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## **JUSTICE AND POVERTY IN NIGERIA: A PHILOSOPHICAL APPRAISAL**

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### **Abstract**

Interpreting justice and poverty in Nigeria exposes us to environment marred with corruption, tribalism, nepotism, poverty and injustice. And so there is urgent need for legal actions and policies that are practicable. Also, urgent need for political and constitutional reforms is paramount. The aforementioned factors have created a hole, leading to economic downturn which is traceable to bad governance. Understanding how social justice, legal fairness, and economic suffering are connected will guide us to critically analyze and add to the already contributions and discussions on justice and poverty as it affects Nigeria. This analysis aims to offer insight on the significant issues that Nigerian society is currently facing and what need to be done for it to be addressed. Through the method of analysis we will be sourcing for information via online articles and library. In this paper we intend examining laws and legal frameworks in the light of Nigerians' daily lives and how it affects the economy. By analysis the contradictions between justice and its connection to poverty will be articulated. This research focuses more on the state of justice in Nigeria which is engraved and been recited in papers but practically elusive in real life. This disjunction is as a result of deeper problems with governance overall, not only a result of legal shortcomings but also leadership problem with both those at the corridor of power and the institution are to share the blame. These structural defects greatly contribute to the persistence of poverty the country in addition to undermining the foundations of the law. By recommendation we suggest that autonomy be granted to judiciary, legislature and executive to enable them operate independently without being influence by the other. Before injustice and poverty can be reduced to the barest minimum, tribalism must be shunned completely, freedom fighters and the society must focus more on

sensitizing the citizens that the only way to cut the excesses of corrupt administration, injustice and abuse of power is to build a strong institution. In so doing, making demands for more freedoms will be easier and with time injustice, corruption and poverty will begin to fizzle out gradually. There is also need for the abstract/theoretical concepts of justice be converted into concrete realities, therefore clearing the path for a more fair and prosperous Nigeria.

**Keywords: justice, poverty, corruption, bad governance, fairness, equity.**

## INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, despite being endowed with abundant natural resources and human resources, faces significant challenges with poverty and justice. The paradox of wealth amidst poverty has led to incessant social, economic, and political tensions. This dichotomy presents a fertile ground for philosophical inquiry of what should be the moral obligations of both the state and individuals in addressing poverty. The philosophical discourse on justice and poverty stretches back to the ancient times, with thinkers like Plato and Aristotle pondering the best ways to attain just society. In the modern era, philosophers such as Rawls have offered theories on social justice which prioritize the well-being of the least advantaged members in the society. In contrast Amartya Sen have focused on capabilities and freedom as the metrics for assessing poverty and justice. The driving force behind this research is the pressing necessity to confront the moral ramifications of these imbalances and to scrutinize the governing structures that have permitted them to thrive. Examining society's moral responsibilities to all of its members is the central task of this study. For Nigeria, these philosophical perspectives provide a framework to scrutinize the country's socio-economic policies, governance, and the distribution of resources. This paper will explore how colonial legacies, governance structures, corruption, and bad policies have shaped the current state of justice and poverty in Nigeria. It will also examine the role of international agencies and the global economic system in perpetuating or alleviating these issues.

Injustice is like a cancer and it spreads faster. Injustice anywhere is a disturbance to justice everywhere. It reinforces poverty and breeds corruption. Plato, the ancient Greek philosopher, did not directly address poverty in the way contemporary discussions may have, but his ideas on justice can be applied to modern concerns, including poverty. In “the Republic” he opined that “true

justice is found not in the wealth of possessions, but in the harmonious balance and well-being of the soul and the city. A society cannot claim to be just if it allows poverty to prevail among its citizens, for poverty disrupts harmony and impedes the soul's quest for virtue."<sup>1</sup> Aristotle in "Nicomachean Ethics and Politics" though not directly asserts that "justice is the arrangement which ensures that each person receives what is due to them according to their merit and nothing else."<sup>2</sup> According to this viewpoint, a just society would have systems in place to guard against extreme poverty and guarantee that every person has access to the resources they need to lead satisfying lives. Aristotle proposed that both extreme riches and extreme poverty are bad for the structure of a society and its government and that a balanced distribution of income is what promotes the common good.

