

# Poverty and Social Violence in Africa: Nigeria as Case Study



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## **Abstract**

As with most societies around the world, violence has been a common feature of many African societies. While political violence, especially those targeted at the state and involving armed groups, has gained popularity in public discourses, social violence is one form of violence that is not necessarily against the state. Often driven by few (if any) political objectives, social violence is increasingly becoming a regular occurrence in many states across Africa and other parts of the world. Unfortunately, because of the complex nature of its causal antecedents, social violence attracts less attention from scholars and policy makers. Based on the long-standing arguments that poverty and violence have a significant relationship, this paper focuses on, and demonstrates, the connection between the increasingly high poverty rates and armed social violence in Africa including urban violence and organized crimes such as kidnapping and drug trafficking. The paper presents a set of recommendations to ameliorate poverty and manage the incidence of armed social violence in Africa.

## **Introduction**

As elsewhere around the world, Africa's history has been characterised by substantial bloodshed and wanton destructions. The pre-colonial period across the region was marked substantially by the rise and fall of empires and kingdoms through violence. Indeed, the process that surrounded colonialism and anti-colonialism had many characteristics of conflict and violence. The post-independence era was marked by the emergence of numerous authoritarian regimes, which unleashed terror on the citizens across the continent. Targeted killings of opposition actors and horrendous imprisonments of citizens reigned supreme in the period. The post-independence era was also notable for civil wars. In countries such as Algeria, Angola, Burundi, Chad, DR Congo, CA Republic, Ethiopia, Liberia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Uganda, and Zimbabwe the continent recorded enormous losses of lives from intense internal conflicts. Contrary to the expectations of democracy activists and theorists, who championed the

argument that democracy was the solution to the reign of violence in Africa, the present era (otherwise known as the post-Third Wave era), which symbolises the era of democratic transitions and civilian rules, has not been isolated from the history of violence for which Africa has become associated with since the end of colonial rule. Since re-democratisation began in the 1990s, there has been an escalation of various forms of violence, which include ethno-religious clashes, elections violence, insurgencies, resource wars, terrorism, and rising levels of armed social violence.

Social violence represents a major form of violence in contemporary Africa, which unfortunately has not received adequate attention as the other forms of violence. The concept itself suffers from inadequate and confusing definitions, which further contributes to the problem of its analysis. Although acknowledging the conceptual difference between conflict and violence,<sup>1</sup> this paper takes clues from the useful conceptualisation of “social conflict” by the Social Conflict in Africa Database (SCAD) advanced by Idean Salehyan and her co-researchers. Social conflict in this context is conceptualised differently from “armed conflict” – organised and armed insurrection against the state which manifests in the form of civil wars and insurgencies, often leading to large-scale death and destructions. This has been the main focus in conflict studies. The focus of social conflict is mainly to capture other forms of conflict not necessarily involving organised armies, pre-meditated attacks or even explicit violence against the state, which may come in the forms of riots, homicides, kidnapping, strike actions, communal violence, uprisings, among others, given less consideration in conflict analysis (Salehyan et al., 2012).

While political violence has attracted more attention, social violence has silently been on the increase worldwide, with far more security implications. A report by the World Health Organisation (WHO) confirms that in 2004 when 184,000 deaths were recorded in war-related violence, an estimated 598,000 deaths were recorded in social violence events in the same year (Fox and Hoelscher, 2010). Although there is insufficient data to present accurately the extent of social violence in Africa, it is a clear fact that the incidence has been on the increase in different countries across the continent going by daily reports in the media and conflict-related reports.

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Huntington (1993: 25) argued that “differences do not necessarily mean conflict, and conflict does not necessarily mean violence.” According to Onapajo (2018) “violence is an aspect of conflict behavior where the use of force (or its threat) is employed to express disagreements in the pursuit of opposing goals by the parties involved.”

