
Nigerian Youths: New Trends in Human Security Challenges since the 21st Century

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Abstract

Recently, human insecurity has been one of the most discussed issues in Nigeria. Every day if people are not killed or abducted by Boko Haram, they are killed by bandits or Fulani terrorists or gunmen of unclassified group. Insecurity has been a bane to our development. It was not like this before the 21st century. There were armed robbery, assassinations but they were not as alarming as they are today. Kidnapping is a familiar concept but was not common in Nigeria, but in the Middle-East. Today, the trend of human insecurity has changed, its sophistication and the use of weapons too have taken a new colouration. Human insecurity has manifested itself through kidnapping, armed robberies, political assassinations, terrorism, ethnic and communal conflicts and other forms of violence. These are organized crimes that are being facilitated by the youths. The paper major argument is that youths unemployment, poor or lack of youth empowerment, greed are the principal causes of insecurity. The paper proffers that arms should be controlled. Arms should always be allowed only to those authorized by law. Government at all levels should create jobs through building of labour intensive industries; provide energy (power) for small and medium enterprises to thrive; empower the youths to be self-employed and encourage them to be patriotic. Youths should have access to good and free education, access to free or affordable medical facilities. The paper uses historical analysis as its methodology.

Keywords: *Security, Human Security, Youths and Trends in Security Challenges*

Introduction

One of the vexed issues usually discussed by Nigerians is the issue of insecurity and youth unemployment. It has become a great burden to Nigerian State because security of lives and property is at the epicenter for human and economic development of a state; viable and productive youths are the heart-beat and future of any state. In this connection, it denotes that if security of lives and property and productive youths are wasted through any means, the hope of such a state is dashed. Indeed, the youths hold the security network of any state not only by being enlisted in the military, police or any paramilitary force for the defence of the state, but in the productive sectors such as food and its security among others. The youths have the key to peace and stability, they make things happen and can even change the course of a nation's historical growth and development. For instance, in 2011, the youths in some countries in North Africa and indeed Arab world changed the course of their history through agitation for their improved welfare through employment which later led to an uprising popularly referred to as Arab Spring that brought down governments in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, etc (Gidado, 2012).

However, the contentious issue in Nigeria is that the economic and financial experts such as Professor Akpan Horgan Ekpo, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and financial power houses such as the Central Bank of Nigeria, the World Bank have confirmed that Nigeria is the largest economy in Africa. The progression is fine and very encouraging and there are lots of good expectations, but why are we in this ugly situation. Youths are unemployed and underemployed, industries are closing shops and insecurity of lives and property is soaring on daily basis. What a state with very high hope but without hope.

The question begging for answer is: in an economy that is the largest in Africa because it shows growth and is said to be doing well, why is the unemployment rate so high and the standard of living within the population so low? In economic parlance, growth in an economy spells decrease in unemployment and improvement in the standard of living of the people (Salvatore, 1995, Hussain, 2004; Todaro and Smith, 2009). Now, there is very high youth unemployment, high illiteracy rate, very poor standard of living, low life expectancy, great poverty in the land, where is the growth? It is this state of affairs that is giving rise to the insecurity challenges, the youths are on the front burner of this insecurity.

Concept of Security

The term “security” lacks a precise definition though it is a word commonly used by all manner of persons. Security is a state of mind, not necessarily an objective state of being. It describes how people feel, not whether they are justified in feeling that way. It depends on the perceptions that people have of their environment, not necessarily on an objective view of that environment. Imobighe (1985) perceives security as a feeling of being protected, and a feeling of freedom from dangers, fear, anxiety, oppression and unwarranted violence. Therefore, security is all about human beings. Indeed, for human beings to be secure other aspects of security must be optimal and encompassing – food security, environmental security, economic security, social security, space security, etc. According to Soroos in Collins (2007), contemporary security studies, security is the assurance people have that they will continue to enjoy those things that are most important for their survival and wellbeing. While McNamara, a one-time US Secretary of defence during President John F. Kennedy administration and later President of the World Bank, perceives security as development; that security is not all about military force, though it may involve it, security is not traditional hardware; though it may include it, security is development and without development there can be no security (McNamara, 1968). Here McNamara perceived security because of the period – at the time he came out with the concept, the world was enmeshed in cold war. Thus, he thought of the measure that would be advantageous to human development especially the developing economies that have little or no business with the cold war issues. Therefore, security is the feeling of the people within the nation of being protected from fear, anxiety, violence, oppression, unwarranted restriction.