Philosophy has remained a continuous search for answers and solutions to the problems benefiting man in his society. Across all ages and climes, philosophers of different epochs have made conscientious efforts at providing solutions to man's innumerable challenges. In Nigeria, the relationship between justice and poverty is a complicated and multidimensional issue that goes beyond simple economic hardship to include concerns of inequality, resource accessibility, and equitable sharing of society advantages and obligations. Nigeria has a lot of natural resources and a lot of economic potential, but a lot of its people live in poverty, and the gap between the rich and the poor keeps getting worse. There are several important questions raised by this circumstance amongst the question include; why does poverty persist in Nigeria despite its vast wealth? How do governance issues hinder fair access to resources and opportunities for citizens that are in dire need of it? In what ways does poverty disrupt social cohesion, public health, education, and economic productivity in Nigeria?

Poverty is not just about people not having enough money. It can also be experienced when some people in the society are finding it difficult to live well together, afford or access healthcare system or have access to the basic amenities. This study wants to look at what's really fair and what justice means when we talk about poverty in Nigeria. It's about understanding what's right and wrong and how we can use those ideas to find better ways to help everyone. By thinking about what justice really means, this study aims to find new ways to solve old problems, making sure that the wealth of Nigeria can help everyone live a better live.

This paper aims to shed light on the possible routes toward a society that is more just and equal through this philosophical appraisal. It aims to expand our knowledge of justice in the setting of economic inequality, combines philosophical concepts with the real-world difficulties of poverty in Nigeria. It aims to reinterpret poverty and justice by applying a philosophical framework. In subsequent headings, the concept of poverty and justice will be analyzed and at the same time how it affects the lives of Nigerians will be described. Philosophical perspectives that offer deep insights into the ethics, social structures, and economic factors that underpin justice and poverty will be exposed. As we explore these theories, we aim to craft a framework that supports and informed effective policies tailored to Nigeria's unique complexities with the thoughts of philosophers like John Rawls, who advocates for justice as fairness, and Amartya Sen, who emphasizes what individuals are actually able to do and to be, and other philosophers, we seek to apply these global ideas to local circumstances.

### **HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF JUSTICE AND POVERTY IN NIGERIA**

The issues of poverty and justice are not just academic affairs but are lived realities that affect millions of lives. In pre-colonial era, Nigerian societies were rich with cultural diversity and had justice systems deeply rooted in their traditions and communal values. Elders and chiefs gathered under the shade of ancient trees to resolve disputes and maintain harmony. In the Yoruba kingdoms, for instance, the Oba (king) and his council of chiefs would listen to all sides of a dispute, aiming to restore peace rather than to punish. Elders played a crucial role in mediating conflicts, ensuring that every voice was heard and that decisions reflected the community's values.<sup>3</sup> For the Igbo, justice was a community affair. Decisions were made collectively in village assemblies known as *Ama-ala*, embodying the principle of *Igwe bu ike* (strength in unity)<sup>4</sup>. In the Hausa-Fulani emirates, justice was guided by a mix of Islamic law and local customs, administered by emirs and scholars who focused on moral conduct and community welfare<sup>5</sup>.

Pre-colonial Nigerian societies displayed a remarkable ability to integrate justice and poverty alleviation into their social structures. Their communal approach to justice ensured that everyone had a voice, while their economic organization and social safety nets minimized poverty and promoted collective welfare. These systems, rooted in tradition and community values, highlight the resilience and ingenuity of pre-colonial Nigerian societies in addressing justice and economic

well-being. Understanding these historical contexts offers valuable insights into contemporary efforts to promote justice and reduce poverty in Nigeria. With the arrival of British colonial rule, the landscape of justice and poverty in Nigeria changed. The colonial government imposed English common law, disrupting the traditional systems that were applicable for centuries. Picture the confusion and displacement as foreign laws clashed with indigenous customs, marginalizing local authorities<sup>6</sup> the colonial economy was designed to extract resources for the benefit of the British Empire, often at the expense of the Nigerian people. This era saw the rise of forced labor and the introduction of cash crops, displacing many from their ancestral lands and traditional livelihoods.<sup>7</sup> Independence of 1960 brought new hope but also with significant challenges. Nigeria's new leaders faced the daunting task of unifying a nation with a patchwork of legal systems left by the British. The early post-colonial period was marked by efforts to modernize and develop the economy, but political instability, military coups, and a devastating civil war of 1967 to 1970 created more problems. The civil war, particularly, left scars of poverty and displacement, especially in the eastern regions. Families were torn apart, and entire communities were uprooted, exacerbating the poverty crisis.<sup>8</sup>

