

**Corruption, poverty & national insecurity: reflections on  
Nigeria**

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**Abstract**

In this paper, we discussed the concept of political corruption and poverty with the view to assessing their place in the study of national insecurity in Nigeria. A brief review of the literature and some methodological discussions are offered. The article then examines how corruption undermines economic growth and engenders poverty which inhibits the full and positive participation of individuals in the society's economic life. This culminates in lack of trusts for government, discontentment by youths and the citizens, civil unrests, violent agitations, terrorism, suicide bombing, kidnapping, militancy and Boko Haram insurgency which threaten national peace, security and stability. The weakness of the rule of law in Nigeria which rules or weighs less than our personal actions was stressed as a major cause of the failure of the often quoted philosophy of Nigeria which is to live in unity and harmony as one indivisible, indissoluble, democratic and sovereign nation founded on the principle of freedom, equality and justice. The paper then concludes with a discussion on the challenges of national insecurity.

**Keywords:** Corruption, poverty, insecurity, National, Reflections

**Introduction**

As at today on the continent of Africa, there are over 650 million people. The gross domestic product of Africa is equivalent to that of Belgium, a country with just 11 million people. That means that what all of us produce in Africa is equal to what is produced in Belgium- a land with no oil, no gold and no diamonds; only 11 million people. As at October 31, 2011 Nigeria population hit the 166 million mark ([www.vanguardngr.com/2011/10](http://www.vanguardngr.com/2011/10)). This figure implies that the country will be contributing about 2.4 per cent of the world's population and at the same time, about five million people are added to Nigeria's population on a yearly basis ([www.population.gov.ng/](http://www.population.gov.ng/)).

The study of basic economics teaches us that successive increases in government expenditure will lead to increase in the growth of output of goods and services, increase in demand as a result of increase in income and increase in the employment of factors of production (labour services). As employment increases, individuals and household incomes will increase and they will be able to purchase basic necessities; this way, there is an improvement in their living conditions and the boundaries of poverty are greatly diminished. But this is never so in Nigeria which has led many scholars to conclude that Nigeria is a place that defies all known economic theories. But contrary to the above view, the only explanation for this is that successive increases in government expenditures failed to yield the desired result either because the expenditures were directed at bogus non-self-liquidating projects or that they were misapplied or misappropriate due to corruption in government-political corruption.

Existing evidence shows that African countries exhibit relatively higher levels of corruption and poverty which constitute a major constraint to efforts aimed at achieving internationally and nationally envisioned goals. According to a Transparency International Report, corruption at Nigeria's presidency ranks among the highest in the world. The literature has advanced several explanations of the link between corruption and poverty and national insecurity. The paper focuses on lack of political reflections on economic science or policies as a major cause of corruption on one hand and a particular channel through which corruption undermines national security namely poverty on the other.

The paper posits that corruption arises mainly from a good economic policy such as we have always had but without serious political reflections and that this lack of political will to make policies work by causing the rule of law to weigh more than any political or private office, is a conceptually impoverished framework in which to govern a country. Moreover, corruption adversely affects economic and technical progress which lowers employment potentials and increases poverty because job opportunities are fewer than the number of people seeking for

them. This further stagnates economic performance because a larger proportion of available resources is consumed instead of invested to generate growth. We also argue that corruption discourages private investment by raising indirect production costs (corruption acts as a tax on investment), by increasing uncertainty over future returns to capital and that corruption also has negative effect on the efficiency of public

investment as corrupt officials give priority to projects that generate higher private material and political gain over projects with higher social returns (higher impact on the economy). In the next sections, relevant literature were reviewed to illustrate how corruption affects economic growth and development thereby worsening the conditions of poverty which in turn creates safe haven for terror and national insecurity. Finally, we concluded by providing policy options for curbing corruption and reducing the level of insecurity in the country.

In this paper, we are motivated by the evidence of huge government expenditure and higher corruption, lower growth and higher poverty in the country relative to other regions.

## **2.0 Literature review on models and theories relevant to corruption, growth and poverty**

Corruption is often understood as the political office for private gains, whether material or political. According to sociologists, corruption is a symptom of dysfunctionality of the relationship between the state and the people characterized by bribery, extortion and nepotism (Alatas: 1968 in Mina and Leonce: 2011). In philosophical, theological, or moral discussions, corruption is spiritual or moral impurity or deviation from an ideal (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia 2012. [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/corruption](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/corruption)).

