INSECURITY AND GIRL-CHILD EDUCATION IN NIGERIA[i]

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Abstract:

Insecurity is on the hot plate globally as ease of transportation and community facilitate movement of persons and ideas across national boundaries sometimes in real time. It is a phenomenon which spans the physical, psychologically, economic, and other aspects of the individual and extends to the community. Nigeria has had a large dose of it in recent time, from insurgency to kidnapping, robbery, social media, and so on. The girl-child, the path to the next generation, is particularly vulnerable, reason measures are needed for her protection. Official action is required now, particularly in the area of social media and electronic communication before the menace grows out of proportion.

Keywords: insecurity, girl-child education, Nigeria

Introduction

There is no gainsaying that security, or lack of it, is at present taking an out-sized proportion of time, attention, and resources of governments and nations around the world. That Pope John Paul II was attacked which led to the development of the Pope mobile, a special vehicle to convey the Pope around crowds, meant that religious sanctity can no longer be guaranteed. Several Moslem leaders have been bombed out of the world by fellow Moslems.

On 29th September 2015, United States (US) President Barack Obama hosted and chaired an international forum on terrorism. Even Japan that has had no standing army since the end of World War II recently passed a law authorizing the setting up of a combat army. The impetus was likely a result of the beheading of a Japanese by the

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militant group, Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). It is not even certain whether the recent "accidents" in Saudi Arabia were indeed accidents. Is there indeed any country in the world that is absolutely free from insecurity?

In Nigeria, citizens are learning to live with insecurity which is verily competing with power outage as part of the daily fare. Once something – a rumor, news, gun shot, a punctured tyre, and even a scream by somebody in a neighborhood – makes peoples heartbeat to increase precipitously, insecurity is on duty.

Nigeria – Brief Overview

The World Bank (2015) indicates that Nigeria's current population is 173 million, making the country the most populous in Africa and the 9th most populous country in the world. The country hosts 47% of the people of West Africa, is the 6th largest exporter of crude oil in the world and has the largest deposit of natural gas in Africa. Following a revaluation, the country is the richest nation in Africa at present.

With respect to education of children, United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) (n.d.) indicates that 40% of Nigerian children between the ages of 6-11 years are not attending primary schools with the North recording the lowest school attendance particularly for girls. Meanwhile, 45% of the nation's population is made up of young people below the age of 15 years. If Nigerian population is 173 million and 45% are under 15 years, it means that about 77.9 million Nigerians are below 15 years of age ; and if about 40% of that number are not attending primary schools, it means that about 31 million Nigerian children may end up as illiterates. These can by themselves become sources of insecurity.

Perspectives of Insecurity

Insecurity is the antonym of security. It represents or describes both a state of mind and a physical situation. People, and even animals and in recent time, inanimate things such as historical monuments and sites face insecurity arising from the activities of human beings. The idea of human beings need be noted, for natural disasters may not be regarded as sources or harbingers of insecurity since they are 'natural' anyway, are not regular, and can, except in the case of earthquakes, be predicted and avoided.

Whenever people have a feeling of self-doubt, or feel vulnerable and susceptible to injury or harm particularly for a sustained period, insecurity is at work. It need not be physical threat to harm or even existential threat of a corporate variety such as the nation of Israel is made to feel by Iran and other neighbours. An emerging or subsisting threat to one's comfort, physical, psychological, emotional wellbeing and related others

tantamount to insecurity. This is why in administration, one talks of security of tenure with respect to jobs. Whenever and wherever people feel that they cannot be certain of not being harmed whether physically or psychologically or emotionally, there is insecurity. Insecurity in this paper is viewed from a wide perspective.

Katsina (2012) reviewed the state of insecurity in Nigeria and submitted that it is a concomitant of the "*deep and structurally entrenched crisis of development that creates conditions for inequality, poverty, and unemployment.*" This line of reasoning was trumpeted for some time during the tenure of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan as Nigerian President as the Boko Haram group kept creating tension and insecurity across Nigeria. Katsina (2012) suggests national cum international effort to "*stem the drift*" noting that the trend is reversible, meaning that if inequalities, poverty, and unemployment are tackled, insecurity will be eliminated.

It is not wrong to look at the issue of insecurity from a developmental perspective. What cannot be ascertained is whether structural reasons that have to do with the national economy provide sufficient and enough reasons for bloodletting. How does one explain the fact that the leadership of Boko Haram has refused to negotiate with the Federal Government of Nigeria on economic platform that militants in the Niger Delta did and were sent for training and given jobs? Are economic dissatisfaction and equalities the rationale for the activities of Al Qaeda and ISIS?