For example, the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) reported that despite the seeming decline in wars across the continent, Africa has witnessed more civilian deaths over the years. In 2015 alone, the number rose to about 40%. Clearly, this example can be extrapolated to suggest the reality of rising non-wars violence rapidly ravaging African communities, but being under reported (<https://www.acleddata.com/rates-of-violence-in-2015/>).

The above background shows the need for a research to answer the questions around the patterns and causes of social violence in Africa. The major aim of this paper is to offer some analysis of the patterns of social violence and a possible cause – with emphasis on poverty. With poverty on the increase in Africa, despite the “Africa rising” narratives in the early 2000s, it is useful to begin the analysis of the increasing incidence of social violence in the continent by looking at that variable. Recent reports indicate that Africa has 75 % of the world’s poorest countries (Paktor, 2015), with the possibility of being the poorest continent in the near future (Beegle et al., 2016).

Numerous studies have sufficiently proven a significant relationship between poverty and violence in Africa (Luckham et al, 2001; Miquel et al, 2004; Ikejiaku, 2010). As the rate of poverty is alarmingly high in Africa, the findings cannot be disputed successfully. Drawing from the existing research proving a positive relationship between poverty and violence, this paper aims to find a connection between the high poverty incidence and increasing social violence in Africa. On this basis, a set of recommendations are provided on how to ameliorate poverty and manage the incidence of social violence in Africa.

### **The Concept of Social Violence**

A good way to begin an analysis of the concept of social violence is to unravel the definition of violence in a broader sense. It is useful to note that there are various definitions advanced by different scholars on the concept of violence, with less disagreements unlike other related concepts such as terrorism and insurgency. The most comprehensive and common definition is that of the World Health Organisation (WHO) which states that violence represents “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation” (<http://www.who.int/>). The

organisation goes further to identify three sub-types of violence which include “self-directed”, “inter-personal” and “collective violence”. Self-directed violence is a type of violence done against oneself – the perpetrator is also the victim. The inter-personal violence involves two or more individuals. This can be family or intimate partner or community violence. Collective violence is the type of violence involving a large group of individuals which can be political, social or economic violence.

Considering the definition and typologies of violence, as presented above, there is a clear confusion in the conceptualisation and classification of social violence because there are many violence events constituting “inter-personal” and “collective” which are considered as social violence in different writings. What is clear, however, is that the existing idea behind social violence is to identify a particular type of violence that is different from political violence in terms of the purpose of the actors and the major actors involved. Thus, the aim is not necessarily politically motivated. For example, Fox and Hoelscher (2010) define the concept “as acts of violence committed by individuals or groups that do not reflect an attempt to contest government authority.” Their examples include individual assaults, homicides, gang violence and communal violence. They maintain that the definition differs from political violence, which is “perpetrated by organised groups of armed individuals with the explicit aim of challenging (and, if successful, appropriating) the authority of the state to monopolise the legitimate use of violence within its borders” (Fox and Hoelscher, 2010: 2-3).

In their effort towards analysing social conflict, for example, a group of researchers created the Social Conflict Analysis Database (SCAD) to identify events that are different from “armed conflict” – organised and armed insurrection against the state which manifests in the form of civil wars and insurgencies. The following are included in their list of what constitutes the phenomenon: protests, riots, strikes, inter-communal conflict, government violence against civilians (<https://www.strausscenter.org/scad.html>). A visible problem in this classification is that a state-motivated violence cannot be successfully dissociated from events that characterise political violence. The problem is also visible in another database labelled the Nigerian Social Violence Project, which was introduced by the Johns Hopkins University’s School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) with the aim of documenting the incidents of social violence in Nigeria, identified the following types of violence under the definition of social violence:

Communal, Political, Herder-Farmer, State and Boko Haram violence (<http://www.connectsaisafrica.org/research/african-studies-publications/social-violence-nigeria/>).

