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The Eclipse of Poverty and Inequality in Multi-Ethnic Society of Nigeria: Diagnosis and Prescription

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Abstract

In most of developing countries of the world, particularly in Nigeria, there is damaging magnitude of an increasing materials and economic gap within and among people, which has grossly differentiates the might of the few rich from the aspirations of the poor masses. The gross inequality and widespread of poverty in Nigeria have become pervasive as a result of government's failure to: adequately maintain a reasonable gap between the rich and the poor and failure to ensure a fair regulation and distribution of economic and political resources among the citizens. The government's failure have constituted a major source of great insecurity and tension which has continued to threatens national development and putting undue pressure on peaceful coexistence of Nigerian people. This study argues that, unless there are concerted strategies to curtail the manifestations of gross inequality and widespread of poverty, the inevitability of national disloyalty, resentment toward government initiatives and policy programmes, civil unrest, surge of youth militia groups, vandalism, kidnapping, drug/human trafficking, electoral violence and incessant increase in the number of insurgency groups among others vices will continue to hurt government developmental agenda in Nigeria.

Keywords: Poverty, inequality, multi-ethnic society, development, Nigeria

Introduction

The pervasiveness of poverty and gross inequality among the general populace in Nigeria has become endemic. Many reports have revealed worrisome widespread of poverty situation in Nigeria. For instance, the percentage of the population living below the poverty line in Nigeria was at 70% in 2010 (CIA World Factbook, 2012). The foregoing poverty situation in Nigeria as painted by CIA World Factbook has constituted a catastrophic threat to economic and social stability of Nigeria as a state. The Nigeria former President, Goodluck Jonathan expressed his concern on the pervasiveness of poverty and directly linked the activities of terrorism in Nigeria as a contributory factors to both poverty and the nation's socio-economic development predicaments (WeeklyTrust, 2013).

Considering the peculiar nature of Nigerian political system, it could be argued otherwise that rather that terrorism contributing

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to poverty; it is the unprecedented level of poverty among other factors that is greatly contributing to the rise of terrorism, militia groups and other forms of youth's restrictiveness. Despite the relative victory recorded against Boko-Haram terrorist group by the current administration under President Muhammadu Buhari, poverty has remained a prime factor that is propelling Boko-Haram source of recruitment and a major problem resisting all governmental remedies in Nigeria.

In general, it is instructive to note that widespread of poverty and gross inequality has remained the bane of Africa as a continent: about 45% of the approximately 590 million people living in the sub-Saharan Africa live below the poverty line; by implication Nigeria host the larger percentage of the poor people in Africa being the most populous and despite its available human and natural resources.

In a recent development, the Vice President, Professor Yemi Osibajo noted that over 100 million of Nigerians live below poverty line (Vanguard, 2015). Although, it is true that Nigeria has made relative progress over the last 30 years and in terms of higher living standards than they did before independence in the 1960 as a result of the advancement of science and technology made possible through globalisation. However, corruption and economy mismanagement have continued to foster widespread of poverty and deprivation on a large scale which is very devastating and dehumanising particularly in the 21st Century.

The foregone explications explained the reason why the present President, Muhammadu Buhari argued that once his administration is able to fixed corruption, other sectors of the economy will fix themselves automatically. However, the current economic crisis coupled with the quest for primitive accumulation among the political elites and persistence disregard for democratic values among the political leaders has further deepened the poverty level and widens the gap between the few rich and poor majorities which in return impacted adversely on socio-economic development and other governmental policies in Nigeria.

For the purpose of meaningful analysis, this paper is divided into six different parts; introduction, the etymology of poverty and inequality in Nigeria, poverty and inequality: the implication fro socio-economic development in Nigeria, conclusion and recommendations.

Conceptual Clarification

Poverty

More than one billion people are living on less than a US a day

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and another two billion are just little better off. Although poverty pockets exist in the industrialised countries, most of the poor are in the developing countries (Malati Pochun) human poverty has many dimensions, and it is not just poverty of income or not having things necessary for material well-being. Human poverty means the deprivation that people suffer throughout their lives. They do not enjoy the choices and opportunities which are most basic to human development and which make it possible to live a long, healthy, well-nourished and self-fulfilling life, to be educated and to have a reasonable standard of living, be able to live in freedom, self-respect, dignity and to participate in community (Human Development Report (UNDP, 1997).

