Economic Poverty and Democratic Participation in Nigeria; A Study of the Niger Delta (2012-2022).

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Abstract

The thrust of this research is on economic poverty and democratic participation in Nigeria; a study of the Niger Delta (2012-2022). The study argues that in spite of Nigeria's rich human and abundant mineral resources (particularly oil), a disproportionately highly number of its population lives in abject poverty with over 50% of the wealth concentrated in less than 10% of the total population. Utilizing content analysis spiced with empirical facts and with the aid of Marxist tool of analysis, Thus, the widespread prevalence of poverty in Nigeria has placed major constraints on the country's capacity to consolidate its emerging democracy leading to plethora of challenges. These challenges include: crisis of legitimacy and the rise of militant sub-nationalist agitations, ethno-religious and identity conflicts, corruption and institutional failures, crime and electoral violence, insecurity, injustice and political apathy with far reaching implications for the survival of the democratic system. The study concludes by aligning its findings with one of the long standing assumption that democracy do not strive in a poverty infested environment and thus attributes the major challenges facing the present democratic experiment in Nigeria to the existence of poverty on a large scale.

Introduction

Africa like the rest of the world witnessed the "third wave of democratization" when authoritarian regime and one party governments were replaced or supplanted by elected civilian governments or administrations. Nigeria described by Ette (2013:p49) as one of the strongholds of dictatorship in the continent was caught in the snowballing effect of the wave after twenty-nine years of military dictatorship. After several years of failed attempt by the past military regimes of Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida and Sani Abacha, democracy formally gained root in the country on 29 May, 1999.

Nigerians were full of hopes and expectations that the hard earned democracy will usher in improvements in standards of living, good governance, improvement in security and what Mohammed (2013) described as freeing of natural resources from the iron fist and jaw of greedy officials to that of enterprising and efficient social services delivery in health, education, sports and prevention of modern day slavery such as human trafficking as well as rehabilitation of infrastructural facilities, poverty alleviation and reduction in unemployment, inequality and general socio-economic development. Disturbingly, twenty years after the inception of the present democratic dispensation, the political landscape is yet to show clear evidence of good governance. Elections and electoral processes are subverted; there have been wide scale of political violence and killing in many parts of the country; upsurge in ethnic militia groups who make life unbearable for the citizenry; general insecurity and high profile terrorism in the northern part of the country as well as kidnapping and bunkering of the petroleum pipelines in the southern part of the country. In spite of the great endowments in both human and natural resources, particularly, the huge oil wealth and revenues, Nigeria still remain a poor country with per capita income average of $350 as at 2003 (USAID, 2007).

In the words of Nwaobi, "Nigeria presents a paradox" (Oshewolo, 2010:p264) owing to the fact that since independence, majority of its population has remained poor in the midst of abundance. The UNDP has classified the country as 141 poorest nations on human development index. In its report, Nigeria is considered one of the 20th poorest countries in the world with 70% of the population classified as poor and 54.4% living in absolute poverty (Ugoh and Ukpere, 2009:p849).

Similarly, about 70.2 percent of the Nigerian population lives on less than $1 a day, while 90.8 percent lives on less than $2 a day (Oshewolo, 2010:p267). The state of poverty in Nigeria is often compounded by the widening inequality between the rich and the poor as "up to 95 percent of this great wealth is controlled by about 0.1 percent of the population" (Oshewolo, 2010:p265). This situation has been clearly highlighted by Oshewolo (2010:p267) that the total income earned by the richest 20 percent of the population is 55.7 percent, while the total income earned by the poorest 20 percent is 4.4 percent. Amis and Rakodi rightly observed that the major impediment to democracy in Africa is poverty. Masses are easily cornered, brainwashed and their right of choices manipulated to a point that some of them are susceptible to bribery and can be used as political thugs to cause confusion, harassment or intimidate an opponent during elections (Maiangwa, 2009:p349). Poverty thus decreases both participation in democratic life and popular support for democracy (Mattes, 2003:p35).

Since the return to multi-party democracy in 1999, the political space has been the exclusive preserve of the elite as majority of the population have been excluded from the political process. While there seems to be a general consensus that mass poverty could cast a shadow on democratic consolidation, "precisely why poverty undermines democracy, however, has been much less clear" (Mattes, 2003:p1). Thus, the main focus of this paper is to interrogate the subject of poverty, and the challenges of democratic consolidation in Nigeria. Achieving a consolidated democracy requires good governance by democratic regimes. It also demands upholding democratic values of popular participation, respect for the rule of law, free and fair elections and the independence of the judiciary. Good governance essentially promotes improved welfare of the people, transparency and accountability by public managers in the conduct of state affairs and reduces corruption to the barest minimum. These correlates of democracy are some of the daunting challenges. What led to the faltering of the initial expectations that accompanied democratization process in the late 1990s? Why has it been difficult to consolidate on the gains of the democratization effort that ousted the military from the body politics of Nigeria in 1999? These are some of the questions that this essay attempts to answer.

