

## PERSPECTIVES ON SECURITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: COUNSELLING AS A PANACEA FOR SOCIETAL STABILITY

By

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### Abstract

Nigeria faces significant challenges related to security and sustainable development which have far-reaching implications for societal stability. This article explores these issues, highlighting the interconnectedness of security concerns and development goals within the country. It argues that counseling offers a valuable tool in addressing these challenges by fostering emotional resilience, promoting conflict resolution and enhancing the capacity of individuals and communities to adapt to changing circumstances. Through a counseling framework, individuals are better equipped to manage stressors that arise from insecurity and underdevelopment, ultimately contributing to a more stable society. This article advocates for integrating counseling services into national policies as a strategic approach to achieving long-term stability and sustainable growth in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Security, Sustainable development, Counselling, Panacea, Societal stability.

### Introduction

Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, has faced persistent security and development challenges over the years. These issues range from terrorism, insurgency and ethnic conflicts to widespread poverty, corruption and underdevelopment. Groups like Boko Haram and other insurgent factions have intensified insecurity in the northern regions (Ojewale, 2021), while banditry, kidnappings and communal clashes plague other parts of the country (Zubairu, 2020). These security concerns have significantly hindered economic growth, undermined social cohesion and stunted development efforts. Moreover, the lack of equitable resource distribution and inefficient governance has deepened the socio-economic disparity, contributing to widespread discontent and instability (Musa, 2021).

The interplay between security and sustainable development is critical for a nation's progress. Security ensures stability, which is a prerequisite for sustainable development. Conversely, underdevelopment, poverty and inequality can exacerbate insecurity, creating a vicious cycle. In Nigeria, addressing the intersection of security and development is essential to breaking this cycle. Achieving sustainable development requires creating an environment

that fosters peace, social justice and equitable economic opportunities. Without addressing security, development efforts will be undermined, while failing to pursue development leaves security vulnerable. Therefore, a holistic approach is necessary to address both security and development in tandem to ensure long-term societal stability (Siloko, 2024).

This article aims to explore how counseling can play a pivotal role in addressing Nigeria's intertwined security and development challenges. By offering psychological support, guidance and conflict resolution strategies, counseling can promote emotional well-being, social harmony and resilience. The article posits that counseling services can help individuals and communities to cope with the psychological effects of insecurity and underdevelopment, fostering a more stable and peaceful society. Additionally, it emphasizes the need for proactive counseling interventions as part of a broader strategy to achieve both security and sustainable development in Nigeria.

### **Understanding Security in Nigeria**

Nigeria is currently grappling with a myriad of security challenges, many of which stem from various socio-political and economic factors (Igbini, 2022). One of the most significant threats is the ongoing insurgency by Boko Haram and the Islamic State of West African Province (ISWAP), particularly in the northeastern part of the country. These groups wreaked havoc through acts of terrorism, mass killings and the displacement of millions. The violence is rooted in religious extremism and the impact on civilian populations has been devastating (Africa Centre for Security Studies, 2021).

Banditry and kidnapping are widespread across the northwestern and central regions, where armed groups terrorize communities with mass abductions, robberies and attacks on villages. This wave of criminal activity has disrupted agricultural productivity and further impoverished affected areas (Soyinka et al, 2022). Additionally, the longstanding clashes between nomadic Fulani herdsmen and farming communities in the Middle Belt are fueled by competition over dwindling resources like arable land and water, leading to deadly confrontations (Creed et al, 2023). In the Niger Delta, militancy remains a significant threat. Though somewhat reduced compared to past years, groups targeting oil infrastructure continue to disrupt the country's oil production, threatening Nigeria's most vital revenue stream. Political instability and ethnic tensions add to the security concerns as violence often erupts around election periods or over local disputes (Duerken, 2021).

