IMPACT OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES IN THE UPSURGE OF INSECURITY IN SOME NORTH WESTERN STATES, NIGERIA

Amina Lawal Mashi
Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina
mashiamina@yahoo.com

Abstract
The security challenges going on in Nigeria over a decade ago have affected the socio-economic well-being of Nigerian citizens. The paper examined the impact of socio-economic inequalities in the upsurge of insecurity in north-western states. The paper relied on secondary sources which comprised of published materials(journals, reports, books etc., accessed online). The study found thatsocio-economic inequalities contribute to the upsurge of insecurity in the affected north-western statesand significant resources have been committed by government but with limited success etc.The study recommended that kinetic or military approach alone cannot solve insecurity challenges in the affected states;government should address the root causes of insecurity such as poverty, unemployment, environmental degradation, uneven development etc., through a holistic social policy approach to promote social justice and equity within the strata of the society;government should Implement community-based programs that would strengthen social cohesion and provide support to vulnerable population in order to mitigate the effects of socio-economic inequalitiesin the most vulnerable states, and that governments should adopt progressive taxation policies to redistribute wealth more equitably and fund essential social welfare programs to take care of the most vulnerable segments of the population.

Keywords: *Holistic Social Policy, Insecurity, Military Approach, North-western States, Socio-economic Inequalities*

1.0 Introduction

Nigeria has been experiencing significant increase in insecurity in many forms such as kidnappings and terrorism-related incidents like ethnic conflicts, religious conflicts, Boko Haram insurgency, banditry, armed robberyand Niger

Delta multitenancy (Ndubuisi-Okolo, 2023).This has deeply impacted on its national security and public confidence, as majority of the Nigerian population has been plunged into extreme conditions of misery(NBS, 2020). Many factors which include high illiteracy rates among youth, youth unemployment, bad governance, porous borders, proliferation of light arms from the Sahelian countries, impoverishment, poverty, misuse of drugs etc., have been identified as factors responsible for the upsurge in insecurity in Nigeria (Ozoigbo,2019;Abari &Welldone, 2022). Similarly, other factorsidentified as the causes of insecurity in the most vulnerable states in Nigeriainclude unemployment, poverty, farmers-herders' conflict, the emergence of Boko Haram group in the north eastern states of Nigeria, emergence of Islamic state in West Africa Province (ISWAP), the emergence of bandits, kidnappers and informants,lack of self-restraint, proliferation of light arms from the Sahel countries etc.,(Oluwale, 2021 &Sulaiman, 2022; Gimba, 2022; and Sulaiman, 2022).

Various strategies largely based on military forcehave been adopted by the Nigerian government through its law enforcement agencies (military, police, DSS etc.), but with little success so far.The reasons for the failure of government strategies to achieve the desired objectives include limited resources, corruption, and wide spread socio-economic inequalities existing within the social structure of the society, particularly the most vulnerable states of Kaduna, Katsina, Zamfara, Sokoto, and Kebbi. Thus, making the northern states an epic center of increase in all forms of insecurity (Oluwale, 2021).

The effects of insecurity onsocio-economic well-being of people in the affected states are numerous. In terms of financial losses, millions of naira had been paid to bandits as ransom to secure the release of abducted victims, loss of farm produceand loss of animals (cows, sheep, goats and donkeys) through rustling (Francis, 2021; European Union Agency for Asylum, 2019; Bashir et al., 2020; Orjinmo, 2020; Blueprint, 2019; & Sahara Reporters, 2021). Similarly, in terms of well-being of citizens, millions of people have been displaced from their communities, farms, schools, businesses, which has resulted in the rise in poverty, unemployment, illiteracy rates(Aliyu,

2021).With regards to loss of educational opportunities, there are about 30 million Almajirai and 20million out of school vulnerable children roaming the streets of the northern states and exploited for all kinds of criminal behaviours detrimental to them and the society at large. Thus, making the northern states to have the highest number of children out of school and living in abject poverty and illiteracy in the country(Daily Trust, 2024).

Furthermore, with regards to the level of poverty, Nigeria as at 2018, was tagged as the poverty capital of the world-by-World Poverty Clock (WPC) because over 87 million of its citizens living in extreme poverty, and about 70,834,207 million out of 225,731,260 million Nigerians are battling with extreme poverty. This view was also collaborated by the 2024 Concern Worldwide report, which stated that Nigeria was among the 10poorest countries in the world (Imoleayo, 2024).The National Bureau of Statistics report also classified 133 million Nigerians as multidimensionally poor. In addition, the United Nations World Food Programme, stated that a total of 24.8 million people or one out of eight Nigerians, experienced acute hunger. It is therefore very clearthat the real factors that are fueling insecurity in most northern states, have to do with the wide spread level of socio-economic inequalities existing within the social structure of northern states of Nigeria.