Statement of the Problem

After twenty years of unbroken democratic rule, Nigerians have not enjoyed the dividends of democracy in terms of economic prosperity, political freedom and social liberties. During the swearing-in of a democratically elected government in May 1999, Nigerians had very high expectations that democracy would offer food for the hungry, job opportunities for the unemployed, economic prosperity, higher standard of living, and transparency in government and justice for the oppressed. But alas, after so many years, the country is still largely characterized by widespread "poverty, corruption, infrastructural decay, social menace, vast unemployment, and violation of basic human rights" like what obtained during the military era (Ighagbon, 2010: p98).

Nwaobi (2011:p23) and Ighagbon (2010:p98) agree that Nigerian democracy is paradoxical. Nwaobi (2011:23) writes, "the country is rich but the people are poor". Despite this enormous wealth, the majority of the citizenry languish in abject poverty while a minority controls the country's massive wealth. Nwaobi (2011:p23) also shows that the economy has not improved for the past four decades as per capita income is still at the same level as it was in 1999.

This has resulted in the loss of faith in the country's democracy. Quoting an Afrobarometer.org survey published by New York Times, (Ighagbon, 2010) shows that the level of confidence in Nigerian democracy has reduced from 84 percent in 2000 to 25 percent in 2005. Nigerians now wonder how longer it will take to deliver the expected dividends of democracy to them. The result is the loss of faith in the electoral process. Some youths no longer participate in elections as they feel their votes would not count, all this and many more poses a serious threat to our democracy, no doubt, if these problems persist our democracy will be a thing of the past, it's in the light of the stated problems that made the researcher to embark on this study.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated by the researcher to aid the completion of the study

i) Does poverty have any effect on democratic participation in the Niger Delta region from 2012-2022?

ii) What are the roles of government in poverty alleviation in the Niger Delta?

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Concept of Democracy

Some scholars have argued that democracy has no definite definition as the practice of democracy depends on the culture of the particular society. This open-ended nature of democracy, according to Tinubu (2009:p1) has made some societies more democratic than others.

Traditionally, however, democracy as derived from the ancient Greek words, *demos* and *cratos* which mean people's power. However, this Grecian idea of people's power in the long run translates to the dictatorship of the disparate rabble and is no more feasible in large modern societies. Due to the open-endedness of democracy, some scholars have argued that it constitutes a continuum as its practice varies from one society to another. Usurpers have been known to adopt the appellation of democracy to justify their usurpation. That is why the purest ideals of democracy are not realizable by any human society. Quoting De Jouvenel, Tinubu (2009:p90) concluded that discussions about democracy are indefinite. However, today, democracy is widely interpreted to mean government by elected representatives of the people or as Rodee, (2018:p78) puts it, "governments in which citizens participate in policy making through elected representatives". For the purpose of this study, we would define democracy as a system of government where every adult has equal chances of voting and being voted for.

In other words, democracy is a system of government where every adult has equal chances of voting or being voted into an office without being influenced, intimidated or dissuaded by the pecuniary power of his opponents. In other words, the citizens share political power by the exercise of the freedom to choose who leads them. The ballot is the key to effective democracy. Democracy is therefore a system of government where the leaders are voted into office by and are responsive and responsible to the people; where free, fair and periodic elections are held; where there is press freedom and freedom of expression as well as freedom of association; where there is respect for the rule of law and accountability and transparency in governance; and where there is clear

separation of the functions of the three arms of government. Put simply, where there is no collusion between the executive, legislature and/or the judiciary.

Concept of Poverty

Microsoft Encarta Dictionary defines poverty as a "state of being poor: the state of not having enough money to take care of basic needs such as food, clothing, and housing; a deficiency or lack of something" (Microsoft, 2009). On its part, Grolier Encyclopedia (2000:54) defines poverty " as lack of sufficient resources necessary to maintain a minimally adequate standard of living". Poverty, accord2ing to (Britannica, 2015) therefore exists in any environment when people lack the means to satisfy their basic needs.

Katsina (2009:p20) identified these basic needs to "include food, shelter, access to health care and sanitary facilities, affordable education and gainful employment opportunities for all people without prejudice". Without mincing words, Katsina clearly stated that "it is none debatable to posit that the highest percentage of Nigerians have access to neither of these". Although the identification of what constitutes basic needs to people may significantly vary depending mainly on the level of economic development of the society concerned, he believes that "it is not likely that in economies like Nigeria, this identification is altogether difficult. On his part, Nwaobi (2011:p43) believes that the indicators of poverty include "…lack of income and access to attain basic necessities (food, shelter, clothing and acceptable levels of health and education); sense of voicelessness and powerlessness in the institutions of state and society; and vulnerability to adverse shocks linked to an inability to cope with them".

Microsoft Encarta Dictionary (2009) defines crisis as "a situation or period in which things are very uncertain, difficult, or painful, especially a time when action must be taken to avoid complete disaster or breakdown". Crisis therefore signifies a condition of abnormality. Something that is not ideal or does not possess the desired characteristics or quality – something on the verge of breaking down except proper precautions are taken. As it relates to democracy under this context, it pictures Nigerian democratic experiment as not meeting up with internationally recognized qualities of a democracy which according to Tinubu (2009:p2) include

freedom of speech, freedom of association, supremacy of the will of the people, regular elections, accountability and transparency.