In the works of Townsend (1979) and Sen (1992), poverty and inequality of a population, is dependent on many dimensions of human life, such as housing, education, life expectancy, and income is just one of these dimensions. In this framework poverty is better defined as a situation that reflects failures in different dimensions of human well-being.

According to RTPI many of the things that add to people's quality of life and enhance their earning potential – such as jobs, better schools and public services, safe streets, green spaces, leisure and entertainment – are most accessible only in particular locations- which implies that poverty is highly determine by people geographical location. Put differently, people's health status, access to quality education, employment opportunities and the possibility to build wealth and improve well-being are substantially shaped by both people's socio-economic status and where they live (OECD, 2014).

Significantly, the mature of poverty in Nigerians is catastrophic and endemic among the vast majority of the populace. The Nigerian poverty situation presents a paradox due to its richness in terms of natural resources and human capacity endowment. According to the United Nations (2010) poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities, a violation of human dignity. Poverty also connotes lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society.

In another perspective, poverty can implies not having enough to feed and clothe oneself and family, not having access to quality education and health care, lack of access to land on which to grow one's needed food, unemployment, lack of access to credit facilities. Poverty could also connote vulnerability to insecurity and outbreak of communicable diseases, voiceless and exclusion from civil and political participation, susceptibility to violence, and it often implies living in marginal or fragile environments, without access to clean water or sanitation.

According to World Bank poverty is define as a conspicuous deprivation in wellbeing which includes low incomes and the inability to acquire the basic goods and services necessary for survival with dignity. Poverty also encompasses low levels of health and education, poor access to clean water and sanitation, inadequate physical security, lack of voice, and insufficient capacity and opportunity to better one's life. The World Bank's "Voices of the Poor," based on research with over 20,000 poor people in 23 countries, identifies a range of factors which poor people identify as part of poverty. These include: Precarious livelihoods, excluded locations, physical limitations, gender relationships, problems in social relationships, lack of security, abuse by those in power, disempowered institutions, limited capabilities and weak community organizations (Tettey, 2008).

Development

Development is a multifaceted concept which has political, economy and social dimensions. According to Todaro (1977) development is "a multi-dimensional process involving changes in structures, attitudes and institutions as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and the eradication of absolute poverty". To Hodder (2000) development is described as an economic, social or political process which results in a cumulative rise in the perceived standard of living for an increasing proportion of a population". This definition suggests that an increased standard of living involves a social and political process as well as an economic one.

To Hodder, the betterment in the standard of living must be both cumulative and in the long duration rather than just temporary. Essentially, development must be seen as an overall qualitative improvement in the lives of a people or a political community which is expected to address the issues of social welfare, equity and justice. In same vein, UNDP (1997) stressed that the central purpose of development is the creation of an enabling and empowering environment in which all the individuals, including the poor and the vulnerable can enjoy healthy and creative lives. However, with the presence of gross inequality and pervasive poverty in Nigeria, the achievability of quality and creative life become elusive among vast majority of the people.

National Development

National development, on the other hand, is not confined to macroeconomic forces of growth, but also focuses on the: improvement of the individual and collective human condition, increasing choices and participation, equality, standards of living and wellbeing, the environment and sustainability, and on another level, development as a human and ways of being (Edgar, 1972 in Dambazau, 2014).

Accordingly, development is not a stage to be attained or a goal to aim, rather it is a constant process of improvement in which education, research, service and political stability through free and fair elections play prominent roles in creating positive change in the self, the people, and the institutions and structures. Examining the concept from the perspective of human security, national development equals human development, the idea of expanding the choices of people and giving them a chance to lead full lives in an environment of peace, security and effective democratic governance.

However, several events since Nigeria attained her political independent in the 1960 have thwarted prospects for development and good governance. With the reversal of many of the policies that contributed to growth and poverty reduction between 1986 and 1992, Nigeria's fragile economy has again fallen to economic crisis in 2015 which has worsen the level of poverty and inequality.

