

## Poverty and Nation Building in Africa: The Nigerian Experience, 1960-2019

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**Abstract:** This paper explores poverty and nation building in Africa, focusing on the Nigerian experience from 1960 to 2019. It examines what poverty means, the signs of poverty in Africa, the reasons behind poverty in Nigeria, the effects of poverty on the nation's development and Nigerian efforts to fight poverty. A large number of Nigerians, more than 75% of our population lives on one dollar a day and many others do not have enough to drink, eat, get medical care, go to school or find work. Poverty is a serious problem that ruins lives and prevents people from making progress. The researcher used progressive social theory as the main theoretical framework, data from both primary and secondary sources and a thematic historical and analytical approach. The paper revealed that poverty has negatively affected the growth of Nigeria and Nigerian leaders are working to reduce poverty by identifying the causes of poverty in the country. The study recommends that political leaders should carry out projects and programs that would benefit Nigerians. Political leaders should endeavour to implement their campaign promises to ensure results oriented governance which will take large populations of Nigerians out of poverty.

**Keywords:** Nation-building, Poverty, Corruption, Nigeria, Development.



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### Introduction

Poverty is one of the challenges of nation building in most African countries. It involves many aspects and appears in the economic, social, and political aspects of human life. No country has succeeded in nation building with 75% of its population in abject poverty. Nwabughuogu (2004) opines that nation building in Africa is a very herculean task. He further stated that not only has it been a difficult task, but it has also been hard to achieve. Poverty is the biggest challenge facing the process of nation building in Africa. The greatest developmental challenge in Africa is the rise of poverty cases. For this reason, poverty related issues are given top priority in the development plans of most African countries. Most Nigerians have seen the quality of their lives decrease instead of improve since the country gained independence in 1960. Because of inflation and

higher prices of food and transportation, most salary earners cannot afford to support their families. It is surprising that despite Africa's great wealth; most of its countries are still very poor. The paper examined poverty and nation building in Africa, the Nigerian experience from 1960 to 2019. It is divided into three sections. The study starts by explaining the meaning of poverty and nation building in Africa and the theory used in the study. The second part covers the signs of poverty in Africa, the reasons for poverty in Nigeria, the effects of poverty on the country and the efforts made to fight poverty in Nigeria. The third part presents suggestions and a summary of the findings.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

To Nwankwo (2005) nation building is the result of deliberate efforts by the state, not just luck. Building a nation is a continuous process that requires constant attention and new ideas. Nation-building in Africa involves creating a common identity among people living in a certain area. Nation building refers to the way people from different backgrounds, histories, languages, cultures and religions unite within a single country with a common constitution, education system, economy and symbols to encourage the integration of all cultures and individuals.

The idea of nation-building is based on the concept of 'nation'. A classical view of nation is that it is an ethnic group where people share language, culture, religion, regardless of how close they live to each other. However, a nation in the modern sense is made up of people living in a particular area, sharing a feeling of unity and similar political goals, and history, despite being from different nationalities (Gaubu, 2003).

Scholars with different backgrounds have looked at poverty in various ways which has led to many definitions. In most cases, poverty is seen as not having enough to cover the basic needs for a decent life. Poor people are unable to read or write, with poor health and a short life span (World Bank, 1995). As Iguise (2002) described poverty as the loss of the basic resources needed for people to meet their basic needs such as food. To Obada (1997), poverty is a part of the larger problem of deprivation and its aspects include being socially inferior, isolated, physically weak, vulnerable, affected by seasonal changes, powerlessness and humiliation. Dike (1997) further explains that poverty occurs when individuals or groups cannot afford food, education, housing, health care and clothing. Nweze and Ojowu (2002) categorized poverty into three main types;

- (a). People in absolute or subsistence poverty who cannot afford basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, water, health care, education and transportation, so they are at risk of facing many hardships.
- (b). Relative Poverty; this happens when a person or family earns below the average income of the population in the country.
- (C). Subjective Poverty: It is shown through various non-material and intangible features. It is the inability to own or control land, animals, capital or other productive endeavors.