Causes of Poverty in Nigeria

One major cause of poverty in Nigeria is corruption. Achebe (1984:p18) categorically stated more than thirty years ago that "corruption in Nigeria has passed the alarming and entered the fatal stage" He does not however believe that Nigerians are inherently corrupt. To him, "Nigerians are corrupt because the system in which they live makes corruption easy and profitable" (Achebe, 1984) The ghost worker syndrome and the associated problem of over bloated wage bill in the public service, the yawning gap between the salaries of junior and senior public servants, overvalued contracts and abandoned projects, hijacking of projects oriented towards basic needs satisfaction, etc, are some of the indices of corruption in Nigeria. Nwaobi (2009) shows that government programmes aimed at improving basic services and infrastructure and poverty alleviation programs like Better Life for Rural Women, Family Support programme and National Poverty Alleviation Programme (NAPEP) has been hijacked by politicians and senior public servants to benefit their families and cronies instead of the poor at whom these programmes were originally targeted. For instance, the Taxi Scheme that was initially conceived by the Akwa Ibom State Government to benefit poor taxi drivers and ex-cyclists was hijacked by top civil servants who collected the taxis for their spouses and aids for private use while depriving the targeted population of the use of the vehicles. All these prove that corruption is spurned in high places. This paper therefore agrees with Achebe (1984) that the average Nigerian has not the power and position to perpetrate corruption. The locus of corruption is at the apex of government and society. In other words, corruption is perpetrated by the leadership of the country. This brings to fore the role of the leadership of the country in perpetuating the poverty of the masses in particular and the entire country in general. To Achebe (1984), "the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership". He, (Achebe, 1984) lamented the squandering of the abundant wealth that providence has bestowed on the country by successive bands of brigands that have occupied the state house since independence. He believes that "Nigeria has been less than fortunate in its (bequest of) leadership" [emphasis added]. He also believes that "Nigerians are

what they are only because their leaders are not what they should be" (Achebe, 2014).

The worsening economic and financial condition of the Nigerian electorate is a direct result of leadership failure. Nigerian leaders do not only directly impoverish the masses of the citizens by expropriating the rewards for their labours but also implement policies that keep the poor perpetually subservient to their whims and caprices. Political maladministration, subversion of due process, dictatorial tendencies in government, refusal to tackle causes of mounting economic crisis, withholding of and arbitrary deductions from fiscal allocations to component units of the federation and the resultant non-payment of the salaries of government workers and implementation of unpopular policies like the removal of fuel subsidy by past and present administration are some of the ways the leadership of Nigeria impoverishes the electorate.

In Ighagbon's view (Ighagbon, 2010), "the government's actions seem to indicate that citizens should lower their expectations about the dividends of democracy".Associated with corruption and leadership failure is tribalism. Tribalism and nepotism are two twin brothers bred and nourished by the leadership and used as an instrument of impoverishment of some sections of the country. Tribalism has not only hampered the principle of equality of opportunity which democracy rests upon, but as Achebe (1984) has observed, it has instituted "the cult of mediocrity" the county's body politics. Unqualified people are voted in offices; unqualified people are given jobs and unqualified people are given contracts and other benefits by the government while those who are competent and qualified are denied any opportunity for self-fulfillment because of tribalism. Settlement politics which is totally contrary to the democratic ideal of equality of opportunities results in the creation of a multiplicity of political positions to feed or satisfy tribal representation is one interpretation of tribalism in Nigeria. This makes Nigerian democracy very expensive and impossible to deliver the dividends of democracy to its citizens. This results in anger against the system. This is the explanation for the lack of patriotism and the complicity of the Nigerian electorate in electoral malpractices during elections. Achebe (2014) argues that Nigerians are unpatriotic, not because they are inherently wicked but because state

has reneged on its responsibility in the social contract which is the foundation upon which patriotism is founded.

Theoretical Frame work

To examine the impact of poverty on democratic consolidation, it is pertinent to contextualize the study from the framework of certain theoretical formulations. This study is anchored on the Marxian theory of capitalism. Accordingly, Marxist explanation of capitalism as the main source of poverty and its effects on the political system/superstructure is relevant. Capitalism for Marx has two dimensions: the first is the use of wage labour which arises only when the owners of the means of production and subsistence meet in the market with the free labourer selling his labour. The second has to do with private ownership of means of production, which is different from personal property (Mukherjee and Ramaswamy 2007).

Marx believes that ownership of means of production is the crucial feature of capitalism which is restricted to the few. The majority of the people who do not own means of production are forced to sell their labour power and thus become wage earners. Marx observed that: the man who possess no other property than his labour power must in all conditions of society and culture, be slave of other men, who have made themselves the owners of the material conditions of labour. He can work only with their permission, hence live only with their permission (Mukherjee and Ramaswamy, 2007:p360).

