

POLICY BRIEF

ON

CORRUPTION, THE NEST OF
VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN NIGERIA





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Executive Summary

This brief is an aggregation of interviews and desk reviews to establish whether there is a nexus between corruption and violent extremism in Nigeria.

First, the brief attempts to assemble the generally accepted definition or description of corruption to bring to bear the effects of corruption as proxies to be able to draw a link between corruption and violent extremism. The brief isolated poverty, marginalisation and discrimination, dysfunctional education system, youth unemployment, smuggling of arms, and the like as products of corruption that have contributed to the exacerbation of violent extremism in developing countries like Nigeria. The brief also contained findings from qualitative evidence, recommendations to the government of Nigeria, and citizens for implementation in addressing violent extremism.

Background

Corruption is an insidious plague that has a wide range of corrosive effects on societies. It undermines democracy and the rule of law, leads to violations of human rights, distorts markets, erodes the quality of life, and allows organized crime, terrorism, and other threats to human security to flourish. This evil phenomenon is found in all countries—big and small, rich and poor—but it is in the developing world that its effects are most destructive. Corruption hurts the poor disproportionately by diverting funds intended for development, undermining a Government's ability to provide basic services, feeding inequality and injustice, and discouraging foreign aid and investment. Corruption is a key element in economic underperformance and a major obstacle to poverty alleviation and development.

Transparency International describes corruption as the abuse of power for private gain. It further emphasizes that corruption erodes trust, weakens democracy, hampers economic development, and further exacerbates inequality, poverty, social division, and environmental crisis.

Irrefutably, corruption is known to have played a significant role in most of the challenges the world including Nigeria is facing. Nigeria was equated with Afghanistan in 2017 by former Prime Minister of UK, in his interaction with Queen of England- Queen Elizabeth II describing Nigeria and Afghanistan as “fantastically corrupt”. He further emphasized that Nigeria and Afghanistan possibly are the two most corrupt countries in the world.

This statement alluded to the fact that the two countries were occupying the bottom table of the Corruption Perception Index in 2015 and 2016. Also be it the huge incidence of poverty, a health crisis with collapsed infrastructures, decayed education system, economic crisis, and public infrastructure in a state of near-total collapse, these two countries share similar poor indices on the human development index.

In a 2013 study commissioned by the U.S. Institute of Peace, the Abuja-based CLEEN Foundation – a current partner of IWPR in an INL programme funded the Access Nigeria Project by the US State Department – concluded that poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and weak family structures contribute to making young men in Nigeria vulnerable to radicalisation and extremist recruitment.

To map the links between corruption and violent extremism, one would consider some of the outcomes of corruption- poverty, marginalization, low-quality education, lack of jobs, poor health facilities, inequality, and injustice, etc, to be identified as strong links between corruption and violent extremism.

Corruption became the catalyst for Boko Haram. [Mohammed] Yusuf [the group's first leader] would have found it difficult to gain a lot of these people if he was operating in a functional state. But his teaching was easily accepted because of the environment, the frustrations, the corruption, [and] the injustice made it fertile for his ideology to grow fast, very fast, like wildfire. HRW 2012

Poverty

Nearly 100 million Nigerians live on less than one US dollar a day. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) 2019 report revealed the situation of Poverty and Inequality in Nigeria. The report highlights that 40 percent of the total population, or almost 83 million people, live below the country's poverty line of 137,430 naira (\$381.75) per year.

This rise is especially notable in a country that, in 2011, was the globe's fourth-largest exporter of oil. Poverty is unevenly spread throughout the country and is less severe in many parts of the south than in the north. Unemployment, lack of economic opportunities, and wealth inequalities are a source of deep frustration across the country, especially in many parts of the north. The National Bureau of Statistics report, for example, shows that 70 percent of Nigerians in northeast Nigeria—Boko Haram's traditional stronghold—live on less than a dollar a day, compared to 50 and 59 percent in the southwest and southeast Nigeria, respectively.

While some experts have argued in their literature that there is no link between poverty and violent extremism, others, using the case of Yemen, and some anecdotal pieces of evidence in Nigeria have reinforced the arguments that poor countries ravaged by corruption are more vulnerable to violent extremism.