This view was recently supported by General Christopher Musa, the Nigerian Chief of Defense staff, when he emphasized that military approach can only solve 30% of the nation's insecurity problem and that the remaining 70% of the security problem can only be tackled through political and socio-economic interventions. He further emphasized on the need to redefine national security beyond military strength by incorporating social, economic and environment factors as giving emphasis on militaryapproach alone cannot provide national security. He also highlighted the importance of building an educated, healthy, and socially cohesive populationconsisting of all key stakeholders such as the media, traditional and religious leaders to tackle insecurity through a collaborative effort (Kingsley, 2024).

Therefore,as maintained by Jibrin & Musa, (2021) and Kingsley, (2024), military approach has consumedhuge national resources but had not yielded the desired resultsso far.Hence, the need for a new approach to address the existing widespread socio-economic inequalities within the social structure of the affected states as a panacea for reduction of insecurity and criminal activities in the affected northern states and Nigeria at large. This may require new approaches and strategies that would encompass law enforcement reform, and community engagement aimed at tackling the wide spread socio-economic inequalities within the Nigerian society. If these factors are not addressed, it would be difficult for the government to secure the country despite its huge military spending.

Addressing socio-economic inequalities in particular is important in view of the fact that numerous empirical evidences suggest that insecurity is rooted or related to socio-economic inequalities which affectthe well-being of people in the affected areas (Awojobi, 2014; Bilgel, 2016; Blomberg, 2004; Davis, Esther, Ifeannyi, 2022; Dauda, 2014; Fatima, Latif, Chugtai, Nazik, Aslam, 2014; Gaibulloev, & Sandler, 2009; Sandler, & Enders, 2004; Shabir, Naeem, & Ihtsham, 2015). However, there is a dearth of empirical studies on the relationship between insecurity (i.e., terrorism, banditry, kidnapping etc.) and bad governance, which makes developing countries like Nigeria more prone to insecurity (Global Terrorism Index, 2022).The paper seeks to highlight the impact of socio-economic inequalities in the upsurge of insecurity in some North western states of Nigeria.

2.0 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Concept of Insecurity

Literally, insecurity implies some degree of fear in respect of threat to life and properties, anxiety and discomfort individual experience.Insecurity as a concept is referred to as a feeling of uncertainty, loss of confidence or anxiety an individual experiences when exposed to danger or threat(Oviasuyi, 2021).Insecurity has also been defined as the absence of peace, order, and security which creates within individual(s) a feeling of vulnerability to harm,shock, danger, worry(Achumba, 2013).Iwundu & Thom Otuya, (2013),

also described insecurity as “a situation when citizens are not free to walk, work peacefully or harmoniously without fear of intimidation, molestation, infliction of bodily injuries”. Thus, leading to a feeling of anxiety, fears, intimidation, threat, harm to lives and property.

2.2 Causes of Insecurity

In Nigeria, insecurity has manifested itself in different forms and dimensions such as acts of militancy and vandalism of oil installations, banditry and kidnapping, Boko Haram, herders-farmers conflict, human trafficking, ritual killings, sectarian violence, political violence etc. (Adebakin, 2012; Darmer, Baird & Rosenbaum, 2004). Various factors have been identified as causes of insecurity in Nigeria. Udoh et al. (2019) noted that one of the factors of insecurity within the context of Nigeria can be related to existence of natural resources in the vulnerable states. Thus, he used the term “Resource Curse” to argue that Nigeria has been endowed with abundant natural resources and that these resources are often the cause of its insecurity. The insecurity, according to him, manifest itself in the forms of civil war, civil unrest, insurgency, farmers-headers conflict, kidnapping, banditry, informants etc., (Udoh et al. 2019). However, Wojuade and Alayande, (2021) argued that insecurity is fueled by bad governance, corruption, deprivation of majority of the Nigerian population of basic necessities of life as they become disadvantaged and marginalized within societies. Ethnicity, religious conflicts and unemployment werealso identifiedas causes of insecurity in Nigeria. Furthermore, socio-economic inequalities were also identified as causes of insecurity, and conflicts particularly in developing nations(Awojobi, 2014; Etim, 2017; Oduwole, 2015; and Okolie, 2019).