The outcome of this relation of production is the reproduction of poverty and even when the means of production is owned by the state, wage labour will still subsist. An important logic of Marx argument that is relevant to this research is that capitalism whether local or international inherently breeds poverty: "the existence even in prosperous time of chronic technological unemployment, the destruction of the skilled crafts by new machines, the displacing of skilled by unskilled labour, the sweating of non-industrialized trades, the growth of an unemployable slum-proletariat" (Sabine and Thorson, 1973:p713) and the assembling in cities where they had become dependent on starvation wages (Mukherjee and Ramaswamy,2007:p362) are all building blocks of poverty.

Furthermore, as Marx argues, when the masses become poorer and numerous, the capitalists become fewer and control greater concentration of the means of production (Mbah, 2006:p34). The consequence of this pattern of development is the rise of conflict which Marx's himself described as "inherent self-contradiction" that would lead the system to self-destruction (Sabine and Thorson, 1973). This contradiction is usually characterized by conflicts and antagonistic relationships between different segments of the society as in Nigeria since the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1999. In Nigeria, poverty and inequality have created immense social tension not only at the horizontal level of 'rich' versus 'poor' but also at the vertical level (between and among the poor themselves) culminating in motley of armed conflicts and political instability, the political instability have caused lots of setback to democratic consolidation.

Methodology

The researcher used descriptive research survey design in building up this project work the choice of this research design was considered appropriate because of its advantages of identifying attributes of a large population from a group of individuals. The design was suitable for the study as the study sought to examine economic poverty and the challenge of democratic consolidation in Nigeria, a study of Niger delta 2012-2022.

Data Analysis

Table 4.1 Administration and Retrieval of Questionnaire

State	Copies Distributed	Copies Returned	Percentage Returned	Unreturned Copies
Rivers State	**100**	**97**	**32.3**	**3**
Bayelsa State	**100**	**86**	**28.6**	**14**
Cross Rivers State	**100**	**90**	**30**	**10**
Total	**300**	**273**	**90.9**	**27**

Table 4.1 above indicates that 300 (three hundred) copies of questionnaire were administered to respondents, 27 copies were not returned, while the remaining 273 were dully completed and returned making 90.9% of the total number of returned questionnaires and used for the study.

Research Question One

Does poverty have any effect on democratic participation in the Niger Delta region?

To answer research question one, four structured questionnaire items numbering 1-4 on the effect of poverty on democratic participation in the Niger Delta were used to generate answers to the question. The respondents' responses on the subject matter are presented in a table below using 5-point Likert scale.

Table 4.2 Mean Analysis on the effect of poverty on democratic participation in the Niger Delta

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	U	D	SD	MEAN (X)	STD DEVIATION
1	Poverty leads to vote selling	139	101	24	6	3	4.35	0.264
2	Poverty leads to thugery	110	105	40	10	8	4.10	0.278
3	Poverty leads to political apathy	130	120	20	3	0	4.49	0.278
4	Poverty leads to participation in political violence	140	100	25	5	3	4.35	0.264

Source: Field Data 2023

Table 4.2 above illustrates the response rate on the effect of poverty on democratic participation in the Niger Delta measured on a 4 item instrument and scaled on a 5-point likert scale. From the data, the first question item shows a mean of 4.35 which is on the strongly agreed range of the scale. The 2nd, 3rd and 4th items with

mean score of 4.10, 4.49 and 4.35 respectively indicate that the respondents are more inclined to the strongly agreed range of the scale used in the measurement.

Research Question Two

What are the roles of government in poverty alleviation in the Niger Delta? In response to research question two, four structured questionnaire items numbering 1-4 on the roles of government in poverty alleviation in the Niger Delta were used to generate answers to the question. The respondents' responses on the subject matter are presented in a table below using 5-point Likert scale

Table 4.3 Mean analysis on the roles of government in poverty alleviation in the Niger Delta

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	U	D	SD	MEAN (X)	STD DEVIATION
1	Creation of employment opportunities	150	105	10	8	0	4.45	0.274
2	Giving alms to farmers	120	110	35	5	3	4.24	0.255
3	Empowering Niger Delta youths	160	90	20	3	0	4.44	0.278
4	Establishing skill acquisition centres	120	110	35	5	3	4.24	0.255

Source: Field Data 2023

Table 4.3 above illustrates the response rate on the roles of government in poverty alleviation in the Niger Delta measured on a 4 item instrument and scaled on a 5-point likert scale. From the data, the first question item shows a mean of 4.45 which is on the strongly agreed range of the scale. The 2nd, 3rd and 4th items with mean score of 4.24, 4.44 and 4.24 respectively indicate that the respondents are more inclined to the strongly agreed range of the scale used in the measurement.

Poverty and the Challenges of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria

After 30 years of military dictatorship and the acceleration of poverty occasioned by the implementation of Structural Adjustment measures in the early 1980s

kwara (1976) presented an opportunity to test the age long hypotheses that says "democracy does not thrive well in a poverty ridden environment" in Nigeria. The expectation that greeted Nigeria's return to democracy was short-lived as the high expectations placed on the new 'democratic government' of then President Olusegun Obasanjo to reverse or correct the increasing levels of poverty in the country withered with the increasing inability of the government to deliver on the dividends of democracy. The first noticeable element of challenge this presented to the new democracy was the rise in crisis of legitimacy on the new government. Consequently, this created the room for the citizens not only to openly challenge the authority of the ruling elite and the viability of the Nigerian state, but also opened up the space for expression of suppressed ethnic demands bottled up by years of repressive military rule (Metumara, 2010:p92). According to Gurr the process of transition creates threatening uncertainties for some groups and opens up a range of transitory political opportunities for ethnic entrepreneurs (Omotola, 2008:p55).

