Nigeria and the Perennial Problem of Governance: Explaining State Failure in the Midst of Abundant Resources

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Abstract

Nigeria’s abundant wealth is sufficient to make it one of the effective states in the African continent. However, the excess resources, like the sugar in the blood stream of a diabetic patient, serve no positive purpose for the teeming population. Poverty and hunger are the principal characters of the Nigerian state with attenuated crises affecting the socio-economic well-being of the people. While Nigeria ranks among the highest producers of crude oil in the world market, it also leads in the classification of countries in distress. Corruption and mismanagement of the abundant resources, coupled with the insatiable appetite of the leaders to pillage the country of its potentials for rapid growth. This paper discovered that this malaise was responsible for the failing status of the Nigerian state.

Introduction

Scholars and writers have passed uncomplimentary remarks about Nigeria. Such derogatory descriptions, unfortunately, reflect the nature of the Nigerian state. Odion-Akhaine et al, (2007:10), describe the “Nigerian political turf” as bizarre. Kesselman et al (1996:616), write: “Nigeria today remains essentially an unfinished state characterized by instability and uncertainties.” Ameh (2007) likens the Nigerian state to a diabetic’s patient whose excess sugar in its blood stream served no positive purpose. According to him,

Nigerians are definitely suffering in the midst of plenty, or how do you describe perennial fuel scarcity in a country that is the sixth largest exporter of crude oil; lack of potable water in a country with thousands of kilometres of coastline (when landlocked and arid countries have gone beyond this primordial human need) or is it the problem of power supply in spite of our huge natural gas reserve again reputed to be one of the largest in the world?

To Ayittey (2006:2), ‘Nigeria is a truculent African tragedy’. Sklar et al (2006:100-115) see Nigeria as a country where dysfunctional politics have drained its potentials for greatness and stability. Odion-Akhaine (2009) describes Nigeria as a country that lacks the capacity for change saying

Nigeria is not working. The citizen class is agonising. Two new developments underline this point. One, the fuel queues have returned to the streets of Lagos and many other provincial capitals in the country. Oil, which is the river between, has become a curse on the country and its people. The country's rulers have been unable to manage it and ensure that it reaches the end users. Rather they have managed it to the extent that it enriches their pockets (Odion-Akhaine, 2009).

Kew (2006:23) posits that Nigeria has lost its pride of place in the African continent to corruption, wasteful management of its enormous oil resources and patron-client politics. A data provided by the World Bank in 2005 listed Nigeria as one of the 46 fragile states in the world (Benn, 2005:7). The 2006 UNDP Human Development Index Ranking listed Nigeria as the 159th in the world (UNDP). In
2006, Nigeria was listed as one of the 26 Low Income Countries Under Stress (LICUS) (World Bank). In the 2008 ranking of the the Human Poverty Index for developing countries (HPI-1), Nigeria ranks 80th among 108 developing countries for which the index with the HPI-1 value of 37.3 (UNDP Report, 2008). The HPI-1 focuses on the proportion of people below a threshold level in the same dimensions of human development as the human development index - living a long and healthy life, having access to education, and a decent standard of living. The poverty level is measured by people living below US$1 per day. Presently, Nigeria is one of the 20 poorest countries of the world with over 70 per cent of the population classified as poor and 35 per cent living in absolute poverty (Leigh, 2007). Yet, Nigeria is the world's 8th largest exporter of oil with a current output of 2.3 million barrel per day, set to rise to 4 million barrel per day by 2010 (Foreign and Commonwealth Office). Is Nigeria a fragile or state in failure? With the abundant resources, are Nigerians supposed to be living in poverty? What are the factors responsible for the parlous state of Nigeria? Any hope for a reversal?

This paper seeks to address these issues. In doing this, it is divided into five sections. The foregoing introduction is followed by the conceptual analysis of fragility and state failure. The third section takes a review of the nature of the Nigerian state, and, section four centres on the role of corruption in explaining state failure in Nigeria. The contradiction of Nigeria as a country wallowing in abject poverty in the midst of abundant resources concludes the paper.

**Fragility and State Failure: A Conceptual Exploration**

There are certain characteristics that define a state. These include sovereignty, territory, population, diplomatic recognition, internal organisation and domestic support (Rourke, 2008:168-172). Thus, state is defined by the identifiable features and responsibilities towards the people. The government of the state is expected to consciously strive to ‘instill a sense of community, a common national identity among the peoples they controlled’ (Almond et al, 2004). In all, state exists for *individual betterment* (Rourke, 2008:173). Classical philosophers like Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, were of the opinion that state exist as instrument ‘created for a ‘utilitarian purpose’ whose survival depends on the fulfilment of its practical mission and adherence to the rule of law. Woodrow Wilson (quoted in Rourke, 2008:174), subscribes to this instrumental theory of government. To him, ‘state exists for the sake of the society, not society for the sake of the state’ and that government should not be an end but a means to an end.