The military coups that followed further plunged Nigeria into economic mismanagement and widespread corruption. Imagine the disillusionment as public resources meant for development were siphoned off by those in power.<sup>9</sup> The Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) of the 1980s, prescribed by international financial institutions, brought austerity measures that hit the poor the hardest. Cuts in public spending led to deteriorations in education, healthcare, and social services and pushed more Nigerians to poverty. The era was characterized by a struggle to survive amid shrinking opportunities and rising costs of living.<sup>10</sup> The return to civilian rule in 1999 sparked renewed optimism. Democratic governance promised a more just and equitable society, but the journey has been fraught with transparency and lots of challenges. The justice system, grappling with fraud, injustice, inefficiency and inequity has failed to protect the rights of the poor.<sup>11</sup> Programs aimed at poverty alleviation have been launched, but their impact is frequently undermined by systemic issues and poor implementation.<sup>12</sup> Access to justice remains a significant issue, particularly for marginalized communities. Recent initiatives like the National Social Investment Program (NSIP) aim to provide social safety nets and empower the underprivileged, but their success is often hampered by corruption and administrative inefficiencies.<sup>13</sup>

**PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORKS OF JUSTICE AND POVERTY IN NIGERIA**

In Nigeria, Justice and poverty are interconnected issues that reflect the broader challenges confronting the nation. The philosophical framework that guides our understanding of justice and poverty in Nigeria is informed by both the country's rich cultural heritage and contemporary global justice theories. It seeks to address the entrenched inequalities and systemic injustices that keep many Nigerians in poverty, while also recognizing the unique cultural, historical, and political contexts of the nation. One of the key theoretical frameworks applied to the analysis of justice in Nigeria is "John Rawls' theory of justice", particularly his concepts of equal liberty and the difference principle. According to Rawls, "justice should ensure that all citizens have equal access to fundamental rights such as education and healthcare. Moreover, policies should be designed to benefit the least advantaged members of the society, thus working towards reducing disparities."<sup>14</sup> Rawls' approach underscores the importance of good governance, transparency, and accountability in ensuring that the benefits of social and economic policies reach those who are most vulnerable. By applying these principles, Nigeria can make significant strides towards just and equitable society. The application of Rawls' theory of justice in the Nigerian context highlights the importance of creating policies that not only distribute resources more fairly but also address the underlying structures that perpetuate inequality and poverty. For instance, to ensure that the marginalized communities have access to quality education, healthcare and basic amenities which are essential for breaking the cycle of poverty.

Another dimension to this study is social justice, which is concerned with creating a society that promotes fairness and equality. Thinkers like Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum provide valuable insights into achieving social justice in Nigeria through their focus on capabilities and human development. Amartya Sen, in his seminal work, asserts that "the capability to live a good life is freedom to choose from valuable options"<sup>15</sup>. This perspective is crucial for addressing systemic inequalities in Nigeria, while expanding people's opportunities to live the lives they value is essential. On the other hand, Nussbaum argues that "the capabilities approach focuses on what people are actually able to do and to be"<sup>16</sup>, emphasizing the importance of enhancing the quality of life for all citizens, beyond mere economic measures. Given Nigeria's complex history marked by colonialism, military rule, and ethnic conflicts restorative justice is also critical. Restorative

justice involves healing historical wounds, fostering reconciliation, and making reparations for past injustices. This approach is about recognizing and addressing historical wrongs and finding ways to move forward together. It combines both Western and indigenous practices of conflict resolution, recognizing the value of traditional methods in the Nigerian context.

Poverty in Nigeria is not merely an economic issue; it is deeply social, requiring a thorough understanding of its root causes. Structural poverty in Nigeria is perpetuated by systemic issues like corruption, bad governance, and inequitable economic policies. Philosophers like Karl Marx and Frantz Fanon highlight the necessity of deep social and economic reforms to break these cycles. Marx, in his analysis of capitalism, posits that “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles”<sup>17</sup>, providing a framework for understanding the structural inequalities that contribute to poverty. Fanon’s critique of colonialism offers insights into the persistent economic disparities in Nigeria, arguing that “the colonized man finds his freedom in and through violence”<sup>18</sup>, a perspective that underscores the lingering impact of colonialism on post-colonial societies.

The philosophical discussion on poverty also extends to the ethical responsibilities of both the Nigerian government and the global community. Peter Singer, in his discussion on effective altruism, argues that “if it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it”<sup>19</sup>. This suggests that there is a moral duty to tackle poverty through aid, development programs, and fair trade practices, both at the national and international levels.