This situation in Nigeria has led to the proliferation and strengthening of sub-nationalist groups that find expression in such phenomenon as the various faction of militant insurgency in the Niger Delta region, the renewed demand for Biafra spearheaded by the Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), the incessant ethnic clashes in the middle belt region, the frequent religious disturbances and Sharia-instigated riots in the north..., the increasing notoriety of the Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC) in the west (Metumara, 2010:p92) and the recurring violent attacks by Boko Haran (fundamentalist Islamic militant) in the north resulting in widespread violence across the country. Ginifer and Ismail, (2005:p5) puts the number of armed violence outbreaks recorded between 1999 and 2003 at over 50, with Lagos accounting for at least 15 cases of armed violence. Similarly, it has been estimated that between 14,000 and 15,000 Nigerians have died from localized clashes since 1999 (Ploch 2013; U.S. CIRF, 2012).

It is to be noted that the activities of these new ethnic militia organizations challenge the legitimacy of the state (Metumara, 2010:p96). The rising tide of militancy and sub-nationalist agitations by different segments of the Nigerian society tend to give credence to one of the clearest findings of empirical political science ., that the prospects for sustaining democratic government in a poor society

are far lower than in a relatively wealthy one (Mattes, 2003:p9). Indeed, Sachs confirmed this findings when he avers that democracy cannot thrive in an impoverished country where people live below $1 per day and where stresses of diseases, famine and climatic shock are pervasive (Yakubu and Aderonmu, 2010:p191). "Civilian population in many parts of the country live in constant state of fear due to" the diffusion of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) among various segments of the Nigerian population "including the young, students, vigilantes, militias, armed groups, politicians, and religious movements" (Ginifer and Ismail, 2005:p2). The crisis of legitimacy rocking the Nigerian state and the growing lack of confidence in the institutions of the state particularly the police and the judiciary has informed the growing numbers of vigilante groups across the country like the Bakassi Boys in the South-east, the OPC in the South-west, the Civilian Joint Task Force (JTF) in Borno State among others that are effectively taking over the role of the police and the courts.

This dwindling confidence in state institutions has increased the resort to self-help and other informal means of conflict resolution that has made the Nigerian state highly unruly. These tendencies have frustrated socio-economic development, stunted industrialization and foreign investment and undermined democratic consolidation. Ethno-religious and Identity Conflicts It is important to note that "poverty creates divisive socio-economic competition. The net effect of this competition is insecurity associated with limited job opportunities and social services" (Metumara, 2010:96). Since Nigeria achieved independence in 1960, her economy has remained largely dualistic and monolithic, [depending] on one primary product for export (Ogunlela, and Ogungbile, 2006:p2). This situation has stunted the development of productive forces reinforced by economic wastage, mismanagement and lack of creative use of resources by the political class. Mono-culturalism and the predominant role of the state in development, reduced the country's competitive advantage vis-à-vis other countries of the world, particularly Western nations. The increasing rents and revenues of over $231 billion which accrued to the Nigerian state from 1970-1999 (Ross, 2003:p2; Nna and Igwe, 2010:p133) as well as the predominance of the state as the "main employer, provider and distributor of resources" (Akokpari, 2008:p90) made the control of state power a highly lucrative enterprise. The neo-patrimonial network and prebendalism which flow from this system made the struggle for the control of

state power "a do-or-die affair". Ethnic identity is thus transformed into a mobilizing element not only for contesting access to state and oil power within a context of competing and conflicting ethnicity, but also a modality for organizing social forces to resist alienation, extraction and exclusion by the hegemonic coalition of the ethnic elite (Obi, 2001:p13).

Since the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1999 ethnic conflicts and violence has taken the centre stage in Nigerian politics. Inter and intra-group competition for the highly priced state power and resources made the "forces of identity, particularly ethnicity and religion, became appealing" (Omotola, 2008a:59). This has often resulted in the outbreak of violent conflicts in which many lives have been lost and properties worth millions of Naira (Nigerian currency) destroyed. Some of these conflicts includes the Sagamu crisis in 1999; Ife-Modakeke war in 2000; communal clash over the location of Local Government Headquarter in Agyaragu in 2000; ethnic violence between the Tiv and the Azara origin in Nasarawa State in 2001; the Tiv-Jukun crisis in 2001; the recurrent blood bath between Hausa-Fulani settlers and indigenous people in Plateau State; and the religious imbroglio of 4th May, 2004 in Yelwaq, Bauchi State. This orgy of violence has become a permanent feature in the northern states (Ifeanacho and Nwagwu, 2009:p12). The recurrence of ethno-religious violence has remained a fundamental challenge to the Nigerian democratic experiment which can be explained by the relative poverty of the Nigerian elite, leading it to depend on the state and on foreign capital for accumulation purposes (Obi, 2001:p14). Their desire to continue to remain in power has often led them to incite conflict by manipulating divisive tendencies like ethnicity and religion for their personal gains. Social Injustice and Political Apathy The high level of poverty in Nigeria has promoted in the same measure a high level of inequality, social injustice and consequent political apathy.