However, states in the developing world are susceptible to internal and external strains making it difficult for them to fulfill their core responsibilities (Goldstein and Pevehouse, 2009: 490-491). Ake (2005:32-67) blames this on the penetration of Western capitalism into Africa and the subsequent integration of African economies into the world capitalist system. This facilitated the dependence of their economies on the Western countries. The developing countries, as Goldstein and Pevehouse have
rightly noted, lack independent power to transform their natural potentials to strength. Inspite of the available wealth, these states tend to fail in their ability to create a national community. Though they possess the characteristics of states, yet they fail to deliver the expected public good.

Fragile states are defined by their susceptibility to crises in one or more of their sub-systems. They are particularly vulnerable to internal and external shocks and domestic and international conflicts. In such states, institutional arrangements most often promote crises conditions in the social, political and economic spheres. Economically, stagnation, low growth rates, inequality in wealth, such as access to land, and other means of livelihood are the principal characters of the state (Benn, 2005). In social terms, institutions may promote extreme inequality or lack of access altogether to health or education and other social amenities like water, electricity, among others. On the other hand, the political environment may entrench exclusionary coalitions in power (in ethnic, religious, or perhaps regional terms), or extreme factionalism or significantly fragmented security organisations (Khan, 2002). Fragile states, to the World Bank, are countries with

a significant number of the world's poor people, states that create negative spillovers such as conflict, instability and refugee flow for their neighbours...a country that lacks either the will or the capacity to engage productively with their citizens to ensure security, safeguard human rights and provide the basic institutions for development (World Bank, nd).

These countries “pose the most difficult development challenge, with weak institutions and high risks of conflicts constraining poverty reduction and service delivery for their own populations” (World Bank). Torres and Anderson (2004:3) identify fragile states with difficult environments. Difficult environments are characterised by the inability or unwillingness of the state to harness domestic and international resources effectively for poverty reduction. This definition focuses on the ability of the state to confront the challenges of development and poverty reduction”. Such states are identified by the inability or failure of the government to deliver its core functions to the majority of the people. On the other hand, Benn (2005:7) identifies poverty reduction as the core responsibility of the state. To him,

The most important functions of the state for poverty reduction are territorial control, safety and security, capacity to manage public resources, delivery of basic services, and the ability to protect and support the ways in which the poorest people sustain themselves (Benn, 2005:7).

The state, though an abstraction, is identified by the core functions it performs. Both the ‘empirical’ and ‘juridical’ character of the state must reflect in the performance of these functions. The empirical feature-the ability to project administrative and regulatory power- and the judicial status, have to combine together to give state its meaning (Torres and Anderson (2004:3).

An effective state is expected to perform certain functions such as ability to exercise power to achieve public goods, and for the security and well being of its citizens. States that fail to provide
adequate public goods to their people, including safety and security, public institutions, economic management, and basic social services such as roads and water are classified as fragile operating in a difficult environment (Torres and Anderson 2004:7). Khan (2002) locates the core function of the state in two models of analysis - service delivery and social transformation. Aligning with Torres and Anderson, Khan sees effective state as the one that delivers a range of services such as law and order, public goods, social security and market regulation to the people. He stresses further that the ability of the state to transform the society from the pre-capitalist and pre industrial stage into dynamic and essentially industrial capitalist ones determines the level of effectiveness of the state. Here, state failure is situated within the rubrics of institutional capacity to prevent poverty. State failure, he says, consists of both errors of omission (when state fails to do things that could have improved economic performance), and errors of commission (when the state does things which worsen economic performance). Kegley, Jr. and Wittkopf (2004:209) recognize failed states as countries that lack strong government to preserve order. Such countries are characterized by mismanagement of policies that their citizens, in rebellion, threaten to disintegrate the state. Corruption and administrative failure are spotted as responsible for such restiveness (Kegley, Jr. and Wittkopf 2004:429).

In actual fact, no state, irrespective of its ineffectiveness, would want to be labelled as fragile. To the international community and donor agencies, “most developing countries are fragile in some ways” (Benn, 2005:7). Fragility in this perspective subsumes states “where the government cannot or will not deliver [its] core functions to the majority of its people, including the poor” (Benn, 2005:7). In this respect, fragility is identified by high mortality rate, low level of literate people, poor access to health care services, high infant mortality rate, and very weak economic growth (Benn, 2005:9).

Rotberg (2003) identifies flawed institution, high level of illiteracy, high infant mortality rate, decaying infrastructure, food shortage and hunger, as the characteristic features of fragile states. According to him, while the “poor become more and more impoverished and battered…states offer unparalleled economic opportunity for a privileged few and nothing much for everyone else”. Rotberg’s concern is institutional performance leading to effective delivery of the most crucial social, economic and political goods by the state. Devetak (1996:200) contends that failed states represent empirical cases of states which deviate from the model by failing to display the recognisable signs of sovereign statehood. Andrew Linklater, like Claude Ake, attributes this to the colonialism. According to him,

failed state is a symptom of a sea-change in international society in which many colonies were admitted into the society of states as equal sovereign members despite the evidence that they might be ill-equipped to govern themselves (Linklater, 1996:108).