Political corruption is the use of power by government officials for illegitimate private gain. It is the misuse of government power for other purposes such as repression of political opponents and general police brutality if the act is directly related to their official duties or done under colour of law. From every perspective, corruption or corrupt practices have to do with fraudulent activity especially to siphon funds that belong to the state or others

([www.onlinenigeria.com/articles/ad.asp](http://www.onlinenigeria.com/articles/ad.asp)). Forms of corruption vary, but include bribery, extortion, nepotism, patronage, graft and embezzlement. Corruption may facilitate criminal enterprise such as drug trafficking, money laundering and human trafficking, though is not restricted to these

activities alone. The activities that constitute corruption differ depending on the country or jurisdiction. For instance, some political funding practices that are legal in one place may be illegal in another place. In some cases, government officials have broad ill-defined powers, which make it difficult to distinguish between legal and illegal actions. Worldwide, bribery alone is estimated to involve over 1 trillion US dollars annually. A state of unstrained political corruption is known as a kleptocracy, literally meaning "rule by thieves" and that is what Nigeria represents. As a result of corruption, the

public at large loses confidence in the government's ability to manage the economy in the interest of the people. Given that corruption not only brings benefits to those in control of power, but also allows the latter to manipulate state institutions to their advantages; the result is that corruption has a tendency to be self-perpetuating. Thus, once a system is corrupt, it is likely to remain corrupt and become even more corrupt unless drastic reforms are undertaken to minimize or entirely stop the phenomenon. The literature has identified several vehicles of corruption which should not be understood as causes of corruption. These include concentration of power, discretion in public spending, the structure of the tax system, low relative wages in the public sector, embezzlement of external borrowing and aid, and lack of transparency in international contracts in natural resource extraction.

As pointed out by (Akilaiya: 2005), the level of poverty in developing countries and the need for cooperation in international development have greatly influenced the desire of developing countries to acquire foreign aids which, in most cases, is for scientific and technological advancements. Despite the pious intentions to see the poor nations develop, the foreign aid programmes are undertaken with little emphasis on humanitarian purposes. The foreign assistance is still given for selfish reasons; they are designed to maximize political profits. Only corruption could account for the diversion of foreign aid programmes intended to address the issues of poverty. Corruption is by and large a by-product of government interventions. It is often made possible by the discretions that the policy makers enjoy in determining the type, size, composition and geographical location of projects and service delivery. The level of discretion is generally higher for capital expenditures than recurrent expenditures (Mauro: 1998 in Mina and Leonce: 2011). For instance, while governments can manipulate, misinvoice, and embezzle funding for road construction projects (capital expenditures), it is more difficult to embezzle civil servants' salaries (recurrent expenditures), except in the case of pensioners' funds as was reported of Police pensions funds found in an individual's bank account (AIT News, Thursday April 5, 2012). Discretion increases possibilities of embezzlement causing leakages in the transmission of resources from the central decision point to the ultimate users of public services. The forgoing analysis; has important implications for the linkages between corruption, poverty and national security. It suggests that corruption will be associated with higher public expenditure on infrastructure as decision makers seek to

maximize their takings by giving preference to large new investment projects.

This suggests that high public investment is not necessarily a desirable outcome in an environment characterized by corruption as it will result in wasteful allocation of public resources.

There is wide support in the literature for the view that corruptions is closely linked to poverty and by extension to national insecurity and all these are bad for growth and development. Empirical evidence shows that countries with higher levels of corruption tend to grow more slowly. This finding is particularly relevant for African countries for two reasons. First, African governments have worse governance outcomes than in other developing regions. Second, sub-Saharan Africa also performs poorly in terms of growth relative to other regions. These two facts suggest the possibility that governance in general and corruption in particular may be one of the reasons for the poor economic performance in the continent. In addition to reducing growth and development, corruption is also found to have substantial distributional effects as it affects the poor disproportionately. This is because corruption slows down the growth of the income of the poor, reduces pro-poor public expenditure, causes congestion in social services, and induces capital intensity in production, which reduces the employment of labour, the impact of investment and growth required for poverty reduction (Ndikumana:2007 in Mina and Leone: 2011). One important empirical question that remains unsettled is how exactly corruption and poverty reduce national growth, development and national security. In other words, what are the channels through which corruption and poverty undermine development and security? There are a number of channels shown by literature to be empirically prominent in linking corruption and poverty to Insecurity. These include investment (public and private), tax revenue, human capital accumulation, labour productivity, and political instability. In this paper, we focus on the investment, unemployment and poverty channels of the linkages between corruption and national insecurity.