World leaders have also attributed violent extremism to corruption which precipitates strong denial of citizens of their fundamental rights as both domesticated in national laws, and international conventions. The 44th President of the United States of America, Barack Obama, once said: “When people are oppressed and human rights are denied particularly along sectarian lines or ethnic lines; when dissent is silenced, it feeds violent extremism, it creates an environment that is ripe for terrorists to exploit. When peaceful democratic change is impossible, it feeds into the terrorist propaganda, that violence is only answer available.”The reason they [Boko Haram] killed government officials and police was because of corruption and injustice.... They said they are against the government because of the corruption in the government sector. Islam is against corruption, they said. If Sharia is applied, corruption would be eliminated. HRW October 2012 and the United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, also alluded to Obama's position in a report: “I am convinced that the creation of open, equitable, inclusive and pluralist societies,

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based on the full respect of human rights and with economic opportunities for all, represents the most tangible and meaningful alternative to violent extremism.”

According to a UNDP report, “Journey to extremism in Africa 2017,” poverty is said to be high, with the lived reality of unemployment and underemployment as a major source of frustration identified by those who joined violent extremist groups.

Marginalization and Discrimination

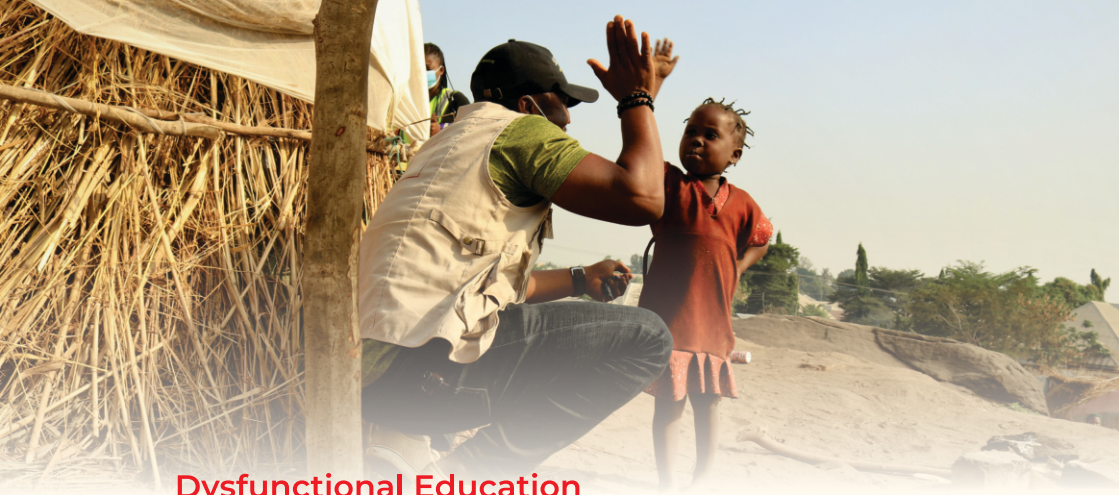
Another outcome of corruption is marginalization and discrimination. From a qualitative gathering of evidence, many believe one of the drivers of violent extremism is marginalization. These positions corroborated the United Nations's Plan of Action report to prevent violent extremism. The Plan of Action showed that there is a consensus or recurrent agreement of two main categories of drivers of violent extremism:

1. The conditions conducive to violent extremism and the structural context from which it emerges; and
2. The individual motivations and processes, which play a key role in transforming ideas and grievances into violent extremist action. Under the first category, marginalization and discrimination were identified as drivers of violent extremism.

The IPOB's grievance in the South East of Nigeria appears to be a near case of marginalization and discrimination brewing violent extremism. The Igbos implicitly in some contexts and explicitly believe that they have suffered injustice from the Nigerian state and that the region has been marginalized disproportionately for over 50 years. It seems, the group has a sense of political dominance from a particular region of the country. Some of the experts interviewed, argued that the Nigeria State neglected the people, as there is humongous underdevelopment, and the wounds of the civil war have not been healed completely, the integration promised after the war seems to have failed to materialise. Others see marginalization as an expression of political corruption.

The South-South agitation that started in the early 90s during the military dictatorship, which later metamorphosed into violent extremism in the late 90s when youth began to take arms against the State and the multinational companies operating in the region. Their grievances were hinged on long-time neglect and underdevelopment of the region. The argument is that the region produces the oil that gives the Nigerian state its 90% foreign earnings thereby contributing to the national revenues, yet it remains underdeveloped due to upstream and downstream corruption of the political elites and senior public officeholders. They, over time, have diverted resources allocated for development to their private pockets, an act some experts have characterized as “privatization of public resources.” Though the Nigerian government since the 90s has attempted measures to address insurgencies in this region, again the processes and implementations of the plan have always been marred with corruption. For instance, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) which was established to manage the development plans of the region, according to some activists, is just a cash cow and a settlement scheme with the highest rate of leadership turnover.

