

## **INSTITUTIONAL FAILURE AND YOUTH RESTIVENESS IN NIGERIA: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF END SARS PROTEST**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examined the effects of institutional failure and youth restiveness on Nigeria's national development. It attempted to investigate the extent to which an accumulation of youth discontent with the performances of institutions in Nigeria fuelled and sustained a mass youth nationwide protest against the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) of the Nigerian Police Force. (SARS). As analytical research, this study relied on secondary data and applied content analysis for inference. It adopted the Relative deprivation theory to examine how the general feeling of frustration in Nigeria can lead to youth restiveness. The major findings revealed that most institutions saddled with the responsibilities to protect citizens, provide services and address societal challenges in the country are either underperforming or compromised. The study goes on to recommend institutional reforms, accountability and service delivery control mechanisms to contain youth restiveness and promote national development.

**Keywords:** Institutional failure, Youth Restiveness, End SARS, Protest.

## INTRODUCTION.

Service Delivery is a central function of government be it at the local, state or federal level. Every government all over the world strives to establish structures and institutions through which the primary responsibilities of government are executed and implemented. It is in recognition of this obligation on the part of the leadership that the Nigerian 1999 Constitution provides "that the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government and that the state shall direct its policy towards ensuring implementation among others;"

1. The promotion of a planned and balanced economic development;
2. That the material resources of the nation are harnessed and distributed as best as possible to serve the common good;

It is the government's understanding of its primary responsibilities that informs the establishments of the various structures and public institutions saddled with the tasks of carrying out these responsibilities. This is why the "public service of any nation is often regarded as the live-wire or nerve-centre of the state structure. It is the operational arm of government which carries the burden of analysing, implementing and administering public policy" (Oyedele, 2015).

Therefore, the viability of governance, the rate of progress and the overall development and stability of any country is dependent on the nature of institutions through which a country dispenses its functions. In this case, institutional performance becomes a major yardstick for assessing state leadership qualities. A country like Nigeria is termed corrupt when it has weak institutions which according to Acemoglu, "is too weak to deliver essential services but too strong to provide the elite something to fight over." (Acemoglu & Robinson 2012).

Over time, the various arms of the Nigerian government have been criticized for poor standards and lack of accountability, resulting in gross neglect of important sectors that drive human resources and national development. Thus, Peter.S. Ubi (2011) noted

“that such institutions as schools, road construction institutions, electricity supply institutions, good water provisions institutions and other essential services institutions necessary to drive the economic development process are greatly compromised.”

Since these institutions drive national development, it becomes understandable that weak versions of them as are obtainable in Nigeria may constitute an impediment to swift human and physical development. Above all, institutional failures reinforce social inequality, youth unemployment and other problems capable of igniting youth restiveness in a society.

The Youth-led End SARS protest that engulfed the country in October 2020 stands out as a case study. This research is therefore intended to establish a connection between the fragility of institutions and youth restiveness using the End SARS protest as a case study. It is expected that in the end, this study would add to other works on crisis management and control, public administration and capacity building by demonstrating that national development and youth restiveness are predicated on reasonable institutional performances. In the end, solutions will be proffered on how to contain youth restiveness through proactive and satisfactory institutional service delivery for national development.

## CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

### **Institutions**

Douglass North defines institutions as ‘humanly devised constraints that structure political, economic and social interactions. These constraints may be both formal (for example, constitutions, laws, and property rights) and informal (for example, customs and traditions).’ (North 1990, p. 3). 69. North’s definition states what institutions are: “constraints (i.e norms, rules) which organise human interaction.” Although North’s definition is broadly used, it does not have universal acceptance. Expanding on North’s definition of institution Peter. S. Ubi, (2011) postulated that “institutions can make predictable our dealings with each other every day in all kinds of forms and shapes. They thereby, not only reduce uncertainty in the world but allow us to get on with everyday business and solve problems effectively.”