In response to seeming contradictions in the concept, Arevalo de Leon and Tager (2016: 12-13) in their own idea of “armed social violence” argue that social violence, although not driven by political motivations, still have political and systemic dimensions. This is because conventional and non-conventional conflicts are usually characterised by “violent actors challenge the state monopoly of coercive power, whether intentionally or not”, and the fact that “violence is systemic in the sense that violent phenomena and violent actors are an integral part of socio-political systems.” Taking cognizance of the fluidity in the conceptualisation of social violence, this study will benefit from idea of “armed social violence” – a concept that is about a type of violence that does not have explicit political motivations and are clear non-war situations. According to Arevalo de Leon and Tager (2016:5), the idea of “armed social violence” describes “situations in which groups in society use large scale violence to pursue non-political goals.” In this regard, the following fit into our categorisation: riots and protests, communal violence, strikes, homicide, gang violence, kidnapping and terrorism. It should be noted that terrorism is included in the category based on the idea that terrorism, although involving organised groups, may not necessarily be driven by a political agenda and principally targets civilians.

### **Poverty and Social Violence: The Explanations**

The literature states that poverty and violence are related, but there are various ways through which they are connected. The first strand of explanations suggests that the linkage between poverty and violence is a question of the prevailing political and socio-economic condition of a group of people. Popularly referred to as the “grievance factor” or “relative deprivation” or “inequality” perspectives, the argument is predicated on the theory that the extent of discrimination of groups, especially ethnic and religious groups, and existing social divisions are possible predictors of organized violence against the state or the perceived dominant group. The advocates of this theory derive their assumptions from the psychological theories that articulate the point that frustration leads to aggression. In the frustration-aggression thesis, it is argued that individuals with an extreme frustration arising from a sense of deprivation will most likely respond aggressively to the object which is perceived to be responsible for their condition (Anifowoshe, 1982). In his own contribution, Ted Gurr (2000) advances the relative deprivation

argument which presupposes that people rebel when there is a growing perception of a widening discrepancy between their expectations (mostly in economic terms) and actual rewards because of discrimination. According to him, "...discrimination and repression increase the strength of most peoples' identification with their kindred and motivate them to seek collective remedies. Skillful leaders build on these psychological dispositions to mobilize support for new and renewed campaigns of protest and ethno-rebellion" (Gurr, 2000: 105).

A major problem with the psychological approach, as noted by Anifowoshe (1982: 7), is the fact that there are many other factors that can lead to aggression and not necessarily frustration. Based on empirical evidence, both variables – frustration and aggression – can be independent of each other, without necessarily having a dependent relationship in all cases. What this suggests in simple terms is that poverty and social inequality may not necessarily be a condition for violence all the time, as there are other factors such as easy access to arms (for example, the case of gun violence in the United States), historical, religious and cultural factors (Israel and Palestinian conflict), and other potential factors that can cause or escalate violence. Anifowoshe (1982: 8) further notes that the theories around frustration are even flawed on the grounds that it is more difficult to operationalise the notions of "expectations" or "relative deprivation" because these are difficult to measure.

The second set of arguments are predicated on empirical researches which show that violence is prevalent in countries with poor conditions of living and high rates of unemployment. This is because of the "greed" of looting assets or natural resources in those countries. For example, Collier presented the findings that low-income countries have a higher possibility of getting into conflicts than their high-income counterparts. He argues that there is a simultaneous relationship between poverty and violence. As much as poverty leads to violence, violence also leads to poverty. Young unemployed men in low-income states are vulnerable to recruitment by militant rebels because "life itself is cheap, and joining a rebel movement gives these young men a small chance of riches" (Collier, 2007: 20). In their useful empirical research, Miguel et al (2004) demonstrated that economic growth shocks, in this case rainfall shocks, have a positive connection to violence. According to them, "growth shocks have a dramatic causal impact on the likelihood of civil war: a five-percentage-point negative growth shock increases the likelihood of a civil war the following year by nearly one-half" (Miquel et al 2004: 746). Against this

backdrop, Miguel (2007) argues that improving the living standards of violence-prone countries may be the most practicable way to reduce the incidents of violence in such countries.