The Impacts of Political Corruption on Poverty and Inequality

Some scholars and development theorists have observed that political corruption is inextricably tied (but not limited) to politics, more especially if politics primarily function as a mechanism to determine “who gets what, when and how” and perhaps how much of entitlement/benefits to be dispensed. In Nigeria, the scramble over resources otherwise known as the “national cake in Nigeria has permitted all forms of corruption. The idea that the national cake has to be shared rather than baked by the various ethnic groups that constituted Nigerian federation provides soft ground for the Kleptomaniac elites who are keen to achieve primitive accumulation and personal aggrandisement through corruption and other illicit financial crimes.

Most research on the interplay between corruption and leadership in Nigeria revealed that Nigeria leadership has tended not to conform to any known theories of effective leadership. Leadership behaviours often do not seem to be directed towards the achievement of the people’s welfare and national development. Accumulation of wealth, social status and excessive wielding of political power has predominantly dominated leadership orientation in Nigeria.

As rightly observed by Ukeje (1996) public treasuries are looted by political leaders with impunity as a result of leadership lack vision and mission for developmental and welfare initiatives. The foregone make it difficult for emergence of effective/efficient leadership and national development in Nigeria.

However, Garner (1976) argued that no society can function with fools, rascals or

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invalid-leaders in leadership positions. It is quite obvious that some Nigerian leaders lack integrity and knowledge required to perform leadership roles. The truism is that integrity without knowledge is insufficient vice versa knowledge without integrity. Thus for a leader to fulfil his/her part of social contract agreement with the people, such leader must combine knowledge with integrity in order to reduce injustice and corruption which are the major catalyst of poverty and inequality.

According to The Daily Nation (Thursday February 3, 2011), good public health services have virtually disappeared with the "out of stock" syndrome, malnutrition, infant and maternal mortality is on the increase, justice is for the highest bidder and educational system which is the foundation of development has been seriously undermined, police officers mount road blocks to extort money from motorists. The manifestation of decadence of leadership-corruption is limitless in Nigeria.

To illustrate the alarming level of political corruption in Nigeria, Transparency International (2011) rated Nigeria as the 147th corrupt country out of the 180 countries surveyed in 2007. Similarly in 2011, the world wide corruption perception ranked Nigeria the 143rd corrupt nation out of 182 in the World. This copiously showed that there are no meaningful efforts to reduce the scourge of corruption by political leaders in Nigeria. Over the past few decades, corruption has been a cause for concern because it diverts already limited funds, undermines economic progress, provision of infrastructural facilities and impeded on policy changes required for development (Lawal and Tobi, 2007).

Nigeria's development has been seriously undermined and retarded particularly under the military regimes. For instance, it was reported that the former military president Ibrahim Babangida during his regime enriched himself to the tone of \$5billion. This was further documented by Maduagwu (1993), Babangida's corrupt practices includes; \$200 million siphoned from the Aluminium and Smelter project; N400 million wasted on Better Life project and huge extra budgeting spending of N186.9 billion naira between 1989 and 1993. Babangida regime widely noted to be the grant patron of political corruption in the history of Nigeria.

General Abdusalam Abubakar administration made mockery of any sense of discipline and probity. The Christopher Kayode panel report revealed that the contracts awarded by the Abdulsalam administration cost Nigeria N635.62 billion

(Maduagwu, 1993). The panel also revealed that the depletion of the foreign reserve which as at the end of 1988, stood at $7.6 billion sank to $3.8 billion by May 1999. While the the Abacha's loot top the list at $20 billion.

In the same vein, corruption profile of the elected political leaders in the Fourth Republic were not impressive and to a greater extent worse than in the past decades in Nigeria. For instance, the Nigerian Senate has heard how South African telecom giant, MTN, allegedly laundered billions of dollars over a number of years, failing to pay necessary tax in the country. It was argued that MTN, has been involved in gross money laundering between 2006 and 2016, the MTN, in collaboration with four commercial banks and with the help of a serving Minister, has moved over $12billion out of Nigeria".