2.3 Concept of Socio-economic Inequalities

Socio-economic inequalities, refer to unequal distribution of wealth, income and opportunities such as education, employment/empowerment etc., existing between different groups of people within the social structure of society (Sernau, 2013). It may also be considered as disparities in income, mortality, and standard of living between different groups of people within the social

structure of a society. However, a fairer distribution of resources and opportunities within individuals in a society can led to social inclusion, and socio-economic development of both individuals and nations (Neckerman, & Florencia, 2007).

Socio-economic inequalities, which broadly manifest in the form of poverty, unemployment, social mobility, andaccess to education can be measured in a number of ways such as a) income inequality: this refers to uneven distribution of income within population, thus leading to insecurity (Piquero & Piquero, 2020; Breetzke& Cohn, 2019).; b) wealth inequality (i.e. uneven distribution of wealth across households/individuals); and c) inequality of opportunities due to various factors such as gender, ethnicity, power, kinship, religion, race, age, intelligence and class (Sernau, 2013).

The effects of insecurity are numerous. They include social dislocations and displacement of residents, disruptions of family lives and their social interactions, reduction of life spans of citizens (Okonkwo & Davis 2015). It also leads to deviance, anomie, and suicide, which according to Karl Marx and Emile Durkheim would result into conflict and insecurity within societies (Mashi, 2021). Socio-economic inequalities, can also lead to political instability, increase in rates of crime and insecurity, reduction of economic growth of a nation etc., (Stiglitz, 2012; Neckerman, & Florencia, 2007).

2.4 Government Efforts in Tackling Insecurity Challenges in Nigeria

The federal government and indeed the affected state governments have adopted various policies and strategiessuch as a) military approach in tackling the menace through increased military budgetary allocations running into trillions of naira; b) establishment of vigilante groups armed with basic arms that are inferior to those in the hands of the criminals; and c) collaboration with relevant stakeholders such as Miyetti-Allah cattle breeders' association, granting amnesty to those who agree to hand over their weapons to the state government and police to deal with the menace of insecurity, but with little success. However, the above initiatives failed to achieved the desired

objectives due to poorly conceived and implemented policies (nomadic education, almajiri schools, poverty reduction etc.), insufficient political will; insufficient resources (personnel and finances), insufficient infrastructure, corruption etc.; failure of governments at all levels to address socio-economic inequalities existing within their social structure; implementation of certain economic policies such as border closure, removal of subsidies on fuel, power, naira float, increase in taxes etc., have impacted negatively on socio-economic well-being of most Nigerians. Thus, leading to upsurge in insecurity, especially in northern region of Nigeria., (Abdulkadir, 2021; Ladan, 2019; Iliyasu, 2024; Sami, 2024& Adeniyi, 2022; Adekunle, 2024; &Mashi, 2021; & Nicholas, 2017). This therefore, raises the need for the government to adopt a holistic policy approach that would address the socio-economic inequalities of illiteracy, unemployment, hunger etc., in the north. Military or kinetic option cannot in itself solve the problems of security facing the country on the long-term basis.

2.5 Empirical Review

Nwagboso (2012), studied security challenges and economy of the Nigerian state (2007-2011), the study employed theory of relative deprivation as its theoretical framework. Data was collectedusing content analytical method because of the nature of the problem, and findings indicated that security challenges in Nigeria were traced to bad governance which failed to address such casual factors of insecurity like poverty, unemployment and inequitable distribution of wealth among Nigerians. The study recommended the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes that can address the causal factors of insecurity in Nigeria.

Achumba, et al. (2013), conducted a study on security challenges in Nigeria and itsimplications for business activities and sustainable development. Content analytical method was employed as a framework to guide the research, and it was found that factors such as weak institutional capacity, pervasive material inequality and unfairness, ethnic religiousconflict, weak security system, loss of socio-cultural and communal value system; porous borders,

social irresponsibility of companies, unemployment, poverty were responsible for insecurity in the country among others. The study recommended the creation of friendly and safer business environment to allow for business activities to strive, which would ultimately lead to sustainable economic development of the country and improvement of the socio-economic well-being of citizens of the country.

Ewetan and Urhie (2014), examined the effects of insecurity and socio-economic development in Nigeria, using content analysis method as its framework. He found that insecurity has been on the increase, which impacts negatively on lives and properties of people and business activities by discouraging local and foreign investors among others. The study recommended that government should be proactive in handling security issues through effective intelligence gathering and sharing among security agencies among others.

Okolie et al. **(2019),** examined the relationship between insecurity and economic hardship in Nigeria, using descriptive approach. The study found that there is a strong relationship between rising level of poverty and insecurity in Nigeria.

Zubairu **(2020),** evaluated underlying factors responsible for escalating insecurity in Nigeria. The study found that joblessness, destitution, elites profiteering, cultural and theological divides, nepotism, an insufficient security system, insecure borders, discrimination and unfairness in the social structure of Nigeria were among the fundamental reasons for insecurity in Nigeria.