The states acquired independence without the capacity to satisfy the economic and political needs of the people. But a renowned Nigerian historian, Professor Ade-Ajayi (Ajeluorou, 2009) attributes the
failing problem on the inability of the post colonial states to rebuild the middle-class.

The central character of fragile states, from the above submissions, emphasizes the failure of the state to perform the identifiable functions meant for the promotion of the welfare of the people. This involves unwillingness of the government to harness the available resources for the transformation of the society. This paper, therefore, defines fragile states as those that are unwilling and or unable to mobilize the resources for the promotion of the welfare of the generality of the population. Nigeria presents a case study in this respect, as its abundant resources could not be prudently harnessed for the well-being of the teeming population. Odion–Akhaine et al (2007: 5) have rightly noted that in spite of the enormous resources at the disposal of the Nigerian state, “it is behind poor and smaller countries in Africa” in terms of ranking in development.

A Review of the Nigerian State

Over the years, the Nigerian government has failed to harness the vast human and natural resources at its disposal to break the cycle of poverty and autocracy that has characterized it since independence in 1960. Thus, the Nigerian state has been constantly struggling between the forces of democracy and authoritarianism, ‘the push for development and the pull for underdevelopment, the burden of public corruption and the pressure of accountability’ (Kesselman, et al 1996:616). Apart from this, it has “deviated from the known curve of consolidation to de-consolidation” (Odion-Akhaine et al, 2007: 1). This is understandable. Nigeria is one of the colonial legacies in the African continent. As an offshoot of the colonial praetors, the Nigerian state retains parts of the authoritarian ethos. Rather than being at the service of the people, it is in the service of the ruling oligarchy.

With a low level of system affect, engendered by lack of accountability, the Nigerian state has been unable to meet the needs of the citizens. A combination of colonial legacy of oppression and the post independent mismanagement of the vast resources are the two fundamental factors that plunge the Nigerian state into the depth of political and economic underdevelopment. While colonialism bequeathed weakening economy, the corrupt and self-seeking leadership and poor policy decisions had stifled the economic and political potentials. As Kesselman et al (1996:617) have rightly noted, many Nigeria’s post-independence leaders had been personally more exploitative of the populace than their colonial predecessors. According to Odion–Akhaine et al (2007: 2),

the Nigerian state has continued to pursue its anti-development agenda through extroverted policies of agencies of global governance such as the IMF and world Bank. These policies while conducive to goals of finance capital and their collaborators are counterproductive to that of national independence and development.

Ake (1995:1) has argued that stagnation and regression in governance were partly responsible for state failure in Africa. This, he said, led to, “a rising tide of poverty, decaying public utilities and collapsing infrastructures, social tensions and political turmoil”. Brett (2006:1-7) explains
state failure in Africa in relation to the idea of primary accumulation and neo-patrimonialism. To him, competing elites in the political arena capture state power “using divisive tribal or sectarian identities to build clientelistic support networks, and use that power to extract the resources they need to maintain their support and build capitalist enterprises”. In such a polity, it would be difficult to attain the best for the benefit of the generality of the people as public service remained personalized through clientelism and nepotism. Consequently, access to public office becomes the means of personal enrichment (Chabal and Daloz, 1999: 6). With this, the cycle of destructive processes would be endless since they serve the interests of the political and economic elites of the state. Under such situation, whatever reforms programme would further provide the template for the elites “to secure both renewed legitimacy and access to the new assets” which the apparent liberalization policies made available.

Abati (2007) specifically identifies Nigeria as a country where the political leaders would not allow the institutions of state to function efficiently because this would have made it difficult for them to hold as much power as they do.

It is as if the chief task of governance has been the frustration of public institutions. The effect has been the flowering of the politics of personality with too many so-called leaders wielding the powers of life and death and sounding like the oracle on subjects in which they lack knowledge and competence… We don't have quality schools that can produce the strong breed of human beings that can compete with the best from any part of the world in terms of skills and ideas. To get quality education for your child, you need to send him or her abroad. We want foreign direct investment, but our roads are bad, there is no regular electricity supply, the railway is dead. The starting point for any development agenda is the provision of infrastructure (Abati: 2007).

This situation has made Makinde (2004:14-20), to describe Nigeria as “a big theatre of contradictions and absurdities.”