The rising levels of poverty in Nigeria has been underscored by the National Bureau of Statistics (2007:p38) that the number ofpeople living in poverty increased from 39.07million in 1992 to 70million in 2004. Similarly, the UNDP states that about 83.9 per cent of Nigerians live below two US Dollars a day (Nna & Igwe, 2010: 133). This poverty profile is further complicated by staggering and alarming levels of inequality as highlighted by Oshewolo (2010:p267) that 70.2 percent of the Nigerian population lives on less than $1 a day, while 90.8 percent

lives on less than $2 a day. The total income earned by the richest 20 percent of the population is 55.7 percent, while the total income earned by the poorest 20 percent is 4.4 percent. The poverty situation since the birth of the Fourth Republic in 1999 included a dimension of powerlessness. This is characterized by dependence on others, and a lack of voice and options. More precisely, analysts conclude that poor people lack information about and access to government (especially the police and courts) and that they see the state as ineffective, irrelevant and corrupt (Mattes, 2003:p35). Similarly, Mattes, (2003:p35) argues that the poor "are regularly victimized by public officials and encounter higher levels of crime.

As a consequence, they are forced to rely on informal networks and associations" for survival. As the state constantly violates the right of the citizen, and denies them social justice including economic opportunity, the people have come to perceive the state as predatory and evil that most be avoided and feared. Thus, Ihonvbere (1994: p43) avers that ...the masses in Africa, relate to the state as an exploitative, coercive and alien structure (whose) custodians lack credibility and legitimacy and are thus incapable of mobilizing or leading the people. This underscores the high level of political apathy by significant segments of the Nigerian population and confirms the assertion that poverty decreases both participation in democratic life and popular support for democracy ...Given the imperative to satisfy basic survival needs, poor people may have little reason to worry about satisfying supposedly "higher order" needs like self-government, freedom and equality that democracy fulfils" (Mattes, 2003:p35). The implications of limited participation of the people in democracy removes such a system from the realm of true democracy and prevents it from engineering people's centered development as well as the loss of its essence and meaning. Such democratic regime can also easily transform or relapse into autocracy and dictatorship. This is not to talk of other implications for violence, conflicts that are already germane in Nigeria since 1999.

In addition, political apathy arising from mass poverty in Nigeria has also hindered and contributed to the stifling of the growth and development of vibrant civil societies as well as the cultivation and growth of democratic value and civic culture. Corruption and Institutional Failures Poverty in Nigeria has promoted and encouraged political and other forms of corruption. "The deepening of

contradictions under" SAP ..."contributed to worsening poverty, unemployment, and hunger" (Obi, 2001:p49) and created the need for people to meet their daily existential needs through other means other than the societal acceptable channels. The unbundling of the political space following the exit of the military in 1999, push the gale for people to regain the loss of the decades of military dictatorship in terms of material well-being as Obi (2001:p49) rightly argues this "fed into the intensification of ethnicity and ethnic struggles over shrinking resources, power and the means of material reproduction". Public knowledge of the pervasive and subsisting level of corruption and abuse of office in public life (Olorode, 2006:p5) in Nigeria is embarrassingly rampant. Kwese, have persuasively argued that corruption and the desire for self-advantage have overwhelmed theideal of public service and turned public institutions into crucibles of sloth, avarice and mediocrity. Poor leadership, shaggy government policies and poverty continue to expose public servants to control, manipulation and corrupt practices (Oko, 2008:p33). Since the dominant source of private wealth is public treasury, looting public treasury will be, and had become, a major way of promoting privatization (Olorode, 2006:p5).

It will be recalled that in 2003 following the re-election of then President Obasanjo, for a second term, Mr. El Rufai, who became Obasanjo's FCT Minister, accused some members of the National Assembly of demanding bribe from him to facilitate his confirmation as Minister (Olorode, 2006:p6). In the same vein, recently, some former state Governors like Alamieyeseigha of Bayelsa State, Chimaroke Nnamani of Enugu State, Joshua Dariye of Plateau State, Orji Uzor Kalu of Abia State, and Idris Abubakar of Kogi State, were arrested and charged to court by EFCC (Eze 2009:p448) for various acts of corruption while in office. The long term effect of corruption is the massive weakening and decay of public institutions "through the diffusion of a culture of impunity" (Bach, 2004:p2). Kalu has argued that democracy in Africa is unstable and this is mainly because of absence or weakness of institutions rather than the state (Ojakorotu, 2009:p161). Poverty makes it difficult for countries to afford or maintain "state institutions such as quality electoral machinery and a well-resourced legislature ...societal institutions such as effective political parties ...independent news media and a vibrant web of civil society organizations" (Mattes, 2003:p38). Since its return to democracy in 1999, Nigeria's democratic institutions "such as the civil society

organizations, the judiciary, political parties", and electoral management body have "remained essentially weak in terms of response to the political, economic and social needs of citizens.