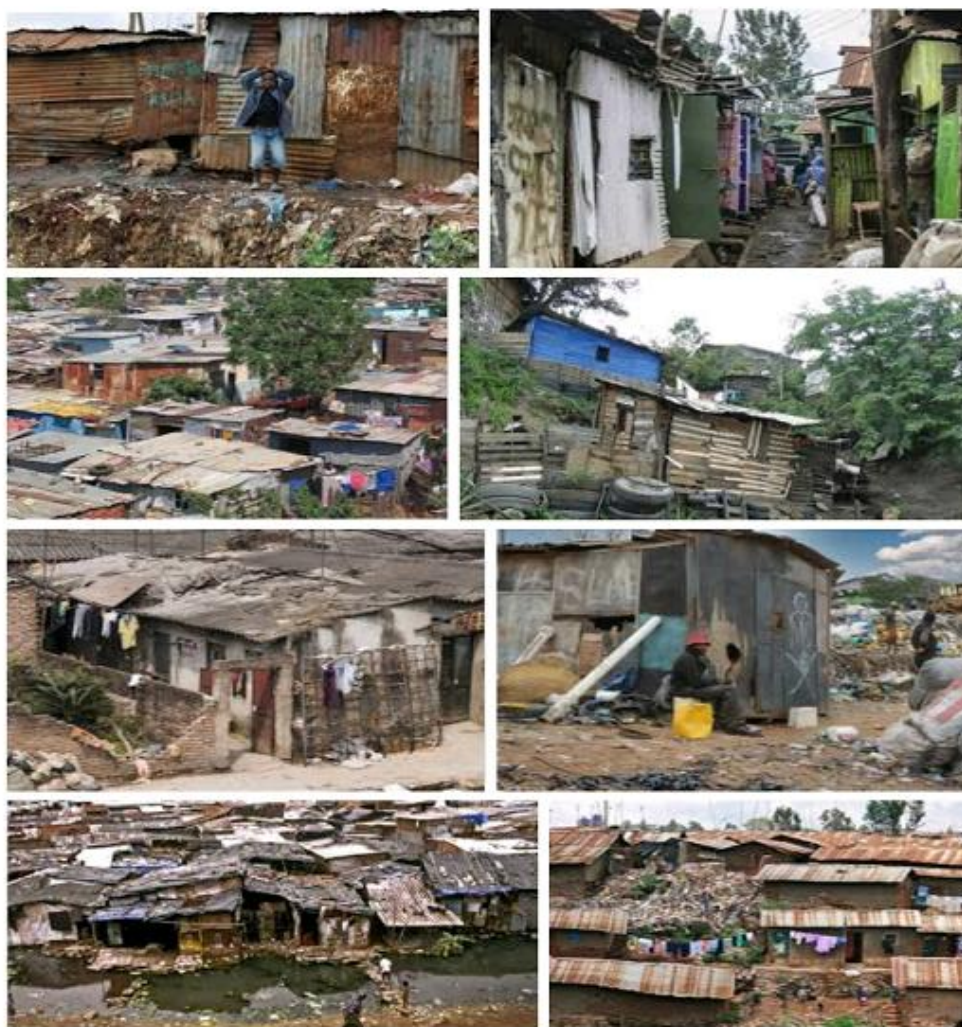
### **Theoretical Framework**

The paper adopted Progressive Social Theory which was developed in the 19th century. Progressive Social Theory was used because it explains that capitalism created a group of unemployed people on purpose to keep wages low. According to this social theory, some people may be hard working and have good attitudes, but still poor because of problems in the social and economic systems. According to Progressive Social Theory, poverty is caused by the way economic, social and political systems are set up, so poor people cannot meet up no matter how hard they tried. Another type of system flaw linked to poverty is when people are denied opportunities in building the nation because of their race, gender, disability or religion, even if they have the skills and abilities. The government's policies and actions in Nigeria increase the level of poverty. Even if the policies are created with good intentions, poor implementation can