**Corruption and the Scourge of State Failure in Nigeria**

The Nigerian state is a victim of high-level corruption. This has led to retardation in national development and the prevalence of poverty and hunger. Corruption has been simply defined as the abuse of public power for private benefit (Tanzi, 1998), or what Kaufmann, (1998) calls “privatisation of public policy”. Lipset and Lenz, (2000:112) define it as “effort to secure wealth or power through illegal means-private gain at public expense, or a misuse of public power for private benefit”. The above depicts the story of corruption in Nigeria since independence. Nuhu Ribadu, former Chairman of Nigeria’s Economic and Financial Crime Commission, (EFCC) gave a graphic summary of the situation. According to him, the period was characterised by profligacy “wanton waste, political thuggery and coercion…disrespect for the rule of law…bare faced, free for all looting of public funds through white elephant projects” (Ribadu, 2006).

Going by the quantum of the available human and natural resources, Nigeria should not be among states experiencing fragility. But then, the amazing wealth needed for strength is being used to
pillage the system of its potency for stability and prosperity. Diamond (1990:81) had predicted that
democratic stability could only be guaranteed in Nigeria when the scourge of political corruption is
drastically reduced. According to him,

[C]orruption continues to drain the country’s revenue and developmental potential. Moreover,
it is undermining the willingness of ordinary Nigerians to endure the pain of economic
adjustment when “the gentlemen in power” indulge in an unrestrained, provocative, and
enraging display of wealth of unsubstantiated means (Diamond, 1990:77).

Nigeria is richly blessed with abundant natural resources capable of making it the most
effective state in sub-Sahara Africa. Nigeria, as the sixth largest oil producer in OPEC, has an
estimated proven oil reserve of 36.2 billion barrels, the tenth largest in the world, the eight largest
It also has natural gas reserve of about 182 trillion cubic feet, the seventh largest in the world. Apart
from this, Nigeria’s recoverable coal reserve amounts to 209 million short tonnes (mmst) but produced
less than one per cent because the coal industry suffers from extremely low productivity and high
transportation costs (Library of Congress, 2008). In 2002, oil and gas exports accounted for more than
98 per cent of export earnings and about 83 per cent of federal government revenue. New oil wealth,
the concurrent decline of other economic sectors, and a lurch toward a statist economic model fueled
massive migration to the cities and led to increasingly widespread poverty, especially in rural areas. A
collapse of basic infrastructure and social services since the early 1980s accompanied this trend. By
2002, Nigeria's per capita income had plunged to about one-quarter of its mid-1970s high, below the
level at independence.

Aside from the endemic malaise of Nigeria's non-oil sectors, the economy continues to witness
massive growth of "informal sector" economic activities, estimated by some to be as high as 75 per
cent of the total economy. Oil dependency, and the allure it generated of great wealth through
government contracts, spawned other economic distortions. The country's high propensity to import
means roughly 80 per cent of government expenditures is recycled into foreign exchange (Library of
Congress, 2008). Cheap consumer imports, resulting from a chronically overvalued Naira, coupled
with excessively high domestic production costs due in part to erratic electricity and fuel supply, have
pushed down industrial capacity utilization to less than 30 per cent.

Transport and Transportation and power sectors of the economy were not strong enough to
support a virile growth and development. For instance, between 1999 and 2007, a total of 86.29 billion
naira was expended on rehabilitation of the nation’s railway system (Adisa, 2008). Despite this huge
amount, the rail transport system has been derailed. The railway modernisation project estimated to
cost US$8.3 billion has been stagnated after government had committed a sum of US$250 million
(Babalola, Abah and Babalola, 2009:8). If completed, this transport system would have catered for the
heavy traffic and excessive stress on the roads occasioned by big truck lorries. In fact, transport sector
alone gulped 967 billion naira between 1999 and 2007 (Daniel, 2008). Government officials could not explain how a total sum of 4.717 billion naira generated as revenue from toll-gates across the country was expended. The Federal Road Management Agency (FERMA) expended over 500 billion naira for road rehabilitation, yet, major federal roads are impassable (Adisa, 2008). Lagos-Ore-Benin road, that links the Eastern and the Niger Delta regions to the nation’s commercial centre, have been in sorry state for years. Yet, the mainstay of national economy depends on resources from this part of the country.

The power sector does not fare better. Rather than getting a better deal despite the available resources, the nation deeps more into the crisis. Just last year, the Power Reform Committee set up by the government reported that Nigeria needs US$85 billion and 301 billion naira to provide infrastructure for the supply of electricity and gas (Muogbo, 2008). Without doubt, a huge amount of money had been expended on these projects without tangible results. For instance, the House of Representatives Committee on Power discovered that a total sum of $16 billion was expended on power sector between 1999 and 2007 without commensurate results (Ameh, 2009). In fact, only 40 per cent of the population have access to electricity (Onuorah, 2008; Library of Congress, 2008). Even at that, irregular supply had forced majority of Nigerians and industries to depend on generating sets for electricity. The Power Sector Reform Committee had disclosed that Nigeria has enough gas deposit capable of sustaining uninterrupted electricity supply for 150 years but that a five-year blue-print to revamp the sector would gulp about N10.03 trillion in terms of reviving the existing and new projects to achieve regular power supply (Onuorah, 2008). Already, the power Holding Corporation of Nigeria (PHCN) has been indebted to gas supplier to the tune of N14 billion as a result of inefficiency and corrupt practices. Inspite of President Yar’Adua’s decision to declare a state of emergency in the power sector, the government has been playing politics with the assurance that it would generate 6,000 megawatts of electricity by December 2009 (Ameh, 2009).