In another explanation within this perspective, Fearon and Laitin (2003) argue that poor countries are prone to violence given that they tend to lack the capacity to contain armed uprisings and insurgencies. Besides, warlords and rebel leaders command more influence in such political environments. This underscores the idea of a strong correlation between failed state or weak states and conflicts, which is popular in conflict studies. A state that lacks the capacity to provide for its people in terms of creating jobs and providing welfare services is prone to violence because the aggrieved citizens are ready to take up arms against the state to register their displeasure about their condition (Rotberg, 2002; Piazza, 2008; Howard, 2010).

It should be acknowledged that the above perspective is not generally the case as research concerning terrorism has established. It was observed that the argument on poverty and terrorism, although valid in some instances, is not generally the case in many situations as many of those who have been found to carry out terrorist acts are not from poor background. Rather, some of them are well educated, have exposures and from rich families. This is the case with other violent incidents. Arguments suggesting a predictive explanation of violence in poor countries do not offer convincing reasons why some other countries with poor economic features do not have a record of recurring violence. However, the validity of the claims derive from empirical research pointing to the fact violence has been more recorded in the poor countries over a period of time (for example, Luckham et al, 2001; Miquel et al. 2004).

### **Incidence of Poverty in Africa**

Africa has been lagging behind in the global outlook on development with its high rates of poverty, hunger, and unemployment. A recent report by a team of economists of the World Bank shows that there might have been a decrease in poverty rate in the continent, from 57 % in 1990 to 43 % in 2012. However, it was observed that Africa still experienced an ironic exponential increase of 100 million poor people within that period. Worse still is the projection that Africa will experience a concentration of the world's extreme poor in the nearest future (Beegle et al. 2016). Indeed, the continent now has 75% of the world's poorest states (with Central African Republic ranked as the poorest with a GDP per capita of US\$ 656 in 2016) (Paktor, 2015).

Despite the stories of “Africa rising” in the early 2000s following the surprising economic growth of more than 4.5 % between 2000 and 2012, which seemingly changed the narrative of a poverty-stricken continent, the report states that Africans living in poverty rose to 330 million by 2012 as against 280 million in 1990 (Beegle et al. 2016). The report found that the fragile states (countries prone to conflict and natural disasters in Africa) have even recorded very slow poverty reduction while “chronic poverty is substantial” in many of the rural areas (Beegle et al. 2016: 1). Furthermore, while enrolments have noticeably improved in the schools, it was observed that “more than two in five adults are still illiterate, and the quality of schooling is often low” (Beegle et al. 2016: 1). What this suggests in simple terms is that although the region experienced some economic growth in the 2000s, the expansion had no direct impact on improving the standard of living of the people.

In another report by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, it was estimated that 233 million people in Africa, out of the world’s 795 million, faced hunger or undernourishment between 2014 and 2016. This made sub-Saharan Africa the region with the second largest area with hungry people -- after Asia. In another report, it was reported that “approximately one in three people living in sub-Saharan Africa are undernourished” (Paktor, 2015). More worrisome is the fact that Africa remains the region with the least progress towards reducing poverty in the world (<http://www.worldhunger.org/>). In other areas of human development, Africa’s story remains equally distressing. The 2016 Human Development Report states that inequality as a cause of depreciated human development, at 32% in sub-Saharan Africa, is the highest in the world, while the rural-urban inequality is the highest with 74% poor people in the rural areas as against 31% in the urban areas. The report further demonstrated that Africa has generally not improved in healthcare as maternal and adolescent mortality is at 551 deaths per 100,000 live births and 103 births per 1,000 women ages 15–19, while there have been improvements in other regions (UNDP, 2016). Maternal deaths in sub-Saharan Africa are approximately more than 230 times more likely to occur than in North America (Paktor, 2015).