### **Impact of Insecurity on Societal Development**

The security crisis in Nigeria, according to Igbini (2022), has severely impacted its socio-economic development. Economically, persistent insecurity has undermined Nigeria's growth, particularly in the agricultural and oil sectors. The conflict in the northeast has displaced millions of farmers, leading to a drop in food production and increased poverty levels. In the Niger Delta, militant attacks on oil pipelines and facilities have slashed Nigeria's oil production, cutting deeply into national revenue (James, 2024).

Education is another major casualty of insecurity. Frequent attacks on schools, especially in northeastern Nigeria have forced thousands of children out of school. Boko

Haram's attacks on educational institutions have contributed to Nigeria having one of the highest numbers of out-of-school children in the world. The impact on education exacerbates poverty and unemployment, creating a vicious cycle of underdevelopment and instability (Abubakar et al, 2022; Umar, 2022; Ochuko & Nkechi, 2023).

Socially, the insecurity has led to increased ethnic and religious polarization. Ethnic conflicts, particularly in the Middle Belt and Plateau State, have driven wedges between communities, disrupting decades-old relationships. The rising number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) has created a humanitarian crisis, as camps for displaced people are often overcrowded and lack basic services, which worsens health and sanitation conditions (Anikwudike & Agabi, 2024).

The psychological toll of insecurity is also profound, particularly on children and families who have witnessed or experienced violence. The constant fear of attacks, kidnappings or displacements undermines societal stability and hinders any attempt to foster national unity or rebuild fractured communities.

### **Historical Context of Security Issues in Nigeria**

The security challenges Nigeria faces today are deeply rooted in its historical context. The amalgamation of diverse ethnic groups into a single colony under British rule in 1914 laid the foundation for the ethnic and religious tensions that have persisted into the post-independence era (Mbalisi & Okeke, 2020). This artificial union, which ignored pre-existing ethnic and cultural boundaries, sowed the seeds of distrust between the predominantly Muslim north and Christian south. These divisions were exacerbated by the uneven development policies of the colonial government, which left the northern regions economically and educationally disadvantaged (Chizoba & Nwakwesiri, 2023).

After independence in 1960, according to Yahaya et al (2022), Nigeria faced political instability, culminating in the Nigerian civil war (1967 – 1970), sparked by the secessionist movement in the Eastern region. The war further deepened ethnic divisions and set the stage for decades of military rule. This prolonged periods of military dictatorship (1966 – 1999) entrenched corruption and weakened State institutions, making it difficult for the civilian governments that followed to address the root causes of insecurity.

The rise of militancy in the Niger Delta in the 1990s and 2000s was fueled by grievances over environmental degradation and the exploitation of oil resources without adequate compensation to the local communities. Similarly, the emergence of Boko Haram in the early 2000s was a response to economic deprivation, political marginalization and a lack of State presence in Nigeria's northern regions. The group's violent campaign against western education and government institutions reflected deeper frustrations with governance cultures (Yahaya et al, 2022).

Since the return to democracy in 1999, Nigeria has faced new forms of insecurity, such as ethnic militias, politically motivated violence and the rise of extremist ideologies. Zubairu (2020) opines that despite successive governments' efforts to address these issues, corruption, mismanagement and weak institutions continue to hamper any lasting solutions to the country's

security problems. It therefore means that Nigeria's security challenges are a product of a complex interplay of historical, socio-economic and political factors. The ongoing conflicts weakened its economy and fragmented its society. To address these issues, Nigeria needs a comprehensive approach that not only focuses on military solutions but also tackles the root causes of insecurity including poverty, inequality and governance failures (Obeng-Akrofi, 2022).

### **Sustainable Development in Nigeria**

Sustainable development is defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (United Nations, 2023). It involves a balance between economic growth, social inclusion and environmental sustainability. Economic development focuses on fostering growth that creates jobs and reduces poverty without exhausting resources (Roche, 2022). Social inclusion ensures equitable access to resources and opportunities while addressing issues like health and education (Frank, 2022). Environmental sustainability seeks to manage natural resources responsibly, reduce environmental degradation and promote the use of renewable energy (Patterson, 2024).