The PIND's Niger Delta Annual Conflict Reports for 2019 and 2020 revealed that there is an increase in conflict risk and violence in 2020.



Dysfunctional Education

Education is described as an instrument par excellence for the social and economic reconstruction of a Nation.

Nigeria has one of the largest populations of poor people in the world after China and India. The dysfunction of education can be attributed to corruption which impacts negatively on productivity, and this is clear in the education sector. The evidence of this is seen in institutions without walls, without roads, with empty workshops, outdated teaching tools, high incidence of examination malpractice, underpaid teachers, and the like, which subsequently impact the quality of graduated students and standard of education offered in Nigeria.

In either legal or illegal activities, education may change the relative pay-offs that young individuals make. It improves hard skills (like literacy and numeracy) and soft skills (such as critical thinking) that are notably crucial to success in the legal labour market. At the core of the argument: education increase productivity, leading to higher earnings in legal enterprises, and consequently raises the opportunity cost of joining a militia or violent extremist groups.

Though there are arguments that there is little reason for optimism that a reduction in poverty or increase in educational attainment will lead to a meaningful reduction in the amount of international terrorism. However, these arguments and other similar findings do not conform with the realities on ground. In Nigeria, there are documented observations that most young people have no prospects in life, and extremists offer them many religious illusions that they are doing the bid of God Almighty, and because they do not have the basic education to understand some of these twisted tenets and principles, they fall victims of these religious incitements. According to the government's 2008 Demographic and Health Survey, less than 23 percent of women and 54 percent of men in northeast Nigeria can read, compared to more than 79 percent of women and 90 percent of men in the south.

A young man is seen from the side, looking out through a lattice window. The window is made of a dark material with a repeating diamond-shaped pattern. Light is streaming through the window, creating a bright, glowing effect. The man's face is partially in shadow, and he appears to be looking towards the right side of the frame. The overall mood is contemplative and hopeful.

Youth Unemployment

Youth is one of the greatest assets that any nation can have. Not only are they legitimately regarded as the partners of today, but also the greatest investment for a country's development. Young women and men are, in particular, recognised as a vital resource whose prospects are inextricably tied to that of their country. They are the valued possession of any nation or region: without them, there can be no future. They are the center of reconstruction and development.

Youth is defined by the United Nations as the age range from 15 to 24 years, but this age bracket is largely considered as too narrow for countries in Africa, given their political, economic, and socio-cultural circumstances. In Nigeria, as in many other African countries, the transition to independent adulthood life, in terms of achieving the economic and social stability that comes with steady employment, may extend into the late twenties and sometimes, beyond. Thus, the African Youth Charter of 2006 defines youth as persons between the ages of 15 and 35 years. On a similar basis, Nigeria's 2009 National Youth Policy chronologically defined youth as persons of age 18 to 35 years.

A study carried out by the National Bureau of Statistics in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth Development in 2021 revealed that the population of youths (15 – 35 years) in Nigeria is estimated to be 64 million. This is 32 percent of the estimated 200 million population of Nigeria. Youth Unemployment Rate in Nigeria increased to 53.40 percent in the fourth quarter of 2020 from 40.80 percent in the second quarter of 2020.

These statistics indicate youth vulnerabilities. Studies have shown that unemployment generates adjuvant socially unapproved social behaviours in society.

Smuggling of Arms

The destabilizing accumulation, illicit transfer, and misuse of small arms and light weapons continue to initiate, sustain and exacerbate armed conflict and pervasive crime. Small arms and light weapons remain a primary tool for armed conflict and violence, and the cross-cutting humanitarian impact of illicit flows remains a serious concern.

Nigeria's political and security challenges, manifested by political violence, terrorist attacks, urban criminality, oil bunkering, ethnic conflicts, community conflicts, and religious conflicts, underpin an excessive demand for Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) by various individuals and groups. This situation, combined with considerable logistical and capacity constraints as well as weaknesses in existing legal and institutional mechanisms, are hampering Nigeria's fight against illicit trade in SALW.