### **PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE ON JUSTICE**

Justice is a deeply human concept that has been explored by philosophers for centuries, each offering unique insights into how societies can be fair and equitable. These perspectives are not merely academic theories but are rooted in real-life applications that can profoundly impact how justice is understood and practiced in Nigeria. Imagine a society where everyone has a specific role that aligns with their abilities and virtues, creating a harmonious and balanced community. This was Plato's vision of justice. In his work *The Republic*, Plato describes a just society as one where rulers govern wisely, soldiers protect bravely, and producers (farmers, artisans, etc.) contribute through their work. Each person’s role is essential for the overall harmony of society<sup>20</sup>.

In Nigeria's traditional communities, this idea resonates. Elders and chiefs made decisions for the community, warriors defended their people, and everyone else played their part in sustaining daily life. Justice was about everyone fulfilling their role, creating a balanced and functional society.

Aristotle introduces the concept of distributive justice, which is about fairly allocating resources and honors based on merit and contribution. Corrective justice, on the other hand, focuses on rectifying wrongs and restoring balance through compensation or punishment.<sup>21</sup> Think about the modern Nigerian context: distributive justice would mean ensuring that the wealth from Nigeria's rich resources, like oil and so on are shared fairly among its people. Corrective justice would involve addressing historical and contemporary wrongs, ensuring those who have been marginalized or wronged receive fair treatment and compensation.

John Rawls brings a modern perspective with his theory of justice as fairness. He argues that everyone should have the same basic liberties and that any social or economic inequalities should benefit the least advantaged and provide fair opportunities for all.<sup>22</sup> In Nigeria, this perspective could translate into policies that specifically aim to uplift the poorest communities and ensure everyone, regardless of their background, has equal access to opportunities. It's about creating a level playing ground where everyone can succeed. Amartya Sen offers a fresh take by focusing on what people can actually do and be their capabilities. Justice, for Sen, is about expanding people's freedoms to live the lives they value. It's not just about having resources but being able to use them effectively.<sup>23</sup> For Nigerians, this means more than just economic aid; it's about ensuring people have access to quality education, healthcare, and other services that enable them to improve their lives. Critical theory, from thinkers like Jürgen Habermas, challenges us to look at the deeper social structures that create inequality and injustice. There is need for us to understand how power and system dynamics can affect justice and its process in order to transform or exploit these structures.<sup>24</sup> In Nigeria, critical theory would push us to address corruption, ethnic divisions, and institutional weaknesses head-on. It calls for a more inclusive and participatory approach to governance, where tribes or people's voice will be heard, and systemic barriers to justice dismantled.

## **ANALYSES OF POVERTY IN NIGERIA**

Poverty in Nigeria is a deeply rooted issue that has persisted over years despite the country's wealth in both natural and human resources. The colonial era disrupted traditional economies and social structures, leaving a legacy of economic disparities that the post-colonial nation struggled to overcome. Scholars have noted that the exploitation of Nigeria's resources by colonial powers created deep economic imbalances, which were further entrenched in the post-colonial period through political instability, military coups, and civil war<sup>25</sup> these factors collectively created a challenging environment for sustainable development and perpetuated poverty across generations.

Economically, Nigeria faces the paradox of "resources curse." Despite being rich in natural resources, particularly oil, this wealth has not translated into widespread prosperity for the population. Economic mismanagement and corruption have been significant barriers to the equitable distribution of wealth. The concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, combined with widespread corruption, has prevented the benefits of Nigeria's resources from reaching the broader population.<sup>26</sup> High levels of unemployment and underemployment further exacerbate poverty, with many Nigerians unable to find stable and well-paying jobs. Past economic policies, such as the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) of the 1980s and 1990s, aimed at stabilizing the economy, often resulted in austerity measures that disproportionately hurt the poor by cutting essential public services.<sup>27</sup>

Chinua Achebe, tied the causes of poverty in Nigeria to leadership failures. In his book *"The Trouble with Nigeria"*, He argues that the root cause of Nigeria's problems including poverty is a failure of leadership. Achebe asserts that Nigeria's potential has been stifled by corrupt and ineffective leaders who have prioritized personal gain over national progress. In his word he articulates his views on the causes of poverty thus:

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership."<sup>28</sup>

Achebe's critique goes beyond just identifying the problem; he also calls for a transformation in leadership and governance. He believes that with the right leaders, Nigeria can overcome its challenges and harness its vast potential for the benefit of all its citizens. Social factors also significantly contribute to the persistence of poverty. Access to quality education remains uneven, with stark disparities between urban and rural areas. Many Nigerians, particularly in rural regions, face illiteracy and low educational attainment, limiting their economic opportunities and perpetuating poverty. The healthcare system also struggles with inadequate infrastructure and limited access to medical services, contributing to high mortality rates and low life expectancy.<sup>29</sup> Diseases such as malaria and the recent cholera outbreak affects the poorest communities because they do not have access to adequate healthcare facilities thereby compounding their economic hardships. Additionally, Nigeria's rapid population growth exacerbates the problem, as the country's economic growth and job creation cannot keep pace with the increasing population, placing additional pressure on resources and social services.<sup>30</sup>

Politically, widespread corruption at all levels of government has severely hindered efforts to reduce poverty. Resources intended for development projects and social services are often diverted, undermining initiatives designed to help the poor.<sup>31</sup> Weak institutions and poor governance have led to ineffective policy implementation, where even well-intentioned programs fail to reach those in need due to bureaucratic inefficiencies and lack of accountability. Political instability, ethnic conflicts, and insurgencies, particularly in the North East with groups like Boko Haram, banditry and herdsmen operations, have displaced millions and disrupted economic activities. This insecurity not only displaces people but also stifles investment and development efforts, further entrenching poverty.<sup>32</sup>

Regional disparities highlight the uneven spread of poverty across Nigeria. Northern states, especially in the North East and North West, experience higher poverty rates compared to southern states. These disparities are deeply rooted in historical neglect, lower investment in education and infrastructure, and ongoing security challenges that disproportionately affect these regions.<sup>33</sup>

Efforts to tackle poverty include various government programs like the National Social Investment Program (NSIP), which encompasses initiatives such as the N-Power job creation scheme, the Conditional Cash Transfer program, and the Government Enterprise and Empowerment Program

(GEEP). International organizations and NGOs also contribute through various development projects, aiming to alleviate poverty and improve living standards.<sup>34</sup>

### **AN APPRAISAL OF JUSTICE AND POVERTY IN NIGERIA**

The term "justice" derives from the Latin word *justitia*, meaning righteousness or equity, and refers to the principle of fairness in protecting rights and punishing wrongs. Justice, in a societal context, ensures that individuals receive what they are due whether in terms of legal rights, opportunities, or resources.<sup>35</sup> Poverty, originating from the Latin *paupertas*, denotes a state of deprivation, where individuals lack the financial means to meet basic living standards. In economic terms, poverty is often defined by income levels, but it also encompasses a broader range of social, educational, and health-related deprivations.<sup>36</sup>

In Nigeria, justice and poverty are deeply intertwined, with each significantly influencing the other. Despite being one of Africa's largest economies, Nigeria faces substantial challenges in providing fair and equal justice for all citizens. The justice system, meant to ensure fairness, often fails the most vulnerable due to corruption and inefficiency. Those living in poverty frequently face legal discrimination, and without proper representation, their rights are often overlooked or violated. Systemic issues like prolonged pre-trial detention and inadequate legal aid further exacerbate the difficulties faced by the poor. To understand justice in Nigeria, it is essential to explore traditional African views, Western legal philosophies, and the contemporary challenges that shape the current justice system.

In traditional African societies, including those in Nigeria, justice is often centered on communalism and harmony. The African philosophy of Ubuntu, which emphasizes human interconnectedness and collective responsibility, plays a pivotal role in shaping perceptions of justice. The influence of Western legal philosophies, particularly due to colonial legacy, is significant in Nigeria's justice system. Philosophers like John Rawls, who advocated for "justice as fairness," have influenced modern legal structures, emphasizing equal rights and opportunities, especially for the least advantaged. However, these principles often clash with Nigeria's local realities and socio-economic challenges.<sup>37</sup> Contemporary challenges, such as corruption, economic inequality, and political instability, further complicate the realization of justice in Nigeria.

Philosophical perspectives can offer critical insights here. For instance, Immanuel Kant's emphasis on duty and moral law critiques corruption as fundamentally unjust, as it undermines the rule of law and disproportionately harms the poor and marginalized.<sup>38</sup> A Kantian approach would advocate for strict adherence to moral principles and the establishment of transparent institutions.

Karl Marx's critique of capitalism is also relevant in addressing Nigeria's economic disparities. Marx would argue that true justice requires addressing the underlying economic structures that perpetuate poverty and inequality, calling for wealth redistribution and social welfare policies.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, influenced by thinkers like John Locke, underscores the protection of individual rights as fundamental to justice. In Nigeria, this means safeguarding rights to education, healthcare, and a fair trial<sup>40</sup> are both violated by the federal, state, local governments; town and village actors.