There are other corruption cases of corruption such as Andrew Yakubu, the former Group Managing Director of NNPC embezzled $9.8 million (PREMIUMTIMES Febrary 10, 2017); the $50 million discovered in Ikoyi Lagos building belonging to the former chairman of the People's Democratic Party, Adamu Muazu (Sahara Reporter, New York April 13, 2017); N195 billion pension fund misappropriated and laundered by Alhaji Maina; the kerosene subsidy scam through which approximately $20milion was siphoned and laundered to foreign banks on every vessel: in dollar terms every vessel of kerosene imported by Nigeria National Petroleum Cooperation (NNPC) with government money cost about $30million and it was sold at $10 or $11million generating rent of $20m per vessel to the syndicate; $6billion Fuel Subsidy Scam which involved several members of the ruling party (People Democratic Party) and their family members. Large portion of this money were also carted outside shore of Africa; Police Pension Fund Fraud of N38.2 billion; NNPC missing $20billion from the sales of crude oil linked to the former Minster of Petroleum Mrs. Allison Madueke; and Mohammed Abacha N446 billion case of unlawfully receiving about N446.3bn allegedly stolen from federal government coffers among other cases of corruption which have result into illicit financial flow from Nigeria.

By and large, the foregoing explication of endemic political corruption under both the military regimes and civilian administration inspired persistent of abject poverty and untold inequality in Nigeria. In all the cases cited, the money that meant for socio-economic development and general wellbeing of Nigeria people were diverted into private accounts and allocated for other personal benefits of the political leaders in Nigeria.

Government Strategies to reduce Poverty and inequality in Nigeria

The history of national planning to eradicate poverty in Nigeria can be traced to the colonial days. To be specific, it has its origin in 1946 when the colonial government introduced what it tagged "Ten Year Plan of Development and Welfare for Nigeria". This was under the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund. Under this historic Development Plan, a total planned expenditure of an equivalent of ₦110 million for a period of ten years was earmarked for the period starting from April 1, 1946 to March 31, 1956 (Ogunjimi, 1997).

Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has formulated and launched series of programmes to foster development and eradicate widespread of poverty. The First National Development Plan was launched in April 1962 and was to cover a period of six years (1962-68). Under this plan, a total investment expenditure of about ₦2.132 billion was proposed. Out of this, public-sector investment was expected to be about ₦1.352 billion, while the remaining investment expenditure of ₦780 million was to be undertaken by the private sector. The full implementation of this development plan was however interrupted by two major political events, namely, the military intervention in 1966 and the 1967-70 civil war (Oshionebo, 2003).

Consequently, the period of the plan was extended to March 31, 1970. These major interruptions notwithstanding, both the Federal Government and regional governments recorded a number of landmark achievements during the development plan period. During the crisis period, the Federal Government alone successfully executed projects like the Oil Refinery in Port Harcourt, the Paper Mill, the Sugar Mill and the Niger Dam (in Jebba and Bacita respectively), the Niger Bridge, and ports' extension, while federal government also constructed a number of trunks 'A' roads. Interestingly, it was during this period that the first-generation universities were established; University of Lagos, by the Federal Government, Ahamdu Bello University by the Northern Regional Government , University of Nigeria Nsukka by the Eastern Regional Government and the University of Ife (now known as the Obafemi Awolowo University) by the Western Regional Government (Oshionebo, 2003).

Also, General Yakubu Gowon launched the Second National Development Plan in 1970 in Nigeria. It was launched shortly after the end of the civil war. Gowon developmental plans were highly influenced by post-war developments and events. The national development plan in 1879 primarily focused on

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reconstruction, reconciliation and rehabilitation. The reconstruction efforts centred on re-engineered the battered economy as a result of civil war and the promotion of socio-economic development in the new Nigeria.

According to Olaniyi (1998) the philosophy of the 1970 national development plan was seriously influenced by the exigencies of the war, which include the building of a united, strong and self-reliant nation; a great and dynamic economy; a just egalitarian society; a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens; and a free and democratic society.

Like the First National Development Plan, the Second National Development Plan also recorded a number of major projects, which were successfully executed by both the federal and state governments. Such projects include the successful construction of many federal roads; the successful take-off of the National Youth Service Corps scheme; the introduction of federal scholarship and loan schemes for Nigerian students, among others. Prior to the outbreak of counter coup that led to the overthrown of Gowon regime in 1976, Gowon also initiated the Third National Development Plan on behalf of all governments in the country. The plan covered a five-year period from April 1975 to March 1980.