Nigeria's borders are known for the limited presence of security and law enforcement officials. The few that are deployed are poorly trained, work with inadequate and obsolete equipment, and sometimes poorly remunerated. In addition, most border communities have for long been neglected by the government, making it difficult for the government to leverage their position to curtail illicit cross-border activities.

In many countries, widespread corruption, under-resourced services, and weak accountability make borders porous and difficult to control, fuelling various forms of illegal activities such as human and drug trafficking, weapon smuggling, organized crime, and terrorism.

Findings

1. Entrenched corruption also grows with impunity, high-handedness, and repression. This invariably creates a sense of victimization, especially where authorities that are expected to intervene in the issues of the aggrieved or desperately in need of support citizens become hostile officials. This builds up a set of citizens disconnected from the State, who have a built-up sense of betrayal by the system and in some instances do not see the State as a friend but a fiend. Unfortunately, these growing discontents also do not have access to appropriate organs for formal complaints or the wherewithal for seeking redress. The system is extremely skewed

against them and they easily begin to see the system itself as an enemy. Where there emerges around them forces or groups promising to pull down such a decadent system, they easily gravitate towards such.

2. The state of insecurity in the country, the re-emergence of militia groups, mushrooming of bandit groups across the country, and the increase in the number, as well as expansions of operation of armed violent extremist groups, are also traceable to the state of corruption which has become endemic.
3. There seems to be a complete failure in leadership to give effective direction on how to tackle violent extremism. This has created an environment for cynics to continue to misinform citizens.
4. Some citizens opined that there is an over simplicity of corruption as it is limited only to bureaucratic corruption, and the gaps in seeing political corruption as a problem.
5. Corruption is a form of violence against citizens who have been denied their basic amenities.
6. There is a huge gap between the rich and the poor. The few rich individuals are connected to public resources for their private use.
7. Lack of public service delivery to citizens. This is causing so many frustration, and discontent in citizens.

Policy Implications

The policy implications of the findings show that the Nigerian government seems not to be doing enough to address violent extremism. Therefore, its approach may need to change to stop the killings happening across the country.

Poverty is already heightened with a huge inequality gap. A continued gale of violent extremist attacks will increase the poverty levels and exacerbate inequality with women and children disproportionately affected. Holistic policy rejigging would be required because the level of corruption seems to have weakened policy implementations. The underlying cause of this is corruption. It undermines democracy and the rule of law, leads to violations of human rights, distorts markets, erodes the quality of life, and allows organized crime, terrorism, and other threats to human security to flourish.

Agreed, there are policies, laws, and institutions to address corruption, however, the proxy indicators like access to education, health, water, roads, and justice appear not to be materializing in the country. Therefore, citizens are getting more indifferent with deeply rooted apathy, and scepticism about the government's seriousness to address the root cause of our many socio-political problems as well as depressing economic burdens. There appears to be a serious imbalance in the Nigerian socio-political and economic system. Therefore, a quick policy review and intervention are needed to avoid uncontrollable chaos and anarchy.

Recommendations

- The Nigeria government should initiate a national dialogue with a democratic representation of stakeholders across ethnic, religious, and professional lines. A more robust all-inclusive dialogue.
- Nigeria government should review the fight against corruption and measure performance by some proxy indicators of good governance.
- Nigerians should be allowed to decide the kind of government structure that is good for them.
- There should be a holistic approach to the issue of violent extremism.
- Nigeria government should re-enforce good governance at both National and sub-National levels.
- The Nigeria government should address leadership failures and galvanize a collective will to change the leadership approach in Nigeria. This should include a review of the processes that allow leaders to emerge.
- Review the tax regime to favour SMEs.
- Review educational curriculum and balance the criminal justice system.
- The government of Nigeria should annex 40 percent of the youth bracket (18-35) into gross productivity and economic activities.
- The Nigeria Government should develop a detailed National Strategy to address Violent Extremism.
- Citizens should report aliens in their environment.
- Citizens should continue to discourage vote-buying and thuggery.

Conclusion

This brief has pointed out some critical issues that the Nigerian government should take seriously to bring peace to the country. This should not be seen as one of those reports unattended to in the past. In fact, the negligent attitudes of the governments both at the National and sub-National to some reports and white papers may have contributed to why Nigeria is currently in this parlous situation. Nigeria's situation is not helpless yet, a concerted and collective efforts should be galvanised in a more holistic way to address the problem of corruption, and by extension reduce violent extremism. The fight against corruption of government is still not convincing enough to win the trust of citizens.

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