Understanding Human Security

The term – human security apparently had its global origins in policy statements emanating from the United Nations in the mid-1990s and to be specific in the 1994 United Nations Development Programmes (UNDP) Report. In this document, human security is described as a condition where people are given relief from the traumas that besiege human development. Human security means, first safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and depression. Secondly, it means protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life – whether in homes, in jobs or in communities (Kerr, 2007). Nnoli (2006) posited that the UNDP pioneered the concept of human security under which it identified seven aspects: economic, health, food, environmental, personal, community and political security. He further estimated that a person in a developing country is 33 times more likely to die as a result of structural violence or social neglect (for example, preventable disease and malnutrition) than as a result of inter-state war. Ensuring human security, according to Kerr (2007) and Nnoli (2006) it requires a seven-pronged approach to address economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political security.

Human security in its broadest sense embraces more than the absence of violent conflict. It encompasses human rights, good governance, access to education and health-care and ensuring that each individual has an opportunity and choice to fulfill his or her potential. A step in this direction is also a step towards reducing poverty, achieving economic growth and preventing conflict. Also linked is freedom from want, freedom from fear, and the freedom of the future generation to inherit a healthy natural environment (Akpan, 2016).

The Youths

In Nigeria and perhaps in some other climes, it is difficult to explain who the youths are? This is so because, many people see the concept quite differently. On the economic production and rating within the system, Akpan, H. Ekpo, a professor of economics conceptualizes youths as persons between the ages of 17 and 35 years (Niyi, 2011; Ekpo, 2012; FIFA, 1985). This age bracket is supposed to be strong as well as able to give and take the best society offers. It is not surprising therefore, that during the dubious Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, those who were shipped to the Americas and Europe to work under harsh and in-human conditions were basically youths. The infrastructure built, and by extension the development of the United States of America (USA) and Europe, for instance, were undertaken with slave labour (Williams, 1964; Uya, 2005; Ekpo, 2011).

In the areas of social interaction, the world football body, Federation of International Football Association (FIFA) defines youths as people between the ages of 17 and 20 years. The United Nations defines youth “as persons between the ages of 15 and 24 (Obedode, 2011). On the other hand, the Nigerian constitution defines youths as people between the ages of 18 and 30 years. It explains the fact that at 18 years, one can contest or vote for or vie for an elective position of office in governance. By this, it is meant that the 18 years bracket by the constitution is the age of maturity, reasoning ability to take independent decisions by one self. However, recently the Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development on May 24, 2019 launched the Revised National Youth Policy, 2019 with youth stakeholders in Akure, Ondo State. The new policy placed the new age classification of youth from existing grade of 18 – 35 years to 15 – 29 years. The review is informed by practical analysis and the need to promote the appropriate targeting of desired beneficiaries of intervention programmes for the youth rather than adults masquerading as youths. This age classification sets Nigeria apart from other countries on the continent that align with the age classification in the African Youth Charter of 18 – 35 years (The Punch, May 28, 2019, p. 20). The Ibibio ethnic nationality sees youth as young people between 5 and 25 years (Nigeria Constitution; Mfon, 2012; Nkenta, Idionomfonabasi, 2012). Nigeria's National Youth Development Policy document as quoted by Akpakpan (2016), sees youths as those citizens between the ages of 18 and 35 years.

Trends in Security Challenges in the 21st Century

What appears to be a new trend in the security challenges of this century may not necessarily be that, there is that wide difference from the 20th century phenomenon. The main difference is the scale and dimension. So the issues would be discussed side by side to elucidate the main digestion from one another.