For instance, electoral institutions created to manage elections have been unable to permit substantial involvement of citizens in the electoral process" (Ojakorotu, 2009:p162) as underscored by the massive electoral fraud that characterized the 2003/2004, and the 2007 general elections variously described by both local and international observers as inadequate and below accepted democratic standard. Institutional weakness and failure has led to high level of disregard for constitutionalism, flagrant abuses of citizens' rights, and the rule by law, not of law (Omotola, 2008b:53). It is dysfunctional institutional that makes it possible for the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC's) "attempted to illegally disqualify Abubakar Atiku from contesting the 2007 elections at the instance of the presidency" (Omotola, 2008a:p66) as well as the successful disqualification of "some opposition candidates" by INEC "in several states, including Kogi and Adamawa states" (Omotola, 2008a:p66). It must be noted that institutional failure has also accounted for the proliferation of plethora of ethno-religious intolerance and violent conflicts. It is in obvious recognition of this fact that Allen argues that "it is this weak state that produces politics that makes violence a prime means of political action in Nigeria" (Metumara, 2010:p99). These weak state institutions have correspondingly failed to contain rising incidence of violence since 1999. Furthermore, the monumental failure of the police as state institution to ensure security and maintain law and order across the country is evident by the proliferation of vigilante groups which are effectively taking over the important state role of law enforcement, adjudication and 'dispensation of justice' and at the same time "protect and extort from local communities" (Ginifer and Ismail, 2005:p2).

The persistence of such intractable institutional inadequacies in Nigeria and by extension Africa which Nzongola-Ntalaja described as "malfunctioning ofdemocracy" (Omotola, 2008b:p55) informed the view by a section of Western scholarship "that Africa is not 'mature' for democracy" (Omotola, 2008b: p46.). Accordingly, Obi (2001:p49) has observed that these factors themselves raise fresh problems for the state, especially in the areas of legitimacy and governance and

present a formidable challenge to the Nigerian democracy. As Bach (2004:p3) painfully notes, the institutions of the Fourth Republic has been unable to cope successfully with the multiplication of violent conflicts across the country. On the whole, corruption and "low degree of political institutionalization has been accompanied by the corresponding erosion of vertical and horizontal accountability ...Not even the resurgence of oversight institutions, such as the parliament, civil society, and the mass media, among others, has been able to "discipline" the democratization processes and the political actors" (Omotola, 2008b:p54).

Worse still, major political actors hardly operate within the limit of constitutional provisions, as they employ extra-constitutional mechanisms to pursue their selfish interests, including the struggle for power elongation and abuse of power of incumbency to frustrate opposition forces (Omotola, 2008a:p58). Crime, Electoral Violence and Insecurity Since the return to democracy in 1999, the Nigerian state has retreated from "economy and welfare" provision that "further reduces the limited resources that could be used to address the growing social crises in a context where there are no safety nets" (Obi, 2004:p12) in what Olorode (2006:p4) described as crisis of poverty and social instability engendered by the Structural Adjustment Programs (now re-christened "economic reforms"). This resulted in what Ojakorotu (2009:p163) call personal economic circumstances of unemployment, shortage of food, public safety, lack of clean water, inadequate health care, poor income level, and more, were on the sky high, negative on citizens. While their material conditions have worsened, social and economic advancement which democracy promises have been elusive (Ojakorotu, 2009:p171). This has led to high level of frustration because meaningful democracy goes beyond electoralism to include the improvement of the material conditions of the people and the fulfillment of their expectations (Jozana, 1999:p1). This resulted into increased "social misery, violence and crime". While "the political class ...re-arms its war chest for the next elections" (Obi, 2004:12).

Thus, A gun culture and impunity has increasingly been established in Nigeria since 1999, particularly among the young (Ginifer and Ismail, 2005:p2). SALW are freely available and both regional and state controls are minimal (Ginifer and Ismail, 2005:p2) leading to a surge in the wave of armed robbery, Kidnapping,

abduction, assassination as well as the intensification of armed violence by the different factions of militant in the creeks of the Niger Delta among other forms of social vices. Apart from life lost to arm robbers, recent ethnic militias like the Odua People's Congress, Egbesu Boys, most of which are currently banned, are involved in killing of criminals and opponents in the most gruesome ways (Aduba, 2004:p12). These in many cases have resulted in counter-violence by the state in order to "contain mounting social unrest and escalating conflicts" (Obi, 2004:p12). Of particular interest is the challenge of electoral violence to the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. Omotola (2008a:p61) have lamented that "Africa's 'new' democracies have been seriously violated in many ways". He contended that "one outstanding area" of this violation "is the deepening crisis of electoral governance partly reflected in the phenomenon of electoral violence". Lehoucq posits that electoral violence is a form, perhaps the most deadlyform, of electoral fraud, which has been defined as 'clandestine efforts to shape election results' (Omotola, 2008a:p56).