Agriculture has suffered from years of mismanagement, inconsistent and poorly conceived government policies, and the lack of basic infrastructure. Still, the sector accounts for over 41 per cent of GDP and two-thirds of employment. Agriculture provides a big chunk of non-oil growth, which in 2006 reached 9 per cent. Nigeria is no longer a major exporter of cocoa, groundnuts (peanuts), rubber, or palm oil. Cocoa production, mostly from obsolete varieties and overage trees, is stagnant at around 180,000 tonnes annually; 25 years ago it was 300,000 tonnes (National Planning Commission, 2004). There has been a more dramatic decline in groundnut and palm oil production. Once the biggest poultry producer in Africa, corporate poultry output has been slashed from 40 million birds annually to about 18 million. Import constraints limit the availability of many agricultural and food processing inputs for poultry and other sectors. Fisheries are poorly managed. Most critical for the country's
future, Nigeria's land tenure system does not encourage long-term investment in technology or modern production methods and does not inspire the availability of rural credit.

Federal and state governments in Nigeria have been alleged to have stolen or wasted over 400 billion US dollars since independence in 1960 (Orji, 2007; Onwuemenyi, 2007). Many of the former state governors have been accused of corruption. In fact, some of them were charged to law courts for prosecution (Eghagha and Ndujihe, 2007; Adewole, 2008; Njoku, 2007; This Day, 16/11/2007; Soniyi et al, 2007:2). This corruption pandemic could be explained through mismanagement of resources, patron–client politics, and bad leadership. For instance, the Nigerian government expended millions of dollars to lobby “Nigerians in the U.S. to encourage them to do business with Nigeria” (Akande, 2007b).

Observers wonder why the Federal Government, which retains a fairly large diplomatic presence in the U.S., will need the services of foreign lobbyists to reach out to its own citizens there. Also, observers are raising questions why the Federal Government is still actively in the business of retaining foreign lobbyists in the United States, paying them hefty sums of money while Nigerian embassies abroad are often cash-strapped and financially insolvent (Akande, 2007b).

In 2007, it was discovered that a foreign company allegedly gave out N767.4 million to bribe officers of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation and others, to secure a contract on the gas project (Nwachukwu and Godwin, 2007:5). Unfortunately, this is a recurring phenomenon in the Nigerian political system. The core issues of development are sacrificed for corruption and wanton mismanagement of resources. For instance, about N18.2 billion donor fund awarded to the Ministry of Education to clear the decay in the sector in the wake of Nigeria’s exit from the London and Paris Clubs of creditors was expended on frivolous media campaigns. Also, N38 billion out of the N65 billion recovered from the loot of the former ruler, General Abacha, was declared ‘missing’ (Uwaleke, 2007).

This mismanagement syndrome has been identified as a major factor responsible for the underperformance of the national economy (African Report, 2006). As such, the fragile nature of the Nigerian state has nothing to do with inadequate supply of product but in the mismanagement of the abundant resources. Over one trillion Naira was said expended on road maintenance and rehabilitation between 1999 and 2007 (Akpeji, 2007). Yet, the deplorable conditions of the Nigerian roads have been inflicting untold hardship on motorists.

As Kew (2006:23) has noted, the Nigerian state “remains trapped at the political crossroads, vacillating between democratic consolidation and the slow road to decay and dissolution”. Rotberg (2003:6-7) has attributed this to the weakness of the country. While government distance itself from serving the interest of its people, the political elites pillage the resources for their private uses. The manifest failure of the Nigerian state reflects in dilapidated infrastructural facilities like roads, potable
water, electricity and health. Though government institutionalised anti-corruption machinery, succeeding presidents were unable or unwilling to attack the heart of the corruption empires of the godfathers. While politicians wrestle endlessly for control of government, most Nigerians suffer from declining health, poor education, and lack of employment standards (Kew, 2006:25). The outcome is the prevalence of rent seekers and individuals with vested interests. Government policies were formulated most often for the benefit of government officials “regardless of whether this would be the best choice for the society as a whole” (Almond et al, 2004:9).