This study uses another, most inclusive and yet simple definition. It comes from the British institutional economist Geoffrey Hodgson who defines: "... institutions as systems of established and prevalent social rules that structure social interactions. Language, money, law, systems of weights and measures, table manners, and firms (and other organizations) are thus all [examples of] institutions." (Hodgson 2006, p. 2) 70.

It has been adduced that institutional service delivery is a major indicator of the performance of governments all over the world. "Institutions are expected to facilitate the generation of ideas, stimulate innovations, lower transaction costs correct government failure and by extension facilitate economic growth. (Ajayi, 2003)

Institutional failure otherwise referred to as the weakness of institutions can be described as the absence of those attributes or qualities that define the institutional strength of a structure or body (Sambo, 2013, cited in Adebayo & Nasir, 2014: 239). Quality service delivery of essential services to the people are primary responsibility of the state. These responsibilities are carried out through public institutions. Therefore, state responsiveness to citizens' well-being is distinguished according to the levels of effective delivery of the most crucial political goods through a functional institutional arrangement (Rotberg, 2003, cited in Okafor, 2021). The quality of institutions helps to distinguish weak states from strong or responsive states and vice versa. Institutional failures are established when basic services such as security of lives and properties, adequate health care system, functional schools, electricity, and good water supply among others are not available or inadequate. Okafor (2018:13) thought that much of public administration failings and malfunctioning are located within the institutional context of its operation and further follow from devious political dispositions. Ozohu-Suleiman (2013:10) reiterates that the political failings of political masters became the institutional failings of

bureaucracy. It is the failure of institutions to deliver on their set goals and targets that justify the description of governments as good or bad.

### **Youth Restiveness**

At this point, attempts must be made to understand the conceptual meanings of youth restiveness taking into account the fusion of two operational words “youth” & “restiveness”.

The word Youth according to Uriah, Egbezor & Ololube (2014:106) can be seen as young men and women who are no longer children, but not yet adults. As defined by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2017), a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence.

For Agina-Obu (2008), restiveness can be defined as a kind of human behaviour geared towards the realization of an individual's or group's needs. It emanates from individual or group failures or inability to meet their needs through institutional provisions or arrangements that could result in youth restiveness. Therefore, Elegbeleye, (2005) defined youth restiveness as “a sustained protestation embarked upon to enforce desired outcome from a constituted authority by an organized body of youths.” It is marked by protest violence and disruption as the case may be. Also, Agbaji, Akhabue, Duruaku et al (2018) youth restiveness can be said to be a “determined disposition by a group of youths to use violent force or threat of force to agitate for their needs and dissatisfactions to be met by the appropriate authorities.” They see these needs as sacrosanct and very important to meet. As such, they adopt every measure necessary and available to make their requests. I see therefore Youth restiveness as a conscious device of activities or actions by young people to resist unfavourable conditions imposed on them by authorities or to compel authorities to take a course of action to address the common expectations of a group of young people. Youth restiveness has often assumed a violent dimension in Nigeria. We have had youth restive activities targeting the state SAP riot 1989, institutions and bodies such as the Niger

Delta armed struggle against the activities of Oil companies in the region or against religious and tribal groups (this one is more frequent due to ethnic and cultural diversities of the country).

#### THEORETICAL STRAND TO UNDERSTANDING YOUTH RESTIVENESS IN NIGERIA

The concept of relative deprivation is often attributed to American sociologist Robert K. Merton, whose study of American soldiers during World War II revealed that soldiers in the Military Police were far less satisfied with their opportunities for promotion than regular GIs! In proposing the first formal definitions of relative deprivation, British statesman and sociologist Walter Runciman listed four required conditions:

- A person does not have something.
- That person knows other people who have the thing.
- That person wants to have the thing.
- That person believes they have a reasonable chance of getting the thing.