Electoral violence often stem from electoral fraud and flawed electoral processes as Dahl argued "Africa's bold democratic aspirations are often marred by electoral fraud and other irregularities that deny citizens the right to choose and control their leaders" (Oko, 2008:p16). These, apart from eroding "public trust and support for the government" (Oko, 2008:p16) have often resulted in large scale violence in Nigeria. Ojakorotu (2009:p181) observes that elections have been badly conducted and managed in Nigeria. Rigging, brigandage and violence are easily identified features of the election process. Electoral violence is prevalent in Nigeria because it is a context where elections are transformed into highly competitive zero sum games (Olarinmoye, 2008:p67). Recent manifestations of electoral violence include physical, psychological and structural dimensions, all with the central motive of influencing the electoral process in favour of the perpetrators of the violence (Omotola, 2008:p61). However the one that is common in Nigeria is the physical elements which "include assassination of political opponents, arson, looting, shooting, kidnapping and hostage taking, forceful disruption of campaign rallies, armed raids on voting and collating centres, including snatching of ballot papers and boxes at gun point" (Omotola, 2008:p55). All this have been recorded in the recent elections conducted since 1999. The 2003/2004 as well as the 2007 elections were all marred by irregularities.

It has been widely reported how incumbent leaders use state security agents to intimidate voters in order to gain electoral advantage. Similarly, tale of politicians arming the youth to the teeth in order to perpetrate all form of electoral violence in Nigeria has been well documented. In fact, the 2011 general elections adjudged by local and international observers as the most credible, free and fair elections to be conducted in Nigeria and by any civilian regime were not entirely free of irregularities and violence. Electoral fraud and violence have prevented the development of the necessary democratic values and civil culture necessary for democratic consolidation and promoted what Lindberg called "electoral authoritarian regime," where there is limited or no space for opposition parties and activists to operate (Omotola, 2008b:p53).

Summary

It is important to ascertain that the aim of this study was to examine economic poverty and the challenge of democratic consolidation in the Nigeria with emphasis on Niger Delta 2012-2022. The relevant data collected for this study were presented, critically analyzed and appropriate interpretation given.

The two concepts (poverty and democratic consolidation) which are germane to this discourse were thoroughly examined. The paper also analyzed the challenges confronting poverty and democratic consolidation in the country. Some of challenges discussed include: electoral malpractice, poverty, corruption, incumbency factor, lack of viable opposition and insecurity. The study posited that there is light at the end of the tunnel because of the presence of elements of democratic consolidation such as vibrant press, independent judiciary, budding civil society as well as acceptance of elections as a means of choosing political leaders.

Recommendations

What would make democracy work in Nigeria or in any country is the sovereignty of the will of the electorate through credible, free and fair elections, the institution of democratic ethos and selfless service by the leadership. For this to be a reality, the liberation of the Nigerian electorate from poverty is an overriding objective which the government must pursue vigorously. Once an acceptable level of poverty reduction has been attained, the electorate

would have the power to make rational choices during elections as their choices would no more be based on pecuniary incentive or immediate financial gratification.

A comprehensive electoral reform that must incorporate a change in the attitude of Nigerian leaders to the poor masses that voted them into office and that would entrench good governance and a responsive and responsible government in the country is absolutely necessary. Each administration that is voted into power must know that it is responsible for driving the wheels of democratic progress through reform and implementation. With this understanding, each administration should leave a stronger democratic foundation than it met at its inception in office.

The leadership of the country should avoid unpopular policies that tend to exacerbate the poor economic status of the masses. Such policies, like the removal of fuel subsidy in a country whose energy sector is completely inefficient and where citizens have to depend on fuel for the last thing as reading in the night will aggravate the poverty of the masses. Government should instead concentrate on the implementation of policies oriented towards basic needs satisfaction. Such policies must be flexible enough to meet the needs of the poor within the various sections of the country.

A good system of planning, budgeting, managing, controlling and implementation must be evolved for any policy geared towards poverty alleviation. There must also be proper monitoring of the policies to avoid the hijacking of such policies by the highly placed to the detriment of the poor population originally targeted. Sustained action over time in this regard coupled with some level of financial accountability by the leadership will definitely set the country on a sound course for democratic consolidation.

There is need for political education by the media and civil society to cause citizens to redirect and redefine their interests in politics. Citing the example of Ghandi, Ighagbon (2010:p5) emphasized individual responsibility of citizens and youths in particular to go out during elections and participate by voting the right people into offices. The citizens must come to the point where they do not only vote but must

be ready to police their votes to the last point where results declared reflect the votes cast.

This thesis believes in the recommendation of the Muhammadu Mawal Uwais Electoral Reforms Committee (ERC) as cited in Tinubu (2009:p6) that the appointment of the Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) must be done by the president through the recommendation of the National Judicial Council (NJC); that funding for (INEC) be charged into the Consolidated fund to ensure financial independence of the electoral umpire ; that there should be security of tenure for INEC; and that every electoral petition be dispensed with before the swearing-in.

Finally, we recommend a mid-term review of the tenure of every political office holder. Those voted into office should be made to go back after the first half of their tenure to receive a ratification or vote of confidence from the electorate in their constituencies that they have properly and effectively represented them during the first half and so should complete the tenure or else his mandate is withdrawn by the electorate. This, we believe would make political office holders to attempt to satisfy, albeit, the peripheral needs of the electorate, at least, during the first half of their tenure.

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