Crane (2007) of Council on Foreign Relations and Eme and Onyishi (2011) however agree with Katsina on the role of personal economics on insecurity in Nigeria. Crane (2007) submits that the inability of the Federal Government of Nigeria to deliver basic services to citizens is a prime cause of insecurity alongside religious fighting and violent attacks in the Niger Delta. She notes that 57% of Nigerians lived below the poverty line of $1 a day by 2007. Eme and Onyishi (2011) tag the economic aspect "*wobble theme*" in their exposition on the issue of insecurity in Nigeria. Fintell (2015) adds another angle to the type copy of insecurity: regionalized insecurity in which there is:

- Insurgency in the North
- Kidnapping in the East
- Ritual killing in the West
- Political assassinations nationwide

The implication of above is that there are patterns of occurrences which can be studied for purposes of designing control measures. This does not imply that certain types of insecurity occurrences are restricted to certain regions. For instance, in September 2015, the Obrikom community in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area in Rivers State was temporarily deserted because some hooded youths – male and female – invaded the community, killed and robbed and withdrew into forests telling people

that they are receiving training in camps for further action. This appears to be an insurgency.

Oluwa (2014) presents a fairly long list of types, causes, and effects of insecurity in Nigeria. For the types, he lists the following:

i)   Militancy in the Niger Delta Region

ii)   Clashes between Fulani herdsmen and farmers

iii)   Ethnic conflicts

iv)   Religious conflicts

v)   'Cold war' among 'ethnic nationalities'

vi)   'Area boys' syndrome

vii)   Gang conflicts and cult wars

viii)   Kidnapping

ix)   Robbery

x)   Mob attacks and lynching of suspected criminals (an act which could be premeditated)

xi)   Ritual killings involving innocent people

xii)   Police brutality

xiii)   Extra judicial killings

Above issues raise conditions of insecurity because they could affect anybody. Even road journey that in the past used to be a source of relaxation and education have now become very hazardous because of mob attacks, robbery, kidnapping, police brutality, and the precarious nature of roads.

The listing of causes of insecurity by Oluwa (2014) is also fairly exhaustive and instructive. He lists the following:

a)   Hunger/poverty (a hungry man, as an adage holds, is an angry man)

b)   Illiteracy and ignorance

c)   Unemployment

d)   Systemic corruption

e)   Income inequality

The effects of insecurity, Oluwa (2014) notes, include increase in the quantum of internally displaced persons; political, social, and economic disruptions; and slow economic growth. All of above impact on the humans that occupy locations experiencing insecurity. Unfortunately, the most vulnerable are children and in particular, the girl child.

Insecurity and the Female Gender

Miss Malala Yousafzai of Pakistan who was shot by Taliban gunmen on the way to school in 2012 and for her advocacy on girl-child education generally won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014. This is a beautiful end to an established case of insecurity visited on girl children in Pakistan and other nations including Nigeria where western education is said by misguided Moslem adherents to be wrong. The interesting thing is that these persons use the products of Western education to prosecute their war of attrition on the society including persons that are adherents of the same religion. Boko Haram for instance means "*western education is sin*."

In South Africa, rape, from routine rape to "*corrective rape*" (on lesbians by 'straight' males) is so common place it no longer makes news. It is held that a woman is raped every 36 seconds in South Africa (Itano, 2003) while one in every four males is said to have been involved in rape (Smith, 2009). India has been making news as young women are frequently brutally and mortally raped. The saga of the Chibok girls in Nigeria remains unresolved. How, then, can girls go to school when they are uncertain that they will not be violated and even killed?

If we go back into time, women have for millennia been treated as second rate human beings. As at date, it is still unacceptable for women to drive cars in Saudi Arabia and even in the world's number one democracy – the United States of America - women still receive salaries that are below those of their male counterparts and voting in elections was secured after a long battle. Interestingly Nigeria started from independence to accord women equal rights. Ubong (2003) has detailed the deprivations of women from ancient times to modern times.

In the area of education, Wokocha (1995) notes that culture is women's number one enemy in Nigeria. In the recent past, parents who had minimal income would allocate what they had to the male children. After all, educated or not, females would end up as mothers and cooks. Certainly, a cursory review would reveal a drastic change as increase in income and more enlightenment have seen more girls in schools, in some areas, the population of girls in schools exceeding that of boys.

