent on category and sub-category ranks (<http://businessdayonline.com/2014/09/nigeria-ranks-37th-in-mo-ibrahim>). Rogers (2012) opines “despite the relatively high levels of economic growth in recent years, Nigeria has not evolved an improved sharing formula for the fruits of that growth”. The NBS (2012) reports show that 69% of Nigerians are poor based on the World Bank assessment of poverty headcount ratio at \$1.25 a day (World Bank, 2014). The northern Nigeria is worse hit by poverty “the South and North-Central regions showed progress in poverty reduction between 2010 and 2013, while the North-West witnessed little

change and the North-East experienced an increase in the poverty rate along with a general decline in living standards” (World Bank, 2014, p. 14).

While the PDP government controlled the federal government for 16 (1999 to 2015) years, however, the Buhari-led APC government of Nigeria (2015-2023), nothing significant has changed in terms of poverty and spiral inflation. For instance, the rise in inflation rate hit 14.89% in November 2020 as against the rate in 2018 that stood at 15.13%, while the overall food inflation between 2015 and 2020 was put at 110.5% (*Sunday Telegraph Newspaper*, January 24, 2021). The prices of food such as the foreign and local rice increased from N14,500.00 to N30,000.00; a 50kg bag of Ijebu Garri moved from N7,200.00 to N13,700.00; a 25-liter Vegetable Oil went up from N9,750.00 to N14,625.00; frozen fish from N417.00 to N625.00. Still on the economy, there are increases on the Passenger transport by air and road, hospital and medical services, pharmaceutical products, motor cars, vehicle spare parts, maintenance and repair of personal transport equipment, hairdressing salons and personal grooming establishments, miscellaneous services relating to the dwelling, paramedical services, and shoes and other footwear.

The level of unemployment in the country arose astronomically. Under the APC government led by President Muhammadu Buhari. NBS (2020) reports that Nigeria’s unemployment stood at 27.1% in 2020 as against 23.1% in 2018. The unemployment rate among young people within the age bracket (15-34 years) move from 29.7% to 34.9%. In states such as Imo, Akwa-Ibom, Rivers, and Zamfara recorded the highest unemployment rate of 48.7%, 45.2%, 43.7%, and 43.7% respectively, while Anambra had the lowest rate of 17% (cited in *The Punch Newspaper*, 2020). The level of poverty and unemployment rate is attributed to the rise of Boko Haram and other criminal elements in various parts of the country. Fajana (2000) and Standing (1983) categorize unemployed people as those who have never worked after graduation from school and those who have lost their jobs thereby seeking re-entry into the labor market. The country’s saturated labor market witnessed the new fresh university graduates that earns between N20,000.00 and N50,000.00, while the highest-paid graduates earn N150,000.00 monthly (Ogunfuwa, 2017). Statistically, underemployment, and youth unemployment, stood at 18.8%; 21.2%, and 52.65% respectively (Ladipo, 2018). The World Bank projected that poverty in Nigeria will increase as a result of the global pandemic otherwise known as the Covid-19. The World Bank economist, Marco Hernandez forecasts that about two million Nigerians are within the range of falling into poverty in 2020 because the population growth has outpaced economic growth and with the global pandemic that is, the Covid-19, the recession pushed an additional 6.6 million Nigerians into poverty in 2020, bringing the total newly poor to 8.6 million in 2020. This implies an increase in the total number of poor in Nigeria from about 90 million in 2020 to about 100 million in 2022 (cited in *the Punch Newspaper*, Friday, December 11, 2020).

The crisis in the economy coupled with inflation accentuated by recession show that extra 6.6 million Nigerians are at the precipice of deep poverty as the global bank forecasted (World Bank, 2020). According to Ogbuokiri “with nearly 90 million Nigerians living in extreme poverty the largest global population, the unending rise of food prices also means food is increasingly out of reach for the poorest Nigerians” (quoted in *Sunday Telegraph Newspaper*, January 24, 2021, p. 30). An American Applied Economist, Professor Steve Hanke observes that the poor performance of the Nigerian government since 1999 particularly that of Muhammadu Buhari is a result of the failure to protect lives and properties, increased unemployment, and inflation. He says:

President Muhammadu Buhari has failed. Nigeria is in the grip of chaos. Bandits control major highways. The government can’t protect its own citizens from Boko Haram or the corrupt Police. Unemployment stands at 27.1 percent, and inflation, which I accurately measure every day and that soars at 30.37 percent/year (quoted in *Sunday Telegraph Newspaper*, January 24, 2021, p. 30).