The overriding interest of Nigerian politicians is to use government for their private gains through the control of the spoils of office. Recent events where former principal officers in the government were arrested on the charges of corruption attest to this phenomenon. Though President Yar’Adua pledged to stem the culture of impunity and combat corruption, events seem to have pointed to the weakness of his government to match his words with action (Nigeria First, 2008). This is not surprising. Since independence, Nigeria has been blessed with leaders that were not prepared for office (Abati, 2007; Obadare, 2009:48). Such leaders found themselves in the public arena by accident, and suddenly became important because government position provides an opportunity for bending public policy to their advantage. Obadare, in his assessment of the two-year administration of President Yar’Adua’s, said:

After two years in the saddle, the current administration cannot persuade even the most generous observer that it came into office with any ideas whatsoever as to how to supervise modern economy...there is absolutely no sense that someone is in control, or that whoever that is, that that person realises the sheer enormity of the challenges facing us as a nation. All we get is the same fatuous reassurance that something is being done...Obadare (2009:48)

The practical demonstration of this malaise manifests in the recurring socio-economic and political crises confronting the domestic environment. Igbokwe (2009) sums it up this way:

It’s not that Nigeria is not richly blessed. It is. But the insensitive display of opulence by some of our rulers and the perennial allegations of sleaze against them, call for some reflection on why we are where we are today...In Nigeria, nothing shocks us anymore. Our public officers can steal billions but nothing will happen. They keep getting richer while the majority of Nigerians keep getting poorer. People are dying of hunger and other diseases (Igbokwe, 2009:64).

The elected representatives at the legislative arm of government do not help matters. They are constitutionally mandated to minimise waste and promote good governance through effective oversight of the executive branch. Unfortunately, members were busy exploiting the state to maximise their interests (Igbokwe, 2009:64).

**Patron-Client Politics and Leadership Failure**

Nigeria’s inability to manage the manifest contradictions inherent in its ethnolinguistic composition is a factor that inhibits good governance. Failing attempts to escape the ethnic-security
dilemma, engendered by political centralization have left governance in abeyance. The various nationalities lack unanimity of purpose. To this end, ethnic consideration, most often, pervades the environment of policy process. Thus, political events are viewed from ethnic lens “thereby constraining and aggravating the choice of political elites” (Sklar et al, 2006:102). The consequence is the intense struggle for “ownership and control over the spoils of office” (Sklar et al, 2006:105) for personal accumulation. No wonder, political actors, both the military and civilian individuals who controlled key state posts were fabulously wealthy, while 70 per cent of Nigerians fell into abject poverty (Sklar et al, 2006:105).

The wealthy elites eventually become “godfathers” and “sit atop vast pyramid-structured patronage networks based on regular ‘cash and carry’ kickbacks relationships” (Sklar et al, 2006:105) which expanded the networks of corruption at the expense of national development (African Report, 2006). While their supporters remain impoverished, the godfathers exploit the cleavages for their own ends (Africa Report, 2006).

The country’s history since independence suggests, however, that the politicisation of ethnicity and religion and factional mobilization along these same lines is a direct by-product of the monopolization of power and assets by ruling elites eager to avoid open and fair competition. With Nigeria’s emergence as a major oil producer, pervasive patron-client networks have developed at all levels of government...Unable to obtain their fair share of the country’s wealth; most citizens have been left with two choices: fatalistic resignation or greater identification with alternative hierarchies based on ethnicity, religion or other factional identities (Africa Report, 2006).

The military legacy of lack of checks and balances exacerbated the failure of the Nigerian state “to fulfil most of its major functions and large segments of the public have ceased to expect social services, public utilities, infrastructure, security or administration from it” (Africa Report, 2006). The implication of this is that the dissociation between citizens and government produced a slow-motion version of a failing state by undermining accountability and good governance, fuelling public anger as a result of the attendant poverty and frustration (Sklar et al, 2006: 105). The return to democracy in 1999 notwithstanding, the Nigeria reels in the unfortunate past. This is characterized by widespread corruption and persistent electoral malpractices, absolute reliance on oil receipts and ever-growing patron-client networks. This partly constitutes new challenges that further strengthen the failing profile of the Nigerian state.

Nigerian leaders have penchant for abuse of office and lack respect for the rule of law, but rather promote unequal application of the law. This contributes to the inability of the state to ensure good governance measured by the degree to which the government delivered on its promises of human, civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights (Lawal, 2006). Rather, abuse of public office for private gains, coupled with nepotism and bribery, has put governance in abeyance. The former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Honourable Aminu Bello Masari, attributes this to
the circumstances that led to the emergence of leaders in the political scene. He contends that most of
the leaders were products of fraudulent electoral process. As such, they could not deliver public goods
despite huge monthly allocations accruing to them from the Federation Account (Ebiri, 2006). The
outcome is the multiplicity of poverty. According to him,

poverty breeds frustration and undemocratic forces...Democracy anywhere in the world does
not survive under condition of corruption and electoral fraud. While corruption denies the state
of the resources for development, thus leading to economic and political instability, electoral
fraud brings into power leaders who do not derive their mandate from the people...where a
leader obtains his mandate through electoral fraud, he is most likely not to work in the interest
of the people and this could threaten the survival of democracy (Ebiri, 2006).