The great threat and challenge to this nation comes from the North-East and North-West regions of Nigeria. Plausibly the location of northern Nigeria makes it a corridor for armed men and terrorists to have a field day. This is so because of the porous nature of the area that has about 1,140 illegal routes extending from Cameroon to Niger Republic, and about 80 legal entry points as at 2014. Meanwhile, there were insurgents in the North-East and North-Central Nigeria, but perhaps were not taken seriously by the Nigerian state. However, the crackdown on the insurgents came on the heels of the murder in cold blood of more than 50

policemen and operatives of the DSS by Ombatse, a religious cult in Nasarawa State. The security men were ambushed by the group in Alakyo village in that State. A day before the Nasarawa incident, Bama, one of the towns in Bornu State was the scene of horror as a result of the activities of Boko Haram. Boko Haram unleashed mayhem on troops, prisons, army and police barracks. At the end of the confrontation no fewer than 50 people including soldiers, policemen and the insurgents died. Before then about 180 people died at Baga in Bornu when security operatives confronted the insurgents in a gun duel (The Source, May 27, 2013).

Moreover, Boko Haram terrorists and insurgents seem determined to establish control and authority over part of Nigeria and perhaps to progressively overwhelm the rest of the country. In many places, they had destroyed the Nigerian flag and other symbols of state authority and in their place hoisted strange flags suggesting the exercise of alternative sovereignty. The new trend was (is) that the security agents who were staking their lives to protect the country have become the targets of criminals who now kill them at will. It means the security agents who were prey to these criminals were policemen, secret service officers, soldiers etc. Boko Haram became hydra in the three northern states of Bornu, Yobe and Adamawa, thus forcing President, Goodluck Jonathan to declare a state of emergency in those areas (The Source, May 27, 2013). Boko Haram have killed over 100,000 people between 2009 and 2020 and have displaced over 7 million from their homes. In spite of the violent experience in Nigeria after the civil war there has not been a time when people were internally displaced for more than a year or so. But some Nigerians in the North-East, North-West and central Nigeria have been displaced internally or are refugees in the Cameroon and Niger republics for more than eight years. This is a new trend to human security in Nigeria.

Indeed, another blood thirsty group emerged in the North-West Nigeria terrorize Sokoto, Zamfara, Kaduna, Katsina and making life unbearable for the people. They are called bandits – their origin is unknown. Some are saying they are foreigners while some are of the opinion that they are Nigerians, but the fact is that they are young vibrant youths who rake havoc on their fatherland. They wield sophisticated weapons, plundering farmlands, killing people – young and old – and thousands of people displaced. However, governor Aminu Masari recently declared that his government had disappointed the people because he has run out of breath in protecting them. He says:

“I don't know what to tell them (referring to the people of the state). I cannot look at them in the face because we have failed to protect them, contrary to our pledge to ensure the security of lives and property throughout the stay.” (The Punch, Thursday, June 18, 2020, p. 3).

What is really common is that the bandits attack is usually characterized with loss of lives, animal rustling, while women and young girls are either sexually abused or kidnapped and houses burnt.

Killer Herdsmen and Human Security Challenges

Before 2015 the relationship between farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria was relatively cordial. This did not mean there was no misunderstanding between them over some issues. Sometimes cattle would eat up crops, but that was quickly settled amicably. But about 2015 the relationship became soar because the cattle herders did not respect the rights of farmers. The herders openly grazed on peoples farms, and when confronted by the owners of the land, they would kill the farmers, and some instances abduct and rape the women. This has been going on without restraint from the law enforcement or security operatives. But where the security operatives intervene, such intervention was a sham because the herders would not be arrested neither would they be cautioned in any manner against a repeat of the act. So, these herdsmen have wasted human lives and created orphans and by extension led to displacement of people from their

communities. It is common in Benue, Plateau, Niger and Adamawa States. The Punch Editorial of June 18, 2020 observed that:

Painfully, these herdsmen who brazenly wield AK 47 rifles and other weapons violate the Firearms Act 2004, which prohibits certain categories of arms and ammunition in the hands of individuals and makes it unlawful to possess lethal weapons without licence. The Fulani herdsmen do not only kill or burn down communities; they rape and kidnap Nigerians, irrespective of their class, age or profession. It is appalling that the Federal Government has not recognized the murderous Fulani herdsmen as terrorists, despite the global Terrorism Index ranking of them as one of the five most dreadful terror groups in the world. GTI's tally in 2018 indicated that they killed 1,700 Nigerians (The Punch, June 18, 2020, p. 19).

Meanwhile, the figure given was in 2018, today it is much higher and there is no hope that it would soon end. All these are carried out by youths and the impact is enormous especially in farming communities whose source of livelihood is entirely farming. Besides, it has spread fear and distrust among indigenous people.

Meanwhile, challenges such as armed robberies, kidnapping, assassinations, terrorism, ritualism and other forms of security indices were there. Armed robberies are not a new phenomenon in the Nigerian State. Armed robberies were experienced mainly in the southern states of Nigeria – in Lagos and Bendel (today Edo and Delta States). Like any other violent means they used to rob with impunity. They were very violent, and the first reported armed robbery incident that captured local and international attention was when about 16 armed men were killed through firing squad in Port Harcourt in Rivers State after the Civil War. Since then killing of armed robbers by firing squad became part of the society until it was abrogated in the 1980s. After the Civil War arms were readily available, and life was a little difficult for most families because of the effect of the war. Some youths then resorted to making ends meet through crime. Indeed, the criminal minded youths formed themselves into a terrorist band and began their nefarious activities. Some of those famous armed robbers at the time were Anini in Bendel (now Edo and Delta), Oyenisi of Lagos. Their targets were banks and other firms, and sometimes individuals that were financially wealthy. The robbers used guns that were sophisticated by that era standard (Newswatch, September 29, 1986; Newswatch March 12, 1990).

The new trend is that armed robbers are found in every state in Nigeria. They kill and maim innocent people in homes, banks, highways and everywhere. Like in the old trend, usually police and their stations are targets – because once the police station is attacked there is that diversion on the part of the police – they become demobilized, hence the armed men then would face their targets. The recent attack of a police station at Nsulu in Kogi State is a case in point. Besides, the armed robbers do not only use sophisticated weapons such as AK 47, in most instances they use grenade. They would go with generators to facilitate the opening of banks vaults and other places of their interest. In the process security operatives, bank customers and others are usually killed.

Today, armed robbers have made lives very difficult; our towns and villages are no longer safe – Kogi-Abuja, Abuja-Kaduna roads are death traps for motorists and passengers. In Owerri, Umuahia, Port Harcourt, Benin, Sokoto, the story is the same. It is really difficult to really have the number of people whose lives have been terminated by the activities of armed robbers.

Kidnapping

Kidnapping was unknown in the Nigerian state not until the late 1990s when it was introduced by the youths of the Niger Delta. The youths were pressing home their demands for the federal government to look into the degradation of the environment by the multinational companies in the process of oil exploration and exploitation. For some reasons the federal government was slow to act on their demands, to draw the federal government attention, some youths began to abduct or kidnap white oil workers and later they extended to others. The idea paid off. However, the federal government acceded to their demands, and they began to withdraw and call-off their activities for peace to reign. That was the scenario upto the time the Goodluck Jonathan administration came on board.

Nonetheless, kidnapping became a business under the Jonathan administration, its root again was traced to Akwa Ibom and Abia States. Youths kidnapped for ransom. What started as a 'child's play' has now become part of the people's culture. Every part of Nigeria has experienced and is still experiencing it; the youths wield dangerous weapons and their captors are taken to either forests or houses away from the public. Contacts were made later with the families for ransom. Their demands are always in millions of Naira. Many people have been killed in the process whether ransom was paid or not. It has become a new trend because it is now seen as part of our culture with very high impact factor – on internal trade, farming, recreation and even tourism. In all kidnappers do not select their captors, old and young people, poor and rich, ministers and non ministers of God; it has become a burden on the society.