make people poorer. In Omoyibo's (2013) view, the political economy of Nigeria is a major reason for the high level of poverty in the country. The way Nigeria is governed is strongly linked to the level of poverty in the country. Onyishi and Ezeibe (2014) corroborated with the view of Omoyibo, they explained that after Nigeria gained independence, the government's role in the economy became even more widespread. The rise of the oil-economy gave an additional boost, as the public's resources increased almost exponentially. Now, many believed that gaining private capital was best done through state power and positions. For this reason, many Nigerians preferred state positions, as they had learned that they were the most reliable way to wealth, status and influence in the country.

The way Nigeria's economy is set up has made poverty worse. The economy's main source of income is oil and other important sectors are not given enough attention. As a result, the economy has not grown well and factories are not fully used which has caused the country to become unstable and poor. The government's failure to provide enough social and economic infrastructures has resulted in a drop in living standards and contributed to poverty in Nigeria.

Fig: 1



Source: Field Trip

Date: 05/08/2022

### Indicators of African Poverty

Poverty is measured in different ways and there is no single standard or parameter for measuring poverty. It has been difficult and controversial to measure poverty, mainly due to the biases in the measurements. Experts have come up with various ways to measure poverty. The United Nations

Commission for Africa (UN-ECA) published the African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programme for Socio-Economic Recovery and Transformation in 1991 and it states that:

a. The world's highest number of poor countries are found in Africa. There are 42 Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in the world and Africa has 29, Asia and Pacific have 12 and Latin America has 1.

Since the 1980s, economic production per person in Africa has been going down consistently.

b. The amount of output per person dropped from \$752 in 1980 to \$613 in 1988. There are not many goods and services produced in Africa and the amount of these goods and services is decreasing. The standard of products is dropping.

c. African farming system relies on old tools and is almost completely dependent on rain. If there is no rain, there is drought and people suffer from famine. If there is too much rain, floods and famine happen.

d. The industry in Africa relies too much on imports for capital, skilled workers, technology and spare parts. There is a lack of entrepreneurial and management skills. In 1980, Africa's share of the world's manufacturing was only 0.9%.

e. There are many small countries in Africa with very few people living in them. Therefore, the market is divided into many segments.

f. African countries, who used to export food, are now struggling to provide enough food for their people, the number of harvesters per person dropped by about 10% during the 1980s. It is estimated that about a third of Africa's population depends on food imports.

g. Africa's external trade sector is not very strong. With a land area that is second only to Asia and a population of 12% of the world's total. Africa's share in world trade is only 3%, mainly due to the export of raw minerals and agricultural products which earn little money.

There are many other signs that show African poverty. For example, in 2002, the United Nations identified 49 countries as least developed, mainly because their GDP per capita was low, they had few skilled workers and their economies were not diverse. Out of these 49, 33 are in Sub-Saharan Africa. The remaining ones are found in Asia and the Pacific.

### **Causes of Poverty in Nigeria**

Nigeria's history is marked by many hardships, as the country has always been troubled by poverty, lack of education, diseases, inequality and various crimes. It has been found that the main reasons for Nigerian poverty are high export of raw materials, the structure of the economy, corruption in institutions, poor leadership, changes in weather and climate, civil war and insecurity, unemployment, social injustices, inequality and marginalization, inadequate infrastructure and lack of good health care facilities.

#### **A. Institutional Corruption in Nigeria**

Corruption comes from the Latin word "Corruptus," which means "Corrupted," and in law, it refers to using a trusted position in the executive, legislative or judicial branches or in political or other organizations to get benefits that are not allowed by law for oneself or others. When someone in a position of authority acts dishonestly or unethically, it is called corruption (Wikipedia, 2017). Examples of corruption are bribery, embezzlement and using public funds, goods or services for personal or local benefit. The World Bank (1997) describes corruption as using a public position for personal benefit. Institutional corruption is possible when both an institution and its authorities use their power and discretion at the same time. It often describes how officials in government offices can intentionally change the way things are done to control