Insecurity and Effect on Girl Child Education

Which parent is happy to let a child leave the safety and comfort of home to face dangers on the way to school or while in school? Certainly none; yet girls still manage to attend schools in spite of the dangers. In Nigeria, insecurity as it affects girl children can be put into two broad groups:

i) Institution-Based Insecurity

In educational institutions and in particular at post-secondary levels, the following are observable:

i) Sexual harassment – female students are several times more prone to sexual harassment than their male counterparts. Fear of not meeting sexual advances of teachers and administrators could have psychological impact on girls and their academic performance. There are also proven cases of female students declared as having failed courses when they did not.

ii) Cultism – although there are several female cult groups (Okoh, 2014) male cult groups are far more virulent and constitute threats to female students.

iii) Economic constraints – the needs of girls are more than those of boys. Girls from poor homes could find themselves constrained in meeting financial needs. This could pose psychological insecurity and force them to withdraw or go for "runs" when they did not plan to. Meanwhile the financial demands of the courses are indeed sources of insecurity.

iv) Choice latitude - whether as a result of societal expectation or a result of upbringing, girls sometimes find themselves constrained in career choice. This is described as "limited feminine fields" by Nwosu Izunwah (1999). These include teaching, home economics, home making, and small scale business development for the few that are prepared to dare the tumultuous and unpredictable world of business. Ubong (2001) carried out a study on female students and determined that many of them have aversion for business as a vocation because of the stresses and strains associated with the world of private business.

ii) Community-based Insecurity

Every school is sited in a community and in any case, every child originates and grows up in a community. Insecurity arising from communities includes but is not limited to:

a) Culture, as already indicated, is regarded as the number one enemy of girls and women in Nigeria (Wokocha, 1999).

b) Religion, particularly the ones that are against girl-child education, some of which have been discussed above.

c) Institutionalized rape which makes girls to be afraid of leaving their homes.

d) Family economics, which could force parents to keep their female children away from school or give them out as house helps or even marry them out at an early age. Also as already mentioned, for those of them that make the attempt, financial demands from lecturers and administrators could force them into hazardous activities that could be a menace to them physically and psychologically.

e) The impact of electronic communications as well as social media on the rising tide of insecurity in Nigeria appears not to have received much attention to date. In advanced countries, children, and in particular girls sometimes take their lives when they can no longer stand the taunts and other forms of attack from their peers. Activities in the social media (bullying) could make children dread to attend school and is thus an aspect of insecurity.

The Way Forward

The first duty of any government or administration in institutions/organizations is to protect lives and property proactively. All other activities of governance must be seen as coming after, for economic growth and strides in socio-political developments are for the living. No one builds schools, develops transport systems and infrastructural facilities, provides entertainment and health centres, and plants food for the dead. It is therefore an imperative that all administrations (school heads, village heads, local government administrators, state governors, President of Nigeria and others) must see citizens as first priority by way of keeping them alive, safe, and comfortable.

For the girl child, there is the need for sustained emphasis on their education and general welfare. Girls are the mothers and society builders of the next generation. The following need be pursued:

- Sustained advocacy on girl-child education
- Sustained education on reproductive health focused on girls
- Where finance is a constraint, there is need for special scholarships for girls
- Sustained orientation directed at boys and men to make them see girls as the gender that must be protected rather than intimated and violated. This should be done by socializing institutions – families, religious organizations, schools, social organizations, and communities.
- Child bride practice must be stopped officially.
- Although there is a law on cultism, the destructive activities of cultists are actually on the increase. The Government of Rivers State led by Barrister Nyesom Wike almost from day one began to tackle the menace of cultism in schools and communities. This should not be an isolated effort but should be adopted nationally. There is no doubt that robbers, rapists, and kidnappers are members of cult groups. There is the tendency that once a particular State clamps down on these people, they migrate to 'safe havens,' that is, States where there is tacit tolerance for crime.
- In schools, from primary to tertiary, there must be very firm stance of administrations on anti-social elements. Firm action on students confirmed as

constituting a nuisance will act as deterrent to newer members of the school communities.

- Child labour must be discouraged as it is a source of danger to children particularly girls (Ubong, 1999).

- This is the right time for official action to design ways and means of handling and or managing insecurity posed by social media or other forms of electronic communication such as text messages and threatening phone calls. Parents and guardians need to monitor the way their children use these facilities and how they react to them. Sustained mood and general behavior changes could be the proverbial stich in time.

- On general security issues, the effort at keeping girls safe physically and otherwise must be seen as community wide, not just that of government. Every person in a community or nation deserves to live a life without being tormented by the spectre of insecurity. Security must be everybody's business.

Conclusion

Insecurity is a plague that is international in nature. The persons/groups that make nations insecure continue to migrate and spread the gospel of hate across national boundaries. There is therefore the need for international action on as sustained basis to combat the rising tide.

In Nigeria, nay developing countries, there is need for official action to manage the menace particularly as they affect the children and specially, the girl-child. There can be no growth and development in an atmosphere of insecurity. Not even the most advanced societies can claim to be enjoying high standards of living when citizens cannot enjoy the goodness of effort in peace.

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