Ritual Killings

Ritual killings have been part of the society for a long period, since the traditional priests usually make use of human parts for their sacrifices. That had been so before the modern age. But ritual killing has returned fully and it is making headlines everywhere. One of such instances was the Otokoto Hotel incident in Owerri. Otokoto ritual killing is symbolic, an 11 year old boy, Ikechukwu Okoronkwo's headless corpse was exhumed in the premises of the hotel. The proprietor of the hotel Innocent Duru was said to be behind the whole scene. Ritualists are everywhere especially in places such as Lagos, Edo, Akwa Ibom, Anambra, Delta, Ogun, etc. Ritual killing is not a 21st century business, it has been there, but the speed and ruthlessness in dimension is intense and alarming (Newswatch, October 19, 1998).

Political Assassinations

Political assassination is not a novelty in the political history of Nigeria. Many have been assassinated during the first and second republics. There were high profile assassinations such as Harry Marshall of Peoples Democratic Party, Bola Ige of the same party. Bola Ige goes down in Nigeria's political history as the only serving minister to be assassinated in office. He was killed in his Ibadan home by unknown assassins. Many youths today are being hired by desperate politicians who arm them to do their bidding. These youths are rewarded handsomely when their tasks have been accomplished. A recall could also be made of the assassination of Dele Giwa, a Newswatch Editor through a parcel bomb. Today, many are still afraid even to act when and where necessary for fear of being eliminated by agents of death (Newswatch Magazine, November 10, 1986; NewsAfrica, January 14, 2002).

Conclusion

There are many driving forces especially among youths in this country that make them to take to violent actions such as terrorism, kidnapping, armed robbery among other things. The government and well-to-do Nigerians need to assist address these ugly situations. Many youths are not educated, hence they become prey to Islamic extremists who recruit them and indoctrinate them on things that are utopia. They are easily

convinced and they take up arms against the state. Youths should be made to have compulsory education at least to the secondary level. On the whole the messengers of violence, the apostles of militancy and kidnapping are from uneducated class of the society. If they are educated they would learn to be patriotic. In addition, youths should be educated not to be greedy. Greed too is responsible for armed robbery, kidnapping and involvement in cultism and cult related violence such as ritualism. Over ambitious youths want to drive big cars, own mansions and engage in politics just to make names. To achieve it they engage in all dubious means of making money at the expense of peaceful relationship with neighbours and ethnic nationalities. It is good to be ambitious but not to the detriment of others – to live and enjoy their lives. Living 'big' and enjoying life should not be in a haste but gradually for a better living. For armed robbery and kidnapping, there should be capital punishment for the offenders. There should also be capital punishment for the Fulani herdsmen who abduct, rape and kill people in the process of doing their business of transhumance. Besides, they should also be discouraged from wandering with their animals as that was an old practice over the past century. They should adopt range system.

There are several economic structures that are untapped in the country. Such structures are found in the agricultural sector, manufacturing, service sectors such as tourism and telecommunication. These sectors should be adequately explored to create jobs for the teeming youths. Youths are the epicentre of the development of nations. Productive youth age is an asset to the nation. Nigerians need to be taught how to be patriotic. The ethical and attitudinal departments should, as a matter of urgency, commence educating Nigerians through jingles, billboards, advertisements, etc, on the negative vices in the Nigerian State and ways of correcting them. The security operatives especially the police have a duty to the nation - protection of lives and property. They should be motivated in many ways through good salaries and allowances so that they do not collude with criminals to undermine the state. They should be sent on periodic training and retraining and equipped with modern security equipment to make them function optimally. Armed robbers, kidnapers, terrorists, cultists and other undesirable elements are living with us and in our neighbourhoods, one should feel free to report these bad eggs to law enforcement agents – so that we can live in peace and for a nation to prosper.

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