corruption or may take part in corrupt activities to benefit themselves. Because of institutional corruption, Nigeria was ranked 161st out of 189 countries and territories (UNDP 2020), as it has weakened the state's ability to carry out its duties. Corruption has a negative impact on every society where it appears, especially on developing country like Nigeria. Corruption in Nigeria is so common that it has stopped the country from growing economically and has led to poverty, lack of education and poor health for many people. According to Onu (2022), development funds and resources are taken by some people for their own benefit which has negatively affected the growth of Nigeria. According to Ali (2022), corruption resulted in poor infrastructure, limited medical care, a drop in education, misuse of foreign loans, high spending on imports and public expenses which led to less production and more poverty, ignorance and diseases.

In the last 50 years, Nigeria has lost huge sum of money due to corruption which could have helped many Nigerians escape poverty. Uchenna (2022) deposited some of the biggest cases of corruption in the country; it was alleged that Sir Marshal Adesola Amosu (Rtd) diverted 21 Billion Naira, Babachir Lawal was brought before the court on a 10 count charge, he was accused of getting N544 million worth of grass-cutting contracts for a company connected to him.

In 2015, Colonel Sambo Dasuki (Rtd) was accused of misusing \$2.1 Billion meant for the purchase of arms. It was claimed that Diezani Alison-Madueke unlawfully took \$39.7 Million and N3.32 billion while she was minister from 2010 to 2015.

Fani-Kayode Femi was also accused of diverted money from theft and money laundering.

It was alleged that Peter Fayose took over N6.9bn away from the Ekiti state government.

Finitir Ahmadu was accused of laundering N2.9bn.

Haliru Bello and his son, Sagir were accused of receiving N300 Million from arms purchase funds that came from Dasuki, the former NSA.

It was alleged that Sule Lamide took N1.351 Billion Naira from government account.

It was alleged that Abdulrasheed Maina laundered N2 Billion Naira of pension funds by using fake names in different banks. Sen. Chimaraoke Nnamani was accused of 105 counts of money laundering and fraud, with a total value of N4.5bn, according to the EFCC.

## **B. Nigerian Economies High Dependence on Exports of Raw Materials**

While the rest of the world is focusing on adding value to their products, Nigeria and other African countries are still mainly exporting commodities worth \$4.38 trillion in one year (United Nations, 2021). As a result, these countries are easily affected by changes in the global market, especially since primary commodity prices have fallen in recent times, according to UNCTAD. Because crude oil, gas and cocoa are the main exports, the risk and vulnerability of these products have caused the Naira to drop 41.5 percent against the U.S dollar since 2016 and 16.9 percent from 2019 to 2020. Even though Nigerian leaders have promised to focus on industrialization and said "no country gets rich by exporting raw materials", their promises have not been realized.

## **C. Civil Wars, Conflicts and Insecurity**

Poverty in Nigeria is also caused by civil war, conflict and insecurity. The long-lasting violence in places like North East and North Central has stopped society from functioning, destroyed important buildings and forced most people to live in poverty. Nsirim (2022) stated that the Nigerian civil war had a negative effect on Nigeria and its people. The war causes millions of Nigerians, mainly Igbo people from Eastern Nigeria, to become poor, lacking and sick. Insecurity makes it hard for things to improve, since both foreign and local investors are reluctant to invest in Nigeria.

#### **D. Lack of Good Education and Unemployment**

UNESCO reports that if people only know how to read, over 170 million could escape extreme poverty. In several states in Nigeria, education is not accessible to many people. If you are not educated and do not have a job, you will not earn a good income. In several Nigerian states, jobs like farming are becoming rare because of insecurity and poverty. North East Nigeria is a good example, as most of its people live in rural areas that have lost their natural resources due to years of colonialism. More than half of the population in North East lives in poverty.