In realization of this negative situation, President Umaru Musa Yar’Adua charged his ministers to
make integrity and transparency their creed in government. According to him,

[I]t is therefore imperative that we all conduct ourselves with the highest degree of integrity
and in total and absolute compliance with the rule of law. This Administration will not tolerate
any deviation from, or disrespect for law and order, established rules, regulations and
procedures. I challenge you all to provide leadership with exemplary conduct, upholding and
living up to your oaths of office. As an Administration, we have absolute zero-tolerance for
corruption in all its ramifications. We must never abuse public trust either through
misappropriation, misapplication, or outright stealing of public funds. Anyone who does so will
have the full weight of the law to reckon with. We have a profound responsibility to meet the
legitimate aspirations of the people of this country. This is why you must see your
appointments as both an opportunity to serve at the highest possible level, and a challenge to be
in the vanguard of our dear nation’s restoration. It is not an opportunity for self-aggrandizement
or the pursuit of narrow interests (The Guardian, 27/07/07).

The President demonstrated this when the then Mister of Health was removed over allegations of
corrupt practices (Nigeriafirst, 2008b). Though there had been subsequent events that portend the
commitment of the government to this solemn resolution, however, there are contradictions in the
pursuit of a corrupt free government surrounded by political actors with tainted records of corrupt
practices (Saharareporters, 2008). The government has also been accused of frustrating probes into

Nigeria as a Contradiction: Poverty in the Midst of Abundant

The fundamental reason why people are in government is to see to the welfare and well
being of the masses. In Nigeria, public office holders have abandoned the people and are helping
themselves with public funds. And, as they are getting richer, the masses are being pauperised.
Presently, Nigeria is considered as one of the 20 poorest countries of the world with over 70 per cent
of the population classified as poor and 35 per cent living in absolute poverty (Leigh, 2007, Library
of Congress, 2008). Out of the estimated population of 140 million, 98 million people are living
on less than one dollar in a day (Leigh, 2007, Library of Congress, 2008), a figure more than the
total population of the Niger Delta Region that produces the oil in Nigeria. In fact, government has
admitted that poverty reduction “is the most difficult challenge facing Nigeria and its people and the

As of 1999, it was estimated that more than 70 per cent of Nigerians lived in poverty. Life expectancy was a mere 54 years, and infant mortality (77 per 1,000) and maternal mortality (704 per 10,000 live births) were among the highest in the world. Other social indicators (from 1999) are also weak (National Planning Commission, 2004: 28-30). Ten years after, under a democratic regime that acclaimed to be people oriented, the situation has grown worst. The poverty rate in Nigeria, according to the United Nations Habitat, has increased from 46 per cent in 1996 to 76 per cent as of February 2009 (Ezigbo, 2009). Nigeria was one of the country with the highest infant mortality rate in 2008 (Ukwuoma, Olayinka and Awoyale, 2008). Nigeria has the highest number of urban dwellers but government has failed to utilise the economic potentials in the urban cities, hence the prevalent of poverty (Library of Congress, 2008). Close to 77 per cent of Nigerian city dwellers are living in urban slums.

The 2009 World Report of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHCR) on Nigeria notes that “government corruption and mismanagement robbed Nigerians of their rights to health and education” (UNHCR, 2009). Apart from this, “state security forces continued to commit extra-judicial killings, torture, and extortion. Inter communal and political violence, often fomented by powerful politicians, claimed hundreds of lives” (UNHCR, 2009). Between 1999 and 2009, more than 30,000 people have been killed as a result of inter communal and political related violence apart from the recurring lives lost to religious crises (UNHCR, 2009). More than 10,000 people were killed by the Nigerian police. Only 10 per cent of the population have access to essential drugs, there are fewer than 30 physicians per 100,000 people, more than 5 million adults are estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS, 30 per cent of children under five years are underweight, about half of the population have access to safe drinking water. For instance, in the 2009 report on the outbreak of meningitis, out of the 25,000 suspected cases, and more that 15,000 deaths worldwide, there are 17,462suspected cases in Nigeria, and 960 deaths (UN News Service, 2009).

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1995 estimated that at least half of Nigeria’s teeming population are regarded as undernourished; the 71 million ill-fed Nigerians constitutes 25 per cent of the 200million under nourished Africans alone (Ayobolu, 2007). It is very clear, therefore, that Nigeria is not only grossly underdeveloped, it is poverty ridden. The fact sheet also indicates that Nigeria is far from achieving the objectives of the Millennium Development Goal (UNDP). This poverty status, according to government, is a product of multifaceted problems (National Planning Commission, 2004: 30-33). These include limited growth of investment, widening income inequality, weak governance, economic and social dislocations caused by incessant internal conflicts, neglect of the rural areas, and environmental factors, among others. These
problems and their attendant effects persist in Nigeria. Hence, one cannot but agree with the World Bank ranking of Nigeria as a fragile state. All the social indicators used by the World Bank to assess the effectiveness of the Nigerian state in spite of the acclaimed reforms of the government are enough to confirm the failing status of Nigeria.