Ayinla (1998) describes this plan as a watershed in the evolution of economic planning in Nigeria. It was a unique development plan because, apart from its huge initial investment of about ₦30 billion (which was later revised to ₦43.3 billion: the cardinal objectives of this plan were also part of its uniqueness. The objectives include increase in per capital income during the plan period; more even distribution of income; reduction in the level of unemployment; diversification of the economy; balanced development; and indigenization of economic activities (Olaniyi, 1998).

In the Fourth Republic beginning from 1999, several efforts were also made to curb the spread of poverty in Nigeria. It is on record that the Government of President Olusegun Obasanjo introduced a number of programmes and measures aimed at making reducing the scourge of poverty. Among the early activities of the Government were the launching of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme, the Poverty Alleviation Programme and the constitution of the Ahmed Joda Panel in 1999 and the Ango Abdullahi Committee in 2000. The immediate concern of the Panel/Committee was the streamlining and rationalization the existing poverty alleviation institutions, and the coordinated implementation and monitoring of

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relevant schemes and programmes. These culminated in the introduction early in 2001 of the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) and the establishment of the National Poverty Eradication Council.

This was an interim measure introduced early in 2000 to address the problems of rising unemployment and crime wave, particularly among youths. It was ultimately aimed at increasing the welfare of Nigerians. Essentially, the primary objectives of PAP are as follows;

- Reduce the problem of unemployment and hence raise effective demand in the economy;
- Increase the productiveness of the economy; and
- Drastically reduce the embarrassing crime wave in the society. One could glean from government pronouncements that the targets/components of the PAP include the following, among others:
- Provide jobs for-200,000 unemployed;
- Create a credit delivery system from which farmers would have access to credit facilities;
- Increase the adult literacy rate from 51 percent to 70 percent by year 2003;
- Shoot up health-care delivery system from its present 40 percent to 70 percent by year 2003
- Increase the immunization of children from 40 percent to 100 percent;
- Raise rural water supply from the present 30 percent to 60 percent and same for rural electrification;
- Embark on training and settlement of at least 60 percent of tertiary institutions' graduates; and
- Development of simple processes and small-scale industries. To actualize the objectives of PAP, several measures were put forward in the 2000 Budget as well as other policy documents such as:
- Increase in the salary of public sector workers that has been decimated over the past two decades;
- Improving the supervisory capacity within the nation's institutions;
- Rationalization of organizations and methods within the system, particularly that of the existing 16 poverty alleviation institutions in Nigeria;
- Encouraging and rewarding all deserving

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Nigerians for industry and enterprise;

- Substantial reduction of avenues for easy and illegitimate acquisition of wealth; and
- The launching of Universal Basic Education Programme (FRN, 2001)

To actualize the programme, the Federal Government earmarked N10.0 billion, which was later raised to N17.0 billion by the Senate. No doubt, this pointed to the Government's commitment to the programme. However, in implementation, the programme appeared to be ad-hoc in orientation with little attention paid to the policy framework.

The Impacts of poverty and inequality on Socio-economic Development in Nigeria

Importantly, the dynamics nature of poverty among different countries and peoples made it difficult to directly measure its impacts using economic, social or political factors. This is important, because some poverty is psychological in nature, some are ideological/philosophical poverty, and some poverty is conditioned by hereditary/biological factors. However, it is evident that poverty impacted negatively on human living condition, human dignity, access to quality life, good health care service, employability, security, equality, justice, access to quality and quantity education, economic and business opportunities, development and general wellbeing of a nation.

According to World Development Volume (2005) the effects of poverty are more serious on children who grow up in poverty ridden environs: often times they suffer more health related problems than the children who grow up under better financial circumstances. For instance, many infants born into poverty condition have a low birth weight, which is associated with many preventable mental and physical disabilities. Not only are these poor infants more likely to be irritable or sickly, they are also more likely to die before their first birthday.