In Nigeria, sustainable development remains a complex issue. The country has made strides in economic growth, largely due to its oil industry but this growth has been volatile as a result of its reliance on fluctuating global oil prices. Efforts to diversify the economy such as initiatives in agriculture and manufacturing have been slow to take off. Social challenges persist with widespread poverty, inequality and unemployment affecting large segments of the population, especially in rural areas. According to Hammed et al (2022), many Nigerians still lack access to basic services like quality education, healthcare and clean water. Additionally, the country faces significant environmental problems, including deforestation, pollution from oil spills and poor waste management. Climate change further exacerbates these issues by threatening agricultural productivity and food security (Nwogwugwu et al, 2023).

Despite efforts such as the National Economic Empowerment and Development strategy (NEEDS) and the Nigeria Vision 2020, progress has been limited due to a range of challenges. Okon (2020) noted that corruption and weak governance remain significant obstacles, as public resources are often misallocated, hindering the delivery of essential services and infrastructure improvements. The economy's heavy dependence on oil makes it vulnerable to external shocks, which stifles attempts to shift toward more sustainable sectors like renewable energy. Poor infrastructure, particularly in areas like electricity and transportation, further limits economic productivity and access to essential services.

Social inequality and poverty continue to hamper development, with over 40% of Nigerians living below the poverty line. Environmental degradation, especially in the Niger Delta, where oil spills and pollution are rampant, poses a major threat to human health and livelihoods. In addition, the country faces significant security challenges, including the insurgency in northeast and conflicts over natural resources, which have disrupted communities and displaced people (Nwoke, 2022). Rapid population growth further compounds these issues by increasing pressure on resources and public services, making sustainable development even

harder to achieve. While Nigeria has made some progress in integrating sustainable development goals into its national policies, these efforts are hampered by structural challenges, so much that achieving lasting change will require comprehensive reforms across governance, environmental protection and social welfare systems (Okon, 2020; Rasaki & Olusola, 2021).

### **The Interconnection between Security and Development**

The interconnection between security and development is profound, as each immensely influences the other. Security has a direct impact on development outcomes. In environments where insecurity prevails, such as conflict zones or areas prone to violence, economic and social development suffers. This is evident in regions like North-east Nigeria, where the Boko Haram insurgency has disrupted economic activities, destroyed infrastructure and displaced millions. Such instability prevents access to education and healthcare, weakens human capital and deters investment, further perpetuating cycles of poverty and underdevelopment. When people cannot safely engage in productive activities or access services, development stagnates (James, 2024; Anikwudike & Agabi, 2024).

On the other hand, development plays a vital role in enhancing security. Ezejughu (2021) believes that economic and social development can address the root causes of conflict, such as poverty, inequality and marginalization. In regions where people feel excluded from economic opportunities, grievances often manifest in violence and insecurity. By fostering inclusive development, creating jobs and improving social services, governments and development organizations can reduce the factors that lead to instability. For example, in the Niger Delta, Nigeria's development programmes, including the amnesty and training initiatives for militants, helped to reduce the region's militancy by providing alternative livelihoods (Oyibocha-Agbajoh, 2021).

Case Studies from Nigeria illustrate this dynamic interplay between security and development. The Boho Haram insurgency in the north-east has severely led to the destruction of schools, hospitals and roads. Efforts to rebuild and restore normalcy through international aid and development projects have faced challenges due to persistent insecurity. Similarly, in the Niger Delta, where environmental degradation and economic disenfranchisement sparked violence, development initiatives have played a role in reducing conflict. The government's creation of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and the introduction of the amnesty programme have contributed to a reduction in violence by addressing economic grievances and providing militants with skills and employment opportunities. However, challenges remain due to ongoing governance issues and environmental damage (Oyibocha-Agbajoh, 2021; Uwak, 2021).