Corruption within the judiciary and law enforcement agency exacerbates these issues, creating a system where wealth often dictates legal outcomes. Those who can afford to pay bribes are more likely to receive favorable judgments, while the poor are left disenfranchised, further entrenching their poverty.<sup>41</sup> This corruption not only denies the poor their rights but also perpetuates a cycle of poverty by eroding trust in the legal system. Legal frameworks in Nigeria often lack the strength needed to protect the rights of the poor. For instance, land disputes can devastate impoverished individuals who, due to inadequate legal representation or knowledge, may lose their land.<sup>42</sup> Prolonged pre-trial detention disproportionately affects the poor, with many languishing in jail for extended periods without trial because they cannot afford bail or legal representation. This not only violates their rights but also disrupts their ability to earn a livelihood, pushing their families deeper into poverty.<sup>43</sup> Efforts to address these issues, such as providing free legal aid and reducing judicial corruption have been initiated but are often insufficient or unevenly implemented. Comprehensive reforms are necessary to ensure that justice is both accessible and equitable for all Nigerians, regardless of their economic status. When funds allocated for essential services like healthcare and education are siphoned off through corrupt practices, the poor are left without the support needed to improve their living conditions. Corruption also discourages foreign investment and stifles economic development, which are critical for job creation and poverty reduction. Social inequality and discrimination based on ethnicity, gender, and religion further deepen poverty.

Marginalized groups face significant barriers to education, employment, and social services. For instance, women and ethnic minorities often experience discrimination that limits their access to resources and opportunities, perpetuating cycles of poverty and social exclusion.<sup>44</sup>

The relationship between injustice and poverty is cyclical; poverty makes individuals more vulnerable to injustices, while injustices, in turn, entrench poverty. For example, without legal representation, a poor individual may lose their land, pushing them deeper into poverty.<sup>45</sup> Breaking this cycle requires addressing the root causes of injustice. To combat these issues, transparency, accountability, and stringent anti-corruption laws are essential. Strengthening legal frameworks and ensuring equal access to justice can help protect the rights of the poor. Promoting social inclusion through policies that address discrimination and provide equal opportunities for education and employment is also crucial.<sup>46</sup> Nigeria's societal structure is deeply rooted in social hierarchies that often determine an individual's access to resources and opportunities. These hierarchies are based on factors such as ethnicity, gender, and social class. Ethnic favoritism, sustains poverty among marginalized ethnic groups who are systematically prevented from advancing economically.<sup>47</sup> Gender inequality also plays a significant role in perpetuating poverty. In some northern parts of Nigeria, cultural norms limit some women's access to education and economic opportunities. Some Women are often confined to traditional roles and face barriers in accessing credit, owning property, and participating in the formal economy, thereby contributing to a cycle of poverty that is difficult to break.<sup>48</sup>

Nigeria's judicial system for many years has been engulfed with gross misconduct, corruption and justice manipulations. In today's Nigeria Justice is very expensive. It is affordable to those in government and to the rich. As a result of this, power is being abused, rule of law no longer applied and many have been denied justice. Such practices have created serious vacuum on the system because hard work and merit are no longer encouraged. To some, corruption is now a lucrative business and they have accepted it as a way of life including the youth. Those with wealth and connections have continued to thrive while the majority walks through the valley of the shadow of death before they can make ends meet. This disparity not only stifles individual potential but also hinders national development, as a significant portion of the population remains marginalized and unable to contribute meaningfully to the economy. Addressing poverty in Nigeria has been a

central focus to the policymakers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international bodies but in camouflage because they have failed to use the right mechanism. Over the years, various approaches have been deployed, each with its own merits and demerits. However, the challenges of poverty and justice in Nigeria are deeply intertwined, influenced by systemic issues ranging from leadership inefficiencies to social inequalities. Government initiatives aimed at reducing poverty have included policies and programs designed to improve access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. Programs like the National Social Investment Program (NSIP) have made significant strides in providing financial support and resources to vulnerable populations. Despite these efforts, government initiatives often suffer from inadequate funding, poor implementation, and corruption. Leadership at the top levels, including the Presidency and legislative bodies like the Senate and House of Representatives, often fails to ensure that these programs reach their intended beneficiaries due to bureaucratic inefficiencies and mismanagement of resources. Additionally, the lack of a comprehensive, long-term strategy for poverty reduction means that these initiatives often provide temporary relief rather than sustainable solutions.<sup>49</sup>