#### **E. The Structural Dependency of the Nigerian Economies**

Nigeria has the largest population in Africa, with 167 million people; she still depends on other countries for her domestic needs. Nigeria mainly exports goods it does not produce and imports goods it does produce. Nigeria is a major producer of crude oil, yet it does not refine its own petroleum and must import it. Nigeria is a major agricultural country, but it still imports the most rice, vegetable oil, tomato paste, toothpicks and even potatoes chips (Akpan, 2022).

Nwabughuogu (2004) explains that structural dependency is mainly characterized by the following features:

- a. The main focus on activities that allow people to survive, but not much more.
- b. A base for producing goods that is extremely small, has no connections with other sectors, uses old and unscientific methods and lacks modern technology.
- c. The presence of a big informal sector.
- d. Large areas of land are now empty and unsuitable for farming or raising animals.
- e. Because of the urban focus of public policies, rural areas are often left behind in terms of development, roads, water, electricity and communication.
- f. The African economy is divided into many small markets.
- g. The fact that these economies are very open and rely heavily on outside resources.
- h. Institutions are not strong enough.

Other issues are shortage of infrastructure, food, water and a bad public transport system. If there are no good roads, bridges and public transport, it can be very hard to find a good job. People rely on infrastructure to access the services and resources that help them improve their finances and lives and without it, things can't improve.

Fig: 2



Source: Google Image

Fig: 3



Source: Field Trip

Date: 08/08/2022

### Effects of Poverty on Nation-building in Nigeria

No country where poverty is as deep as in Nigeria has ever managed to build a nation. Poverty and nation-building do not go well together, regardless of how many people in the country are poor. When a large part of the population are poor and lacks basic needs, they are not able to take part in nation building as they should. Poverty has negatively affected the process of nation building in Nigeria in different ways:

1. Because of financial and technological poverty, Nigeria leaders have been persuaded to accept neo-colonial policies. Oyodele (2004) believes that the crisis in Africa is due to the way its independence political process has been taken over by teleguided politics and controlled economics. No nation has ever been built by “Leaders” who are also working for the benefit of foreign enemies. Because of the need for foreign aid or loans, Nigerian leaders have had to follow policies set by other countries which have led to poverty in Nigeria and made her dependent on neo-colonial authorities.

In 1986, Gen. Ibrahim Babangida, who was the then president of Nigeria, introduced Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) that caused great hardship for the people. To receive a loan from the International Monetary Fund and/or the World Bank; a country must follow the economic reforms set by the Structural Adjustment Program.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) reported in 1987 that Structural Adjustment made the situation of poor countries in Africa even worse. Because of Structural Adjustment Program, food became more expensive, workers were laid off and unemployment increased which led to unrest and made it harder to build the nation (Nwabughuogu, 2004).

2. Corruption, injustice, marginalization, nepotism, ethnicity, religious conflicts and insecurity are all caused by poverty which affects the process of building the nation. Since independence in 1960, corruption and poverty stopped Nigerian leaders from providing Nigerians with good roads, bridges, public transport and basic necessities like food and water. Without these basic things, it is not possible to escape poverty. Because past and present leaders have not met these basic needs, building a nation is a tough task.

3. The presence of insecurity, lawlessness, banditry, kidnapping, cultism and other problems in most Nigerian states is caused by poverty and makes it hard to build, integrate and mobilize the nation.

4. Because Nigeria depends on foreign aids, loans and financial institutions, it has become difficult for its leaders to make independent decisions in politics, foreign policy and the development of their own ideology.

5. Technological poverty has negatively influenced the process of bringing people together, building the nation and mobilizing in Nigeria. Even the smallest natural resources in Nigeria are processed with the help of machinery and skills from developed countries. Nwabughuogu (2004) stated that the prices of the machinery and the finished goods are set by the developed nations which African governments purchase. As a result, the extra resources that could help Africa are taken away to the developed countries. Therefore, the citizen is not encouraged to help the state and society, as they believe the society does not care enough about their well-being. When Nigerians feel marginalized, they may develop a careless attitude toward the state and sometimes destroy state services to show their anger.