In the Middle Belt region, the conflict between herdsmen and farmers, driven by competition over resources exacerbated by climate change, further highlights the relationship between development and security. Development strategies such as improved agricultural policies and the establishment of grazing reserves could help to reduce tensions by addressing the root causes of the conflict. However, James (2024) revealed that the success of these strategies is often limited by ongoing insecurity, which hampers their implementation.

It may therefore be said that security and development are mutually reinforcing. Development requires secure environment to thrive while insecurity often stems from a lack of development. Addressing the root causes of conflict through inclusive development is crucial for fostering long-term peace and stability, as illustrated by the experiences of Nigerians in various conflict-prone regions.

### **Counselling as a Strategic Approach**

Counseling can play a vital role in addressing Nigeria's security and development challenges, though the country currently has limited frameworks in place. Existing counseling practices are largely centred on school guidance programmes, mental health services provided by hospitals and NGOs, religious-based counseling and traditional community-based support systems. While these approaches offer some level of assistance, they are often underdeveloped, underfunded and lack the necessary scale to address the broader challenges of trauma from violence, mental health crises and development issues.

To integrate counseling into national policies, Usman et al (2023) believe that Nigeria would benefit from establishing a comprehensive framework that focuses on the professionalization and expansion of counseling services. This would include standardizing training and certification for counselors, particularly in areas like trauma and conflict resolution, given the country's security concerns. National policies should also prioritize the creation of more accessible public counseling centres and include counseling in health and education systems. Raising public awareness about the benefits of counseling, particularly in reducing stigma around mental health is essential for its success (Adikwu, 2024).

The government plays a critical role in this integration by developing policies, providing funding and facilitating partnerships with both local and international organizations. Mumuni and Abidogun (2023) emphasized that it must ensure that counseling is seen as part of a broader public health and security strategy, especially in regions affected by terrorism and environmental violence. NGOs are key players in this space as well, offering services where governmental reach may be limited, particularly in rural or conflict-affected areas. They can help to train professionals, advocate for policy changes and raise awareness about the importance of mental health and trauma recovery.

Community leaders, including religious and traditional figures are central to promoting counseling at the grassroots level. Their influence can help to break down cultural barriers that often prevent individuals from seeking help. They can also serve as mediators in conflict-prone areas, guiding their communities toward peace-building efforts supported by counseling services. With proper training, these leaders can be instrumental in supporting mental health initiatives and fostering a culture where seeking emotional support is normalized (Marquette University, 2021). In other words, by embedding counseling into the nation's security and development strategies, Nigeria can better address the underlying causes of insecurity, foster social cohesion and support the mental well-being of its citizens, leading to more sustainable national development.

## Conclusion

The article concludes by emphasizing the close connection between security, sustainable development and societal stability in Nigeria. Insecurity, including terrorism, communal conflicts and violence, significantly impairs the country's socio-economic progress, with communities facing setbacks in education, healthcare and overall development. Counseling is identified as a vital tool in addressing the psychological impacts of these security challenges, such as trauma and displacement, which can stall sustainable development. Moreover, counseling is not only a reactive approach but also a preventive measure, promoting emotional resilience, conflict resolution and societal cohesion, which are key to preventing further violence and instability.

Policy makers, community leaders and other stakeholders are urged to integrate counseling programmes into Nigeria's national and community development strategies. This requires dedicated funding for mental health and social services as well as collaborative efforts with non-governmental organizations, schools and religious institutions to implement grassroots counseling initiatives. The focus should be on providing emotional support and conflict management skills to those in conflict-prone areas.

In envisioning a stable and sustainable Nigeria, counseling initiatives hold the potential to build a society grounded in peace, development and resilience. Addressing the root causes of conflict and fostering emotional well-being among citizens can create a foundation where security and sustainable development thrive together. The government and stakeholders must recognize the crucial role of counseling in achieving this vision, which is essential for Nigeria's long-term stability and growth.

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