Apparently, the hope that the situation will improve anytime soon is very unclear as many African economies experienced negative growth following a sharp fall in commodity prices and other shocks in the global economy since 2015, reaching its peak in 2016, which have plunged some of them into recession. High inflation rates and increased rate of unemployment

characterised the continent. The UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) noted that 13 Least Developed Nations, of which African countries constitute a large number,<sup>2</sup> have been the most affected and increased their poverty rate (Guardian, 2017). In a United Nations Economic and Social Council (UNESCO) and African Union report (2017), it was stated that because of the negative growth experienced in 2016,

At the social level, the poor in Africa live much further below the extreme poverty threshold than in other regions, with an average consumption at about 60 per cent of the international poverty line. Despite numerous gains, inequality remains a key development challenge in Africa. The average within-country inequality levels in Africa are high and hamper the poverty-reducing effect of economic growth.

It is instructive that many African countries failed to actualise the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the target year of 2015. Sub-Saharan Africa recorded the least performance in halving extreme poverty by 2015 as only Botswana and Equatorial Guinea were the only states that achieved the goal (Baptiste, 2014) Not even one country was able to achieve the goal for reduction in maternal mortality rate (Gibbs, 2015). Many analysts have therefore been skeptical about Africa's prospects for achieving the targets for the new round of the global development agenda – the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – introduced in 2015 for 2030.

### **Rising social violence in Africa**

Indeed, research shows that there has been a significant decline in wars and other large-scale political violence involving large numbers of casualties in Africa. Reports from the Center for Systemic Peace and the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIK) demonstrate that high-intensity conflicts and wars (where over 500 people are killed) are lower in comparison with the 1990s (Aucoin, 2017). Yet, there have been more incidents of social protests and violence in the region in recent times, which are paid less attention to. A report released by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) reported a sharp increase in the number of protests and riots since 2010 in the continent, with South Africa

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<sup>2</sup> According to the United Nations, countries under the category of "least developed countries" (LDCs) are considered "highly disadvantaged in their development process, for structural, historical and also geographical reasons." Compared to other countries, they have a higher "risk of deeper poverty and remaining in a situation of underdevelopment." Presently, there are 48 countries in that category, out of which 34 are in Africa (<http://unctad.org/en/Pages/ALDC/Least%20Developed%20Countries/LDCs.aspx>).

recording the highest, while Tunisia, Ethiopia and Egypt followed. South Africa's Civic Protests Barometer reported that the years 2009 (204 incidents) and 2014 (218 incidents) saw the highest numbers of incidents of civic protests in the state (Chigwata, M O'Donovan and Powell, 2017). Interestingly, these actions are mostly carried out by the poor who see violent protests as a means to communicate their grievances over government's failures in addressing their socio-economic problems, perceived to be driven by poor service delivery and corruption. In South Africa, for example, most of the violent protests are popular in the poor communities otherwise known as townships and informal settlements. A report by South Africa based Institute for Security Studies (ISS) stated that "unemployment, high levels of poverty, poor infrastructure, and the lack of houses add to the growing dissatisfaction in these and other poor communities" (Burger, 2009). Another report by the Reference Group on Migration and Community Integration found that the wave of xenophobia in South Africa has more to do with "a state of inequality and prevalent poverty" (Ratlebjane and Pather, 2016).

A useful report by ISS states that besides the increasing rates of social protests and riots, other observable trends dominating the patterns of conflict in Africa are the following: increased targeting of civilians; changing conflict actors; and conflict goals. The report demonstrates that civilians are becoming more targeted in violence as against combatants. This trend was most common in Nigeria and Ethiopia. It was also observed that political and communal militias are increasingly taking over from rebel groups and state forces, which is an indication that the motivation has shifted away from direct overthrow of a regime (Aucoin, 2017).

Homicide is one trend that featured prominently in the report. However, there is lack of useful data to adequately track it in Africa. This notwithstanding, it is clear that homicide is very high in Africa. A 2014 report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime reveals that Africa and Latin America have the highest number of countries with homicide incidents. In this context, Lesotho and South Africa are in the category of the top 10 countries in the world (Ser, 2016). In South Africa, for example, report suggests that 34 murders per 100,000 people occurred as of 2015/16 and a murder was recorded on an average 51.2 times in a day (<https://africacheck.org/>). An increase of 4.9% was recorded between 2015 and 2016, which implies that more than 50 people are killed on a daily basis (England, 2016).