Another viewpoint on relative deprivation was developed by American author and Professor of Political Science, Ted Robert Gurr. In his 1970 book “Why Men Rebel”, he established a link between relative deprivation and political violence. Gurr examines the probability that the frustration-aggression mechanism, triggered by feelings of relative deprivation, is the primary source of the human capacity for violence.

The theory of relative deprivation is useful for analysing factors that contribute to many cases of youth restiveness in Nigeria. Several cases of unrest, riots, and violent and peaceful demonstrations such as the SAP riots of 1989, the removal of the oil subsidy of 2015, as well as End Sars protest of 2020 among others were deeply influenced by citizens feeling of deprivation amid abundant human, mineral and material resources. The Nigerian youth have always had a feeling that there exist some unresolved structural issues which create discrepancies between national resources, citizens' expectations and resource distribution, hence a growing incidence of frustration that often triggers unrest.

## OVERVIEW OF INSTITUTIONAL FAILURE AND YOUTH RESTIVENESS IN NIGERIA

There must be some element of certainty and stability which can only be provided by good governance and sound economic policymaking through the enthronelement of the appropriate institutions. Of course, the role of formal institutions in providing a stable economic, political and social environment cannot be overemphasised. Institutional performance has a positive relationship with economic development; implying that once the right institutions are in place, the nation will flourish and prosper. (Ezenekwe and Amah, 2014:84) Nigerian youth have had to groan under the pains and contend with gross service delivery failures in society. Infrastructural decay in schools and hospitals constitutes a serious impediment to the survival and growth of individuals and the development of Nigerian society. Even though we have had several reforms and policies in our Health and Educational sectors, the performances of those institutions are considered weak to the point that citizens are relying on external forces and self-sacrifice to access their existential needs. While the political institutions have been dominated by the same old elites to the exclusion of the youth for decades now, the labour market is also not rewarding but very retrogressive. Graduates roam the streets in search of jobs having been trained under a system that makes them job seekers and not job creators. Civil servants, lecturers and University workers alike do not get their fair reward after working so hard in a country endowed with enormous mineral and material resources. Essential services like water, energy, transport, and good road networks are not provided or maintained adequately. We have a multiplicity of institutions that do not deliver goods and services when needed. Monitoring and Evaluations of projects and policies are not enforced to ensure a synergy between policy formulations and implementations and the results of goals and objectives.

It has been strongly argued that the lack of opportunities to realize basic needs is one of the causes of youth restiveness in the country as in most other societies (Uriah, Egbezor & Ololube

.2014:111). This fundamental social problem could manifest in any or a combination of many qualified youths not gainfully employed while many others are not fit for employment (Okorosaye-Orubite, 2008).

### I. Unemployment Challenges

Post-independence Nigeria leadership has failed to provide employment opportunities to absorb the country's youth population irrespective of its present and future consequences on national development. The unemployment rate has continued to be on the increase in Nigeria. The general unemployment rate of 9.01 per cent was relatively higher than what it was in 2021 which was 3.07 per cent. The youth unemployment rate which was 7.81 percent in 2015 rose to 17.69 percent in 2019 less than five years period (Sangodapo, 2022, 335).

A Bloomberg report documented that Nigeria has surpassed South Africa on a list of 82 countries whose unemployment rates were monitored recently, with Namibia leading the list with 33.4%. The report said Nigeria's unemployment rate surged to the second highest on a global list of countries tracked. The increasing number of job seekers in the country over the years is a reflection of population growth which has continued to outpace output expansion (Premium Times, 2021).

### ii. General Insecurity of Lives and Properties

A must imperative of a secured and sheltered environment to human existence makes Security the prime responsibility of the state “(Thomas Hobbs, 1996). This also informed section 11&18 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which stipulates that “The security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government” (FRN,1999) The present democratic dispensation which commenced in 1999 inherited a catalogue of unresolved volatile issues some of which are the major causes of present-day security challenges in the country. The security situation in Nigeria over time has been quite disturbing but the more recent



experience in violent extremism, insurgency and other forms of militancy have made the situation much more complex (Adagba, Ugwu & Eme, 2012). Talking about extremism the 2011, Boko Haram attack on the United Nations Building in Abuja provides empirical evidence. The attack was fatal leading to the death of about 21 people and 60 others wounded. Nevertheless, what gave Boko Haram the international attention it yearned for was the kidnapping of over 200 hundred school girls from their school dormitory in Chibok, Borno state (Magashi, 2022:444). Painfully about one hundred of these girls are still in captivity.