6. Because of low income, people are not able to fully take part in and use the government's services and structures such as schools and health centers. Being unable to read and write is a major cause of poverty. At the same time, many Nigerians are unable to read or write which has a negative effect on the country's development. Health and food poverty have slowed down the process of nation building. Health poverty refers to a situation where someone's health issues stop them from fully participating in activities that can make their life better. Health poverty has negatively affected the process of nation building because people who are poor in health are sometimes excluded from participating in it. Food poverty can result in health poverty which can negatively affect the development of a nation.

Fig: 4



Source: Google Images

### Nigerian's Efforts at Combating the Scourge of Poverty

Poverty has been a problem for a long time and causes concern everywhere. Because of under development, ignorance, slow growth and illiteracy, poverty continues to affect society. Because poverty in Nigeria is such a big threat to humanity, both past and present governments in the

country have made it their common goal to reduce it. Various policies and programs have been introduced to help reduce poverty in Nigeria:

Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Free and Compulsory Education, Green Revolution , River Basin Development Authorities, National Agricultural Land Development Authority, Agricultural Development Programmes, Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme, Rural Electrification Scheme, Rural Banking Programme, Family Support Programme, Better Life for Rural Women, Family Economic Advancement Programme, National Directorate of Employment, Mass Transit Programme, Petroleum Trust Fund, National Poverty Eradication Programme, National Economic Employment and Development Strategies (NEEDS), N- Power Programme. With all these programs and policies, poverty reduction has still not been achieved in Nigeria. Many experts have pointed out that the poor results of poverty reduction in Nigeria are due to bad designs, inconsistent policies, lack of funds and corruption (Aigbokhan, 2008). Even though poverty reduction programmes in Nigeria are still affected by many of the old problems, it is necessary for Nigerian leaders to try their best to address the main causes of poverty to support any significant development.

### Recommendations

This study is a theoretical expression of poverty and nation-building in Nigeria, 1960-2019. A cursory look at the entire study reveals that Nigeria is endowed with natural and human resources that are capable of removing Nigerians from the pangs of poverty. Therefore, if virile nation building should be achieved, there is urgent need to reduce widespread poverty in Nigeria. In view of the above, the study recommends:

- a. Nigerian leaders should embark on projects and programs that have direct bearing on the lives of Nigerians.
- b. Political leaders that are corrupt should be punished severely, which would serve as a deterrent to others.
- c. Concerted efforts should be geared by leaders towards the provision of social intervention grants such as unemployment allowance, students allowance and aged people allowance etc.
- d. Nigerian leaders should effectively implement anti-corruption policies and achieve accountability.
- e. Leaders should build the Nigerian economy and polity towards meeting the basic needs of the people so that they are not driven by abject poverty.

### Conclusion

The study has shown that poverty and nation-building are two strange bed fellows. Findings from the research have proven that people who lack basic necessities of life are most unlikely to contribute much in the process of nation building. Since Nigeria gained independence in 1960, its leaders have worked towards building the nation so that all ethnic groups can be united under a common identity. Unfortunately, this has not been achieved which has led to ethnic and religious clashes and most recently, political division. It is truly sad and painful that Nigeria which has all it needs to lift its people out of poverty is instead facing the highest levels of poverty.

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Name	Age	Sex	Occupation	Place of Interview	Date of Interview
Onu Dominic	38	M	Lecturer	ApkajoEleme	5/08/2022
Anthony	39	M	Trader	Oyigbo	8/08/2022

Chukwu					
UchennaAmaka	45	F	Teacher	Obiakpor	10/08/2022
Emeka Amaka	50	F	Business Woman	Oyigbo	8/08/2022
Rose Akpan	56	F	Trader	Oyigbo	8/08/2022
Ali Mohammed	35	M	Security Man	Oyigbo	8/08/2022
Isa Abubakar	25	M	Security Man	Oyigbo	8/08/2022
Grace Babawale	56	F	Trader	Afam	10/08/2022
Nsirim John	26	M	Politician	Port Harcourt	10/08/2022
Mary Nwabueze	22	F	Student	Etche	12/08/2022

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