From all indications, corruption discourages investment- both domestic and foreign direct investment because of the various forms of takings (bribes, kickbacks, etc) and transactions cost due to corruption. Corruption raises the cost of doing business in a country, increases uncertainty over the returns on capital which internally reduce profitability. Corruption act as a tax on capital; but unlike official tax, it is uncertain and unpredictable. Given that corruption tends to perpetuate itself,

the option of delaying investment is not viable. Hence, the only choice for the potential investor is to engage in activities with shorter maturity such as trade and speculative ventures or buying and selling. The effects of corruption on investment are quantitatively large. (Mina and Leonce: 2011), citing the works of (Pelligrini and Gerlagh: 2004), observed that a one standard deviation decrease in the corruption index raises private investment by as much as 2.5 percentage points. This in turn leads to GDP growth by about 0.34 percentage points. Corruption also reduces growth which increases poverty by adversely affecting both the quantity and quality of public investment. Corruption erodes efficiency in decisions regarding public investment, especially by inducing preference for large projects with potential for large private gains for the policy makers. Indeed, available data supports this prediction of a positive correlation between public expenditure and corruption on one hand and corruption and poverty on another. The preference for new projects is motivated by the pursuit of higher takings. Governments finance recurrent expenditures not by current revenue but by borrowing as much as it does for capital expenditure. This rent-seeking generate a positive correlation between corruption and the quality of public investment to be associated with lower growth and higher level of poverty. This is an empirical question that deserves further investigation.

### **3.0 Corruption, poverty and insecurity correlates**

We live in a country where few rich top government functionaries spend as much as the entire income of all the people of a state subsidizing the unnecessary production of unwanted foods, bogus non-self liquidating projects (white elephant projects), fruitless security and frivolous trips overseas- to the tune of billions of Naira, while hunger is a key factor in more deaths than the entire continent's infectious diseases put together. In Africa and in Nigeria in particular, there are pockets of top government functionaries who spend a sizeable portion of district council's budget feeding dogs, snakes and other forms of reptiles as well as engaging in frivolous overseas trips when hundreds of thousands of children are dying of hunger and diseases within their neighbourhood; and in some areas of the Niger Delta, the people drink polluted waters with snake eggs floating on top of the waters (Onyekeni: 2007). There is poverty everywhere across the globe and it knows no national boundaries; therefore poverty can and does exist in cities like New York, Tokyo, etc, the magnitude, however/ may vary from city to city and in terms of the percentage of the total population.

Poverty falls unevenly in all respects and is not limited to centres of big cities (Wonnacot and Wonnacot: 1983, 785). Poverty breeds poverty because poor parental economic background in most cases perpetuates poor economic performance. Persistent poverty and oppression have led to hopelessness and despair in the land, and when governments fail to meet the most basic needs of their people, these failed states become havens for terror in many states around the world, and poverty prevents governments from effectively controlling their borders, policing their territory/ and enforcing their laws as in Nigeria. (NEPAD: 2005, 19). What happens to the poorest citizen in the poorest country can indirectly affect the richest citizen in the richest country. The above is consistent with the views expressed by (Akilaiya: 2012). According to him, when the poor is unable to sleep as a result of hunger engendered by corruption and poverty, the rich will not be able to close their eyes. This means no injustice such as poverty will last forever. What happens to poor people in a country can indirectly affect the richest people in that country also. More grimly, the events in New York and Washington on September 11, 2001 have caused many in the rich world to reflect on the relationship between global poverty and homeland security. Today, the fortunes of the rich people in the richest countries are irrevocably tied to the fate of the poorest people in the poorest countries of the world, even though they are strangers and will never meet (NEPAD: 2005, 19). If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, as the U.S. president John F. Kennedy once said, it cannot save the few who are rich. (Samuelson: 1984, 76) quoting (Marx and Engels: 1848), Communist Manifesto containing the lines: "Workers of the world unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains", perhaps, was one of the earliest authoritative accounts on poverty. According to Marx, the modern labourer, instead of rising with the progress of industry, sinks deeper and deeper below the condition of his own class. He becomes a pauper and pauperism develops more rapidly than population and wealth. Thus, poverty could be seen as a "chain", bondage, a situation of hopelessness and despair which simply means insecurity.

Several research efforts have focused on the relationship between macroeconomic variables and poverty but only a few paid attentions to the influence of corrupt tendencies of African governments on poverty. However, several of these research works showed a very strong correlation coefficient between corruption and poverty. According to (Kolodko: 1999), corruption and poverty can become a political issue that provokes tensions, conflicts, unemployment and national

insecurity and creates economic obstacles to durable growth and development. Presently, the rich people build and own all the beautiful and luxurious apartments in their villages but cannot sleep in those apartments whenever they visit their hometowns, some preferring to visit their flats in the mornings, take their baths and retire to nearby hotels in the night to avert the unsolicited visits or "courtesy calls" by the 'small boys' at home, (Agokei: 2006, 11).