As though the security institutions of this country were overwhelmed, the entire country soon was engulfed with different security concerns (Akinwunmi, 2022:512) the northern part of the country being the most affected with devastating consequences. In the past decade, Nigeria has been battling with cases of insurgency, tensions and clashes between herders and farmers, kidnappings, and cattle rustling leading to the loss of lives and properties as well as the displacement of about 2,583,000 people (IDMC, 2020 cited in Yorom & Dasyilva, 2020:175).

Essentially, the escalation of violent conflicts across Nigeria in recent times can be understood within the logic that political insurgencies, criminal networks, Kidnapping gangs, armed militia and resorting to conflicts are often the most common response to a situation of stagnation and lack of prospects (Abbink, 2005, cited in Daura, 2018:148).

### iii. Faulty Policing and Compromised Justice System

The Nigerian police force is the core governmental institution of the state charged with the responsibility of protecting the lives and properties of the citizens. This role was explicitly provided for in Part II Section 4 of the Nigerian Police Act 2020, which stipulated that the primary functions of the Nigeria Police Force shall include: —protection of the lives and property of every person in Nigeria, maintenance of public safety, law and order; prevention

and dictating of crimes and protection of the rights and freedom of every person in the country as provided in the constitution. Accordingly, it shall be the duty of the Nigerian police to facilitate free passage and movement and not as impediments on highways, roads and streets open to the public among others (Nigeria Police Act, 2020 p. 6).

The nature of enforcing these stipulated mandates has remained the source of generational public discontent against the operations and activities of the Nigerian police and the judiciary. Noticeable among agencies of crime management in Nigeria are such problems as lack of consultation with and accountability to citizens and failures to harmonize their operations in line with democratic principles of the criminal justice system Alemika (2003). There is growing public concern about police integrity in Nigeria and its consequences on effective policing and a fair justice system (Idowu, B.M. & Nwosu, C.P.2021:25) Citizen's lack of confidence in the police as an instrument for peace, law and order has remained a major obstacle to effective policing in the country. Cases of brutality, bribery and corruption, coerciveness, and regular cases of intimidation have continued to define police–public relations in Nigeria (Gilbert Enyidah-Okey Ordu & Macpherson U Nnam, 2017:88)

Several cases against the Nigerian police exist to account for the level of injustice, extra judicial killings, extortion, tribal bias, torture, robbery and other forms of unconstitutional acts which culminated in negative public perception of the Force leading to EndSars protests in October 2022 (Idowu, B.M. & Nwosu, C.P.2021:28) Police unholy actions tend to deepen public resentment against them and poor policing has been identified for several cases of death in the hands of police (Yorom & Dasylva, 2020) The killing of six youths, one female and five male spare parts dealers in 2005 in Apo village Abuja known today as Apo Six is still fresh in the minds of the general public. The judicial proceedings on this matter lasted for close to 12 years eliciting public outcry against the police and the Nigerian judiciary. A disappointing highlight

of the judgement was that the principal suspect of the killing, a deputy commissioner of police Ibrahim Danjuma was acquitted and reinstated in the police and promoted to the next rank. HumAngel (online blog ) reported that Twelve years after the incident, Ishaq Bello, the presiding Judge, on March 9, 2017, held that there were contradictions in witness testimonies and that Ibrahim's fingerprint was not taken after arrest, making it impossible to establish his guilt, meaning that the victims were gunned down by ghosts?