Enamorado et al. (2014), conducted a study on the problems of socio-economic inequalities within societies. This study is imperative because they can cause social tension, disorder, apprehension, and strain, which would most probably trigger insecurity within societies. Past empirical studies, suggested that there is a strong positive correlation between the level of socio-economic inequalities and insecurity in European countries and the U.S (Wirdze,2024 and Jones,2018). The study concluded that reducing economic disparities could

play a crucial role in lowering crime rates in urban areas and therefore, recommended for addressing the inequalities through investment in socio-economic welfare programs, in the form of provision of low housing programs, targeted interventions to support low-income communities, skills provision, improved access to social services (Jones, 2018 & Smith, 2019).

Brown (2021), conducted a study in India on the effects of socio-economic inequalities on the upsurge of insecurity in vulnerable areas and concluded that areas with high income disparities had more insecurity incidences. He recommended the adoption of measures to secure such vulnerable areas and provision of more infrastructure within the vulnerable areas. Williams (2022), also conducted a comparative case study of African urban areas to explore the link between socio-economic inequalities and upsurge in insecurity. He found that communities with higher socio-economic inequalities were more prone to insecurity and he recommended comprehensive social reforms, that would address the problems of high illiteracy rates, poor healthcare deliveryand unemployment which were responsible for the socio-economic inequalities. This, according to him, can be achieved through the formulation and implementation of a comprehensive social policy.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

So many sociological and other related social sciences theories, have given insight on the causes of insecurity and its impact on the socio-economic well-being of people. These theories include: a)“relative deprivation theory”, which states that insecurity develops from public unhappiness largely due to socio-economic inequalities which breeds unemployment, illiteracy, lack of income, poverty etc., within societies, due to weak governance or bad governance, corruption, nepotism etc., (Gurr, 2011; Blomberg, 2004); b)“dissatisfaction–aggression” which holds that discontent generates acts of violence and insecurity which happens as a result of people impoverishment, and deprivation; c). “Religiousfanaticism theory” which postulates that religious extremistsimpose their extreme religious views on their communities (Özdamar,2008).

However, from the perspective of sociology, the paper found the "strain theory" of Robert K. Merton as apt and relevant. This theory, which developed in the 1930s, suggests that economic disparity intensifies strain, which leads to insecurity as individuals affected would resort to employing non-legitimate means to achieve their legitimate goals of survival. Therefore, this theory clearly explains how socio-economic pressures or factors contribute to emergence and upsurge of insecurity within societies (Johnson, 2019). Another sociological theory, the paper also considered relevant is the "relative deprivation theory", developed by Stouffer (1949)and later expanded by sociologists including Runcimanwhich posits that inequalities andfrustrations individuals experience create a feeling of injustice which could trigger insecurity within societies(Brown, 2019).The theory assumes that members of society who are deprived of valuable resources or opportunities can be motivated by a sense of injustice to join social movements to create a societal change that will benefit them.

The above theories, are considered relevant to the topic as they have identified socio-economic inequalities as causal factors to insecurity in Nigeria and the world at large. Nigeria, particularly the affected north western states, has high incidences of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, etc. This no doubt propelled insecurity to its present level; despite the heavy investment in military Nigeria and the upsurge of insecurity.

3.0 Methodology

It is a conceptual paper, which employed a desk research methodology, where secondary data was regardedas its research design. This research design involves review of published materials such as journals, books, reports, newspapers etc., and it was chosen because of itslow-cost advantage when compared to other research designs.

4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Insurgency in Nigeria is a major source of concern to both governments at all levels and the citizens becausemany resources have been used towards its

reduction but with little success. Additionally, it has also affected the socio-economic well-being of many people in the affected states by way of displacements from their homes, and economic activities. This has prompted academics, military strategists, and a number of interested parties to think outside the box to propose solutions on ways and means of tackling the menace of insecurity in the country. This is because it is apparent, that the military approach alone cannot achieve the desired result of reducing the insecurity to the barest minimum. Hence this paper, attempted to examine the impact of socio-economic inequalities existing in the affected northern states and the need to address them as a panacea to the reduction of insecurity in the affected states and the country at large. The study relied on secondary sources of data in its research and its findings revealed among others the need to address socio-economic inequalities. The paper recommends that socio-economic inequalities that are widely spread in the most vulnerable states could be addressed through a comprehensive social policy approach, which would address the inequalities in the areas of education, healthcare, employment, poverty etc., in addition to the ongoing military approach.

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