Nigeria is billed to earn US$12 billion per annum from LNG in 2009. However, gas flaring, which in 2001 represented a quarter of the world's flaring, was expected to cease by 2008. Nevertheless, this deadline has been shifted several times (Young, 2009, Awhotu, 2008). Nigeria records a loss of US$2.5 billion to gas flaring annually (Young, 2009). Apart from the financial implication, gas flaring constitutes health hazards to the people. Flaring according to health experts, “can lead to leukaemia, asthma and premature death: and it causes acid rain which acidifies lakes and streams and damages the environment” (Young, 2009). In fact, critics have described government's continuous shifting of the date for the cessation of gas flaring as a bad signal to the long-suffering people of the Niger Delta (Ogbodo, Okoronkwo and Ebiri, 2008). Nigeria is an oil producing country that lacks the ability to maintain functioning refineries. Government records an annual loss of N11.5 billion through importation of about 27,000 tonnes of essential oils (Hassan, 2008). Sad enough, the political elites as well as government officials exploit the poverty level of the people and the precarious political environment to advance their selfish interests (Kew, 2006: 23).

**Prospects for a Change?**

The categorization of Nigeria as a fragile state does not mean anything to Nigerians. All they know is that this country used to be much better than what it is in terms of infrastructure, governance, security, employment, education, health and social amenities, among others, though the fear of humiliation by the military was feasible. But then, democracy, since 1999, was expected to change things for the better and to improve the lives of Nigerians. So far, the reverse is the case. The political gladiators in their quest for power have turned the political environment into another theatre of absurdities.

In the face the overwhelming statistics and feasible features of poverty in the country, government officials continue to defend failure of governance. For instance, Nigeria’s Coordinator of the National Programme on the Eradication of Poverty (NAPEP), Magnus Kpakol, has insisted that the present “poverty rate in Nigeria may be in the 50 percent range” (Business Day, 2009) arguing that the UNDP’s rating of 70 per cent was wrong. Exceptionally, the governor of Ondo State, Olusegun Mimiko, admits that the high poverty rate was real. He said that Nigerians were suffering in poverty because of mismanagement of the available mineral and human resources needed for real development (Adeshina, 2009). This paradox of plenty reflects in the overall national development. While 80 per cent of the oil and gas revenues goes to the government, only one per cent of the population benefits thereof as a result of corruption (Library of Congress, 2008).
An empowered civil society could go a long way in compelling the government to adhere to the constitutional provisions in respect of promotion of public welfare, goods and services. Sections 16(1b) and 16(2d) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provide that, government should control the national economy in such manner as to secure the maximum welfare, freedom and happiness of every citizen on the basis of social justice and equality of status and opportunity. Not only that, provision of suitable and adequate shelter, suitable and adequate food, reasonable national minimum living wage, old age care and pensions, and unemployment, sick benefits and welfare of the disabled are mandatory rights of all the citizens. From all indications, it is obvious that government at all levels have failed to meet the aspiration of this constitutional provision which they sworn to uphold. In the face of collaboration between the two political branches of government to deny the citizens of their rights, the civil society can hold unto this statutory provision to engage the government in ensuring its implementation. Nigerian citizens should explore the democratic environment to demand for their rights and reject palliative measures that promote the selfish interests of the political elites. More importantly, there is the need to nurture democratic governance whereby the people can make their leaders to be accountable.

Fundamental to enlarging these choices is building human capabilities—the range of things that people can do or be in life. The most basic capabilities for human development are to live long and healthy, to be knowledgeable, to have access to the resources needed for a decent standard of living and to be able to participate in the life of the community. Many other available choices are capable of having spill over effect on the African continent. These are the expectations of the people from the government. Failure to meet up with these needs have been responsible for the cycle of crises that have engulfed the Nigerian state. This is why the words of President Yar’Adua, most especially, the Seven-point agenda of his government, should be merged with action. This cannot be in the realm of self serving government officials who are feasibly detached from the plight of the people. To this end, there is the need for a change of attitude by the government rather than rebranding poverty and failure with corruption and impunity in high places.

The vision 2020 expected to be midwived by the seven-point agenda would remain a mirage if high level corruption persists in government. Already, the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) has noted that systemic corruption in the political and economic arena was responsible for the stunted growth and development. The continent’s self-monitoring mechanism established by the African Union (AU) states that this problem “has held back economic growth and development and frustrated incentives to align budgetary allocations with development priorities” (afrol News, 2008). Top government officials agree that corruption has contributed to a large measure of broken promises dashed hopes and shallow dreams that characterises the polity (afrol News, 2008). Then,
where is the hope for a vision 2020 when the wealth from the energy sector could not engender socio-economic development?

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20