### **Case Study: Nigeria**

Nigeria presents an interesting case about the connection between poverty and social violence in Africa. Although this paper is not based on an extensive quantitative research to empirically show the link, but in qualitative terms there is enough evidence to show the prevalence of poverty on the one hand, and evidence for the rising cases of social violence on the other hand. Thus, this study will approach the subject-matter from that perspective.

### *Poverty*

Nigeria has been a country of a paradox considering the wide disconnection between its abundant oil riches and its deplorable state of human development. The 2016 Human Development report ranked Nigeria 152 among 188 UN member nations, with a total Human Development Index of 0.53% (UNDP, 2016). With an estimated 65% poverty rate, Nigeria is ranked as one of the top five countries with poor people. The poverty rate is very high in the rural areas (because of less development in the rural areas) and amongst female (who are economically disempowered over cultural and religious reasons). The North-west and North-east recorded the highest level of poverty with 74.3%. Youth unemployment rate was 42% and regarded as “very high, creating poverty, helplessness, despair and easy target for crime and terrorism” in the UN report (2016). The state of healthcare is also worrisome. It was reported that “37% of children under five years old were stunted, 18 percent wasted, 29% underweight and overall, only 10% of children aged 6-23 months are fed appropriately based on recommended infant and young children feeding practices” (Ujumadu, 2016).

The country’s sudden fall into recession in 2016 following gross corruption, wastage and failed economic policies over the years have further aggravated the situation. The inflation rate soared to an extremely high rate of 18% which further deepened hunger and hopelessness in the country as food prices spiralled upward and increasingly out of the reach of the masses. Clearly, this represented a major setback for a country still battling with the social impacts of the Boko Haram insurgency that has created a population of 2, 152, 000 internally displaced people (IDP) based on the estimate of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC) as of 2015. The government and the international community had declared a hunger emergency in the North-east with an estimated 400,000 children aged under five were found to be at risk of severe acute malnutrition over the next 12 months in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe States (with 244,000 in Borno state alone) (<https://www.actionagainsthunger.org.uk/blog/11-things-you-may-not-know->

about-hunger-emergency-nigeria). In January, the UN launched an appeal for 1.05 billion USD for 6.9 million people in the area (Harrison, 2017).

More worrying is the fact that there is no effective social security system in existence to address the pervasive poverty in the country. It is important to acknowledge the social intervention programmes introduced by the present administration such as the school feeding programme, conditional cash transfer, youth employment and micro-credit loans. However, the policies have been enmeshed in controversies over inefficiencies as no satisfactory progress has been made on reaching the targeted people. Thus, its intended objectives are obscure and unable to cushion the effects of an increasingly harsh economy.

### *Social violence in Nigeria*

With the very saddening picture presented above, there should be no gainsaying that violence will be very present in such country. Already, it has been established in many research that the incidence of terrorism fast enveloping the North-east has a lot to do with poverty (Onapajo and Uzodike, 2012; International Crisis Group, 2014). To have a good graphical representation of the incidence of social violence in Nigeria, two institutional data are very useful: The Nigeria Social Violence (NSV) by the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) which documents social violence in Nigeria from 1998-present and the Nigerian Security Tracker (NST) by the US Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), which has been using media sources to track violence in the country since 2011-. Both generate their data from a collection of both local and international media on conflict-related issues in Nigeria.

The NSV's report is based on social violence that occurred from 1998 to 2014. The NSV documents the following types of violence in its database: state-related violence; farmer-herders; Boko Haram; communal and political violence (related to partisan politics). In the period covered, a total of 32,943 deaths were recorded from the events. The report, as graphically illustrated in Table 1, states that in the first 10 years (1998 to 2008), most of the social violence appeared more in the central, southwestern and northwestern states, while the Boko Haram incident dominated the scene from 2009 (<http://www.connectsaisafrica.org/research/african-studies-publications/social-violence-nigeria/>). The NST's report which covers from May 2011 till date looks at the general conflicts in Nigeria. The report states that 13, 938 people have died as a result of the Boko Haram violence. The country has experienced 6, 918 sectarian violence,

while the state forces have caused a total of 7,104 deaths (which are mostly civilians) (<https://www.cfr.org/nigeria/nigeria-security-tracker/p29483>).