All programmes put in place under the government of PDP and APC hardly bailed out Nigerians from the shackles of poverty, despite humongous financial resources committed to these programmes. The Leadership Newspaper, and the Daily Post Newspaper reported that President Muhammadu Buhari in 7 years spent about N3.5 trillion on the social intervention and poverty alleviation (<https://leadership.ng/poverty-stings-despite-federal-govts-n3-5trn-social-interventions/>; <https://dailypost.ng/2022/08/16/buhari-govt-spent-n24bn-to-alleviate-poverty/>). In 2023 alone, the same government provided N250 billion for the eradication of poverty across the federation (<https://guardian.ng/news/poverty-alleviation-scheme-captured-2m-nigerians-last-year-okays-n250b-for-2023/>).

Geopolitically in Nigeria, records have shown that the Northwest, Northeast, Northcentral, Southwest, Southsouth and Southeast has 45.5m, 20.5m, 20.2m, 16.3, 19.7m and 10.9m respectively in poverty index (Premium Times, January 20, 2024). Furthermore, the World Bank (2026) reported that the poverty rate in Nigeria is 63% despite easing of “inflation and poverty has yet to begin declining” (Vanguardngr.com, 2026). The World Bank (2026) observes that the economic reforms by President Bola Tinubu put 79% of Nigerians very poor and poverty ridden (Punchng.com). Arguing that the Streamlined Country Diagnostic showed that the 33% of Nigerians is ultra-poor (food insecure by age-weighted, caloric intake), 61% below the poverty line, and 79% is near poor (below the poverty line that is, falling back into poverty (Punchng.com). Although, the report acknowledged present efforts at stabilizing economy through restoration of foreign investment by the present administration, yet the needed benefits have not translated into meaningful and appreciable improvements in living standards for majority of Nigerians.

As argued above that poverty is a cankerworm which has rendered Nigeria’s workforce graduates, informal workers, dropped out, school children among others susceptible to

social violence, underage crime, internet fraud, examination malpractices and stealing. The crisis of poverty continues to halt national growth and development as the people who supposed to think positively are denied the capacity and socio-economic well-being.

Conclusion

The study has revealed that poverty has led to malnutrition, deaths, hunger, homelessness, joblessness, less empowerment and absence of social welfare, employment and empowerment. The challenges of poverty are not only regarded as a menace but it is seen as a parasite with its headquarters in the country.

Corruption, lack of political will on part of the Nigerian leaders across the federation is touted to be responsible for the poor state of Nigerian people. The Nigerian governments both under the military regimes and civil administrations have not denied the existence of poverty among the teeming population. That is why, they have created programmes that will eradicate and eliminate poverty in its totality. This by and large, all the past and current government battle for eradication of poverty through the creation of ministries and agencies saddled to create job opportunities and empower the people nationally. For instance, the programmes such as the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), the 7-Point Agenda (7-P), Transformation Agenda (TA), Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P), TraderMoni (TM). Others like the Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT), Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP), the National Home Grown School Feeding Programme (NSIP), N-Power (N-P), the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP), Farming Programme (FP), the Unemployed Young Professionals Programme (UYPP), among other hidden and undisclosed programmes have failed to push an average Nigerian out of poverty.

But as they try, poverty continues to kill the people because an average Nigerian spends less than \$1.90 a day. Such individuals cannot fend for themselves, less more for others particularly their relatives. Poverty influences curable diseases to be a killing giant like malaria. Lack of incentive and financial resources affect young Nigerians into criminal activities in order to keep and stay alive. The Nigerian governments across the federation have socio-economic and political responsibilities to exterminate corruption, if such decision is followed with political will as well as willingness to do so. Democratic institutions should be strengthened and those who represent the larger people of Nigeria especially the peoples Parliament should initiate economic policies that will be geared towards solving the endemic poverty through transformation and diversification of economy and encouragement of small-scale enterprises with availability of energy and presence of security as well as empowerment of Nigerians for pragmatic solutions to many challenges confronting us as a country.

Foot Notes

1. Interview with Chief Bode George in 2026, Victoria Island, Lagos State.
2. Interview with Chief M.A. Olagbayi in 2026, Ikeja, Lagos State.
3. Interview with Honourable O.A. Bankole in 2026, Abeokuta, Ogun State

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