International aid has been instrumental in supporting poverty reduction in Nigeria. Aid from international organizations and foreign governments provides crucial financial resources for development projects, disaster relief, and humanitarian assistance. Such aid has facilitated infrastructure development, improved access to education and healthcare, and supported economic development initiatives.<sup>50</sup> But dependency on foreign aid can undermine local governance and self-sufficiency, leading to a cycle of dependency. Community-based approaches to poverty alleviation emphasize local participation and empowerment. By involving community members in the planning and implementation of development projects, these approaches ensure that the initiatives are culturally relevant and meet the specific needs of the community. They also promote social cohesion and collective action, which can lead to more sustainable outcomes.<sup>51</sup> Despite their strengths, community-based approaches can face challenges such as limited resources and capacity.

Addressing poverty and justice in Nigeria requires a comprehensive approach that tackles the systemic issues at every level of the society, from leadership to grassroots levels. Government programs need to be free from corruption and must prioritize long-term, sustainable solutions. The

judiciary must be strengthened to ensure that justice is accessible to all, particularly the poor and marginalized. NGOs and international aid organizations must work in harmony with government initiatives, ensuring that efforts are coordinated and resources are used efficiently. Community-based approaches should be supported with the necessary resources and leadership to ensure their success. By addressing these issues holistically, Nigeria can make meaningful progress in reducing poverty and improving the quality of life for all its citizens.

The lingering insecurity problem in the country shouldn't have taken government in power this long to address. But the problem is that many politicians and some members of presidential council are benefiting and are enriching themselves from it. Insecurity situation of the country has affected so many areas such as agriculture, education and businesses. The threats and mayhem the bandits are unleashing on the farmers through their barbaric activities of raping, killing, destruction of farmer lands and their kidnapping activities has affected the country negatively in so many ways. Some farmers have stopped going to farms because of the fear of being raped, kidnapped or their farms being destroyed by the bandit/herdsmen. As a result, so many farmers who relied on medium and large scale farming have being idle and have become poorer including the people that relied on them for survival. The abductions in public schools both in primary, secondary and at tertiary level has brought discouragement to parents and students that is why some are losing faith in education because the government at every level have not taking their welfare and security serious. To them, government has failed in their responsibility to protect their subjects. The activities of the bandits/boko Harams in the north has hindered economic growth and have pushed many to poverty line. Many fled their homes and are now living in IDP camps because bandits and the terrorist have taken over their homes and lands. High cost of living in the nation has made life unbearable that some who can raise money to Japa abroad for the search of better life and greener pasture has seen it as the last resort. And so the Japa syndrome is affecting the nation because those who are leaving the country are the best brains that if they had stayed back would have invested and contributed to the economic growth of the nation.

Not that the government in power before and now does not know what to do to stop this mess, but only that they have decided to remain insensitivity to the longing, yearning and suffering of the people. Before the problem of poverty in the country can be addressed and many lifted out of it,

Nigerian government must try something new since the old analog system of safeguarding lives and properties have not yielded any positive result. We're suggesting that Artificial Intelligence should complement Human intelligence (Human Intelligence has being in existence) in policing and safeguarding lives and properties in the society. Since human intelligence has failed to provide maximum security to the citizens who needs it, and so we're proposing that AI technology should be incorporated into the security framework and surveillance of the nation so as to assist in taking coverage of crimes, corruption and banditry activities. With that those who are into such acts and sponsorship will be fished out and penalized. AI with inbuilt cameras, videos and recording devices is enough to do this services better. It can snaps, video and record the activities of criminality that disrupts the peace of the nation. Before the problem of insecurity can be addressed, the security of the nation must be committed into the hands of selected individuals that have integrity. Government should spend and invest more on the security of the nation to ensure that a robust security coverage and framework is put in place. When that is done, the lives and properties will be secured and it will reduce the level of poverty in the nation. Government should with matter of urgency address the issue of subsidy, subsidy removal and electricity hike. They should make fuel, diesel, kerosene, cooking gas and so on affordable. If government servicing fuel and electricity subsidy can reduce cost of living, it is advisable that government in power consider it to ensure that the living standard of life is improved. If it is done the transportation cost, the price of production and high cost of food stuff in the market and so on will come down. Businesses that were shut down as a result of high cost of fuel, diesel, production and transportation will begin to thrive again and many will be lifted out of poverty. Government at all level and private ventures should focus more on digital security. But before it can yield a better result the federal, state, local government, towns, villages and families must network together and it is expected that all hands be on the deck.