#### **4.0 Corruption and poverty, is "good socio-economic policy" good enough?**

That "good socio-economic science" might prove to be an antidote to lack of economic growth and development, unemployment poverty and insecurity has been a hope of progressive social observers throughout the modern age. For instance, no one will dispute the fact that since the inception of our modern state, efforts by various governments have been geared towards achieving a robust economic growth by putting in place well-focused programmes to reduce poverty through empowering the people by increasing their access to factors of production such as land, labour, capital and entrepreneurial capacity. These commitments or efforts to alleviate poverty in Nigeria were reflected in programmes such as rural banking scheme, sectoral allocation of credits, a concessionary interest rate in respect of financing and development of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), the rural agricultural credit guarantee scheme (ACGS). Other institutional schemes were the establishment of the Nigerian Agricultural and Co-operative Bank (NACB), the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), the Nigerian Agricultural Insurance Corporation (NAIC), the Peoples Bank of Nigeria (PBN), Community Banks (CBs), Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), Mass Mobilisation for Social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER), Directorate of Foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), Better Life programme for rural women (BLP), Family Support Programme (FSP). In 2000, the government merged the NACB, PBN and

Limited (NACRDB) to enhance the provision of finance to the agricultural sector, the sector believed to be housing majority of the country's poor. It also created the National Poverty eradication programme (NAPEP) with the mandate of providing financial services to alleviating poverty and also the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS), Nigeria's home-grown poverty alleviation model, which is anchored on the private sector and SMEs as the sector's growth driver. Government through the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), before now, also directed all



banks to set aside 10 per cent of their profit before tax for the finance and development of Small and Micro Enterprises (SMEs). Could any of these policies be said to be bad or just an act of charity? It is our opinion that nothing is wrong with our policy formulation but everything is wrong with our implementation. Our economic analysis appears not thorough enough, in our own opinion, on a simple ground.

### **5.0 Corruption and poverty: does the rule of law factor weigh less than we think in our policies?**

There is a saying in legal parlance that "the king cannot be greater than the law that created him" for he himself is a product of the law. All this supports our ground that economic and social policies without serious political reflections are a conceptually impoverished framework in which to govern a country. Policy making involves more than simply providing technical, economic or political solutions to the problems of governance. It involves taking symbolic actions that express a people's values and beliefs. What symbolic actions has any government in Nigeria taken outside the short-lived Buhari-Idiagbon regime (1984) that could be said to have expressed our values and beliefs? What are the beliefs and values of Nigeria in terms of its National Policy? We value money above everything yet the poor preponderate amongst us. Can our democracy be made free? Can the rule of law weigh more than the unconstitutional actions of a democratically elected president? Can a senator involved in bribery and other forms of social scandals be removed from office? Can a president of a Nigerian Stock Exchange be fired for ethical violations? Can a judge be removed from office and blacklisted for taking bribe to give judgment? What is the place of the rule of law in our national policies and actions?

According to a BUSINESSDAY report of February 9, 2009, Nigeria's National Assembly is reputed not for its competence for legislation for good governance but as the "world's biggest democracy cost centre" where an average Senator takes not less than N200m as salary per annum, each one of them taking as much as N23m monthly; this is not inclusive of the senate president and speaker of the house of representatives having the privilege of eight and seven vehicles respectively including ambulance, pilot and protocols. This, according to the report amounts to a cumulative N57.02 billion for all 108 senators per annum. This is besides what they get from their various state governments which is in the form of constituency development monies which the state governments realized were not being spent on any project. These startling revelations which threw up hues and cries in the polity

came amidst confirmed reports that a good number of the legislators have constantly been living abroad and never attended any plenary or legislative session all year round, a congressional or legislative development in a nation asymptomatic of only hunters. This may have informed the call made by the Professor of Political Economics, Pat Utomi, that the services of legislatures be hired only on part-time basis to plug the holes. The legislations passed to fight corruption since the inception of democracy in 1999, have been very weak with obvious and intentional loop-holes. These range from the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission Act, the Code of Conduct Act, the Independent and Corrupt Practices Act etc. These legislations have obvious loop holes that enable criminals to wriggle out or entangle lawyers in court. The legislators being corrupt reasoned that if they pass legislation on corruption that is tight, that they may end up being the victims of the same law they passed. So efforts were made to ensure that debilitating lacunas exist in these legislations that will give criminals escape route. Nigeria has weak institutions to fight corruption, and that is why the country has not made any remarkable progress developmentally.