**Table 1: Fatalities in Nigeria from Social Violence According to the Nigerian Social Violence Project**

Geo-political Zones	Fatalities (1998-2008)	Fatalities (2009 – 2014)
North-East	14%	64%
North-West	18%	12%
North-Central	27%	17%
South-West	13%	1%
South-East	6%	1%
South-South	22%	5%

Source: The Nigeria Social Violence Project, <http://www.connectsaisafrica.org/research/african-studies-publications/social-violence-nigeria/> (retrieved 25 August 2017)

The farmer-herder violence is one prominent form of social violence that has featured prominently in Nigeria today. According to ACAPS (2017), an estimated 2069 people died in Southern Kaduna and Benue states alone in 2016. In those two states, an estimated 62,000 people have also been displaced. The Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP)'s *Global Terrorism Index* (2015) reported that about 1309 people were killed in the violence between 2010 and 2014, with more occurrences in the Middle Belt areas including Taraba, Nassarawa, Southern Kaduna, Benue and Plateau.

It is clear that all these incidents cannot be separated from the poor socio-economic condition prevalent in the country. While politics cannot be totally ruled out, the intense struggle for survival and the fact that the unemployed youths are easy targets for recruitment to cause violence show the extent to which poverty is involved. To make matters worse, the Nigerian political elite see no reason for addressing the situation as they exploit the situation to advance their personal interests. The youths serve as thugs and ethno-religious militants to advance the political interests of different individuals.

## **Conclusion and Policy Recommendations**

The paper has demonstrated that poverty remains a major problem in Africa. It has a significant causal effect on the rising cases of social violence across the continent. From South Africa to Zimbabwe, and Nigeria to Kenya, there have been increasing cases of different forms of social violence, which have not been well reported in both academic and policy-making circles. This study has provided some useful analyses on the extent of the problem in Africa, with more focus on the Nigerian case. Given the findings presented in the paper, the paper offers the following as some of the possible policy options which governments and regional organisations can implement to address the issue of poverty as it relates to the phenomenon of rising social violence in Africa.

Commitment to poverty alleviation strategies: African governments must show more commitment and seriousness in pursuing strategies aimed at ameliorating the sufferings of the people. Presently, there are many social security programmes in the continent, but most of them suffer from corruption, bureaucratization and politicization that render them ineffective and unable to reach the poor that really need them. This concern should be given a serious consideration. An effective system that has the capacity to adequately capture the people that need social interventions should be established in order to actualize the intended objectives of the programmes.

- Anti-corruption strategies: the rampant cases of corruption ravaging many African states cannot be delinked from the problem of poverty in the continent. Many of the funds intended for social interventions or developmental projects end up in private hands. This has repeatedly affected the course of development in the continent. A more radical and courageous anti-corruption system need to be institutionalized to fight corruption. In addition, the judicial system must be strengthened as a governmental branch to effectively prosecute corruption-related cases.
- Good governance: Africa's long years of bad governance and poor service delivery have been a major setback in the efforts to achieve development in the continent. The issue of

good governance has been a focus of The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance (the Democracy Charter), and the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD). However, not much has been achieved since the instruments were established.

- Effective socio-economic policy: The governments must develop a serious framework for economic growth and development. The lack of direction in many existing government policies is also a major problem in the path of development in Africa.
- Regional cooperation on social violence: It is important that social violence is included in the categories of violence and conflict to be addressed in Africa. The existing regional frameworks focus more on political violence and terrorism. The issue of social violence must increasingly be seen as a problem that requires urgent attention.

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