In the same vein, World Health Organization (2015) ranked Nigeria as 187 out of 191 countries in its ranking of the world's health systems. This connotes that Nigeria's health care system is only better than that of Central Africa Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Myanmar. By implication poor countries such as Togo, Niger, Mali, and Chad were ranked well than Nigeria with 152, 170, 163 and 178 respectively. This invariably implies that majority of Nigerian citizens who are predominantly poor would be automatically denied the access to

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quality and quantity health care services.

The lack of income and productive resources sufficient enough to ensure sustainable livelihoods, hunger and malnutrition, ill-health, limited or lack of access to education and other basic services increases morbidity and mortality. Homelessness, unsafe and degraded environment, social discrimination against women and minority tribes, and exclusion are also caused by poverty. Whereas, urban poverty has also posed some problems, such as overcrowding, congestion, contamination of water, bad sanitation, crimes and additional social problems. For instance, in 1991, only about 46 per cent of the total population in Nigeria had access to safe water while in 1991 only about 67 per cent had access to basic health care; and where available they were in low quality (World Bank, 1995). Levels of stress in the family have also been shown to correlate with economic circumstances (Ukpong, 1996).

Studies during economic recessions indicate that job loss and subsequent poverty are associated with violence in families, including child and elder abuse. Poor families experience much more stress than middle-class families. Besides financial uncertainty, these families are more vulnerable to series of negative unfavourable of life such as; illness, depression, discrimination, oppression, job loss, crimes, victimization, and untimely death.

Poverty also multiplies as many industries like textiles, auto, steel, petro-chemical among other that previously offered employment opportunities begin to shut down. Other industries have relocated to neighbouring countries as a result of epileptic power supply situation in Nigeria. The impacts of poverty caused by unemployment and job loss among youths have become a serious source of insecurity in Nigeria. The negative poverty inspired rise involvement of unemployed youths in many crimes activities such as; armed robbery, human/drug trafficking, kidnapping, cyber frauds, terrorism, youth militancy and the growing trends of cultism in Nigerian society.

Crime and Violence: A steady increase in crime and violence has degraded the quality of life to a varying extent in Nigeria. Although individuals of all socioeconomic groups are affected, however, the poor are predominantly vulnerable to poverty and inequality as social problems. As noted by Foster et al (1984) the instances of shootings, gang killings, kidnapping among other crime and violence have serious economic implication on the poor.

Political apathy: The persistence and pervasiveness of poverty in

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several countries has been linked to the lack of popular participation in governance and decision making process. Political apathy among the poor majority in Nigeria account for the lack accountability from the government, lack transparency, weak public institutions and pervasiveness of bad governance among other problems in Nigeria.

Migration and Brain drain: Migration as result of personal or national economy failure also leads to labour markets deficiencies in terms of improving productivity. Thus, migration of highly skilled workers results in brain drains. It also reduces the pace of economic growth and thus slows the process of overall job creation and affects the long-run development potential in a country (Oyeduntan, 2003).

The Interplay between Poverty and National Development

The United Nations (2005) recently ranked Nigeria as 13th poorest nation in the world with about 70% of the population living on one dollar per day. This was further buttressed by Kpakol (2005) that more than 20% of the world six billion people are poor in the absolute sense given the internationally accepted threshold of living below $1.00 a day.

By implication, foregone analysis implies that about 1.2 billion of world population cannot live below one dollar $1 a day. The untold level of poverty in the midst of plenty in Nigeria is unthinkable and it suggests the compelling need systematic eradication of poverty if the political existence of Nigeria is to be sustained. According to (Central Bank of Nigeria, Research Department (1999) there is the need for an agreed poverty reduction agenda that can be used by all stakeholders, that is, Federal Government, State Government, Local Governments, Civil Society Organisation, NGOs and the International Donor Community.

Conclusion

It is noteworthy to stress the inextricability nature of poverty and inequality and how has political corruption fostered their pervasiveness in Nigeria. The endemic poverty and inequality has impacted negatively on security in Nigeria which in return manifested incessant increase of crimes rates such as; armed robbery, human/drug trafficking, kidnapping, cyber frauds, terrorism, youth militancy and the growing trends of cultism in Nigerian society. All of the aforementioned pathologies constituted serious obstacles to Nigerian prospect for development and general wellbeing of its people.

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