Social and economic policy-making and implementation is about doing justice. According to (Nwalado: 2012), prayers do not develop nations; they develop based on right mental attitudes and values. The development of nations of the world is expressed in their respect for their national constitutions. As (Akilaiya: 2012) observed, no nation can develop beyond the level of its education and value system. Our value system is awkward and this has brought poverty and misery to all of us including insecurity of lives and properties. Our policies, our economic science is beautiful on paper. Yet what may be called the expressive content of public action- the message to the political community conveyed by the letter of a law, the behaviour of a bureaucracy, or the public utterances of a political leader- has no place in conventional economic models. Nothing is said about factors that could make all our policies to fail. There is no measurement and honest evaluation of the implementation of our policies. How great we are on paper! Conventional economic analysis has little to say about this kind of thing. Perhaps they stated a bit of it but those charged with responsibility of implementation turned the other way because of corrupt tendencies. Where the rule of law and justice are unfettered, there would be chances that the society will make progress. Nigeria is a clear paradox of the principles of rule of law. Too many laws that are set out to run

the state conflict and become unwieldy for implementation. Justice is at cross road with those who are highly placed evading the law and the weak and poor, caught up by the law. Regime disdain for rule of law and respect for court pronouncements are rife in the Nigerian state and democratic practices and thrown overboard in preference for abuse and travesty.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

Theoretically, an increase in GDP, *ceteris paribus*, is expected to lead to a decline in the level of poverty. But this is not the case in Nigeria as there has not been any evidence of a decline in the level of poverty despite increases in Government expenditure over the years. What this means is that gross domestic product in Nigeria in the years under reference are either misplaced or misappropriated by the privileged few such that needed poverty alleviation programs are either avoided or inefficiently execute. Even government programs aimed at mobilizing the poor ended up benefiting only the rich. This has led to a growing massive poor, discontentment, negative restlessness or restiveness which has threatened national peace and security. Corruption affects economic growth (income growth and purchasing power of the people); it brings about widening inequality which has wiped out the middle class. In Nigeria today, if you are not rich, then you must be poor. Political corruption is not a recent phenomenon in the Nigerian state. Since the creation of modern public administration in the country, there have been cases of official misuse of resources for personal enrichment. But the level of corruption since the return to civilian rule in 1999, has given it a state sanction. All levels of the public institutions are involved in one way or the other in corrupt practices, and this has negatively affected the growth and development of Nigeria as a state. To obviate the burden of corruption and poverty in the Nigerian state, the following suggestions are put forward: First, as a way out, government at all levels particularly at the centre, should demonstrate a political will or rare courage, like the Obasanjo administration did for once, in improving the salaries of classroom teachers, to bring corrupt officers to book including those accused Police Pensions fraudsters who got bail and their families who attacked AIT crew for coverage (AFT News, 8.00pm, Thursday, April 5, 2012). In doing this, government must be transparent and objective. Second, the state needs activist leaders who will be close to the people they govern. Governments at all levels should be more responsive to the needs of the poor, reduce corruption and enhance transparency, efficiency, equity and

justice. Third, there should be an accurate data bank of all citizens in the country equivalent to the Italian communes where every citizen is known within his/her commune and an indigenous capacity to carry out corruption and poverty monitoring built rather than relying on World Bank and international statistics. Fourth, economic policies should be thorough enough with honest measurements and controls built in at every stage of implementation. What gets measured gets done. This cannot happen without government taking an action that expresses a people's values and beliefs. Fifth, government being the biggest spender in the economy and controller of the instruments of state should be able to take control of state resources and dictate a positive course of national action that will instill in the lives of every citizen a deep sense of commitment to the country including all groups that are marginalized or discontented. The resource, presently, is oil; the government needs to be transparent in managing the wealth it accrues from it thereby replicating the Venezuelan example. Lastly, government must put in place strategies to deal with the worst poverty in the land (mental poverty which appears stronger than physical poverty), where opportunities and choices most basic to human development are denied. The government needs to deal with the issue of corruption and injustice in judiciary, fight incompetency that often leads to corruption in the hallowed chambers of justice. Acts of terror, when they occur in developed countries of the world, are blamed on the people but whenever they occur in Nigeria or some developing countries, they are blamed on the government. The reason finds expression on the steps seen to have been taken by the various governments to curb crime which includes corruption. When this issue of corruption is handled decisively, the economy will be set for growth. When the economy grows, unemployment which is a major cause of social disquiet and a harbinger of crimes, kidnapping, terrorism, perennial youth unrest and the acutely unstable socio-economic structure that has bedevilled Nigeria, will naturally go down and poverty will reduce drastically. If these issues are addressed, the chances are that the spate of corruption and insecurity will drastically reduce and the economy will grow.

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