## **CONCLUSION**

The issue of poverty in Nigeria poses significant ethical and philosophical challenges. At the heart of this issue is a broader understanding of justice and its failure to manifest adequately in the lives of millions of Nigerians. Justice is a multifaceted concept, encompassing fairness, equality, and access to resources. Within the Nigerian context, justice has often been obscured by systemic failures, corruption, and the inability of distributing goods and services equitably. John Rawls'

theory of justice as fairness offers a foundational approach to understanding these inequities. It emphasizes that justice should be the guiding principle in structuring human society and that social and economic inequalities should be arranged to benefit the greatest number of the least advantaged people. Such principle in practice appears to have been systematically undermined. The nation's wealth and resources, has not been adequately distributed equally. Instead, the concentration of wealth among few elite reflects a profound failure in establishing systematic framework for justice that thrives in order to lift greater number of poor Nigerians out of poverty. The vast inequality that exists in Nigeria highlights the gap in leadership from federal, state and local government levels and good and how it affects the citizens and the less privilege. This disparity is not only a symptom of leadership failure but also of justice failure. Poverty in Nigeria is not simply the absence of material wealth but the deprivation of basic capabilities necessary for living a fulfilling life. Evaluating this within Nigerian context reveals that the poor has been denied justice and are systematically have been denied the capabilities required to lead dignified lives. Justice, then, is not all about creating laws that protect individuals' rights but also about ensuring that these laws translate into real opportunities for the poor.

To Nussbaum certain capabilities approach are necessities and must be guaranteed in any just society.<sup>52</sup> According to her, these capabilities include life, bodily health, bodily integrity, emotions, practical reason, and control over one's environment, among others. The lack of these capabilities among many Nigerians reveals a systemic failure to ensure justice in its most fundamental form. The role of corruption as a major impediment to achieving justice in Nigeria cannot be undermined. Tribal sentiment and bad governance are factors that have been distorting distributions of good and services, hindering the implementation of policies that could alleviate poverty. Corruption creates a situation in which justice is selectively applied, benefiting the rich while disenfranchising the poor. This raises question, **to what extent can anti-corruption reforms contribute to the promotion of justice in Nigeria, particularly in relation to alleviating poverty?**

Despite these challenges, the study also highlights potential pathways for achieving justice in Nigeria. One key aspect is the reform of institutions to ensure that they serve the needs of all

citizens, particularly the poor. Institutional reform must address the systemic issues that allow corruption to thrive and prevent the equitable distribution of resources. In line with this, it is essential to explore how the implementation of justice can move beyond theoretical principles and be operationalized to address real-world socio-economic issues. Furthermore, the integration of social justice programs aimed at improving access to education, healthcare, and basic services for the poor would significantly contribute to alleviating poverty and promoting fairness. These reforms would ensure that justice is not just an abstract concept but a lived reality for all Nigerians.

The philosophical exploration of justice and poverty in Nigeria leads to a profound understanding of the interconnectedness between ethical principles and socio-economic realities. The failure to achieve justice in Nigeria has profound consequences for millions of its citizens, particularly the poor, who remain marginalized and disenfranchised in a system that should protect them. The theoretical frameworks provided by philosophers such as John Rawls, Amartya Sen, and Martha Nussbaum offer valuable insights into how justice can be re-imagined and restructured to the needs of Nigeria's most vulnerable populations.

As Thomas Pogge rightly put; global institutions and by extension, national institutions have a moral obligation to ensure that they do not systematically harm the poor.<sup>53</sup> In Nigeria, the systematic harm inflicted upon the poor through corruption, inequitable resource distribution, and the lack of basic capabilities underscores the need for a radical restructuring of the socio-political and economic system. Peter Singer's principle of preventing harm reinforces this ethical obligation: "If it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it."<sup>54</sup> This principle highlights the ethical responsibility of Nigerian leaders to prioritize the needs of the poor. The failure to do so is not just a failure of governance but a failure of moral duty. Addressing these injustices requires not only economic reforms but also ethical and institutional reforms that prioritize justice as a guiding principle. Future research should focus on how justice can be operationalized within specific Nigerian contexts, including urban and rural divides, regional disparities, and the intersection of ethnicity, gender, and poverty. By continuing to explore the philosophical underpinnings of justice in relation to poverty, policymakers, scholars, and activists can develop

strategies that not only address the symptoms of poverty but also the systemic injustices that perpetuate it. The pursuit of justice in Nigeria, while challenging, remains an essential goal for achieving a fair and equitable society where all citizens will have the opportunity to live with dignity.

#### END NOTES

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