Against the background of international and domestic poor ratings of the Nigeria Police Force (Human Rights Watch, 2016, cited in Idowu above), noted reports and insinuations that police officers in Nigeria engage in activities that undermine the integrity of what an ideal police organization should be. This same source referred to cases of illegal extortions of money from unsuspecting public members, numerous roadblocks which have led to avoidable accidents on highways, illegal arrest of unsuspecting citizens in disguise for police raids, intimidation of law-abiding citizens, forceful collection of money from commercial motorists, among other deviant attitudes which undermines conventional police roles and further generates public resentments against the police force. (John, 2017). Despite some landmark achievements by the police both in local and international engagement public opinion still weighs heavily against their performance in the country. This partly explains why in 2016, the International Police Science Association rated Nigerian police as the WORST in the world (Onubogu, 2020).

#### **BUILD UP TO END SARS PROTEST**

SARS is the acronym for SPECIAL ANTI-ROBBERY SQUAD unit of the Nigeria Police Force. Available records indicate that with the growing number of high-profile criminal cases such as robbery, murder, assassination etc in Lagos state, the unit was created in 1992 to tackle armed robbery in the state. Initially, members of the squad were operating undercover against violent crimes in plain clothes traditionally called "mufti" and unmarked vehicles. Since their

task was mainly to facilitate successful arrests of criminals and armed robbers, they did not carry arms or other objects that could expose their activities before the public.

According to the Amnesty Report in 2002, SARS spread from Lagos to other states. Its mandate was to arrest, investigate, and prosecute suspected armed robbers, murderers, kidnappers, hired assassins, and other violent criminals. While it was credited with having reduced brazen lawlessness in its initial years, the police unit was later accused of becoming a criminal enterprise that acted with impunity. SARS officers were rarely held accountable for their behaviour. The unit quickly began to set up roadblocks and severally was accused of extorting money from members of the public. The SARS officers started to carry weapons in public and were over time implicated in extrajudicial killings, torture, arbitrary arrests, and unlawful detention. There was a catalogue of cases against SARS all of which revolved around their impunity to act outside the law. There was a general sense of feeling by citizens that the much and widely dreaded police unit not only turned out to be a nightmare for the people they were created to protect but similarly were perpetrators of the very crimes they were created to stamp out. Amidst public outcry and request for state control on the activities of SARS, Amnesty International issued a report that said it had documented at least 82 cases of torture, ill-treatment and extrajudicial executions by SARS officers between January 2017 and May 2020. The victims, Amnesty said, were predominantly men of 18 to 25 years old from low-income backgrounds and other vulnerable groups. SARS acquired so much notoriety across the country that it attracted the attention of Amnesty International in 2014 and 2016, during which the international human rights organization investigated the organisation and described it as the headquarters of human rights violations. (Vanguard Online, Oct, 2020). One of their facilities at AKWUZU in Anambra state today stands as a sad reference point of a Hitler-like Jewish concentration Camp during World War 11. There were allegations of secret killings, mock executions, and torture. There were cases of swapping innocent citizens with criminals and

parading them publicly after extorting money and releasing the actual criminals. In one instance, a student union activist from Madonna University was arrested in January 2019 and detained for six months for speaking against the school management. His experience at Awkuzu SARS was heartbreaking. In other cases, SARS operatives were accused of meddling in land disputes and even domestic issues involving family members. Detainees under SARS custody across the country lamented torture, dehumanising of innocent victims and extra-judicial killings. Victims slept in overcrowded cells and were often denied food and medications. In 2013, 35 bodies were found in a river between Anambra and Enugu states. They were missing people allegedly killed by SARS in one of their detention facilities. This particular incident attracted a lot of international condemnation calling on the authorities to disband this unit and subsequently reform the police. Several promises by the government to look into allegations of violation of human rights ranging from illegal detention, torture, assault, and extrajudicial killings were never implemented. In most cases, erring officials were transferred from one duty post to another without prosecution. Indeed, SARS's operational existence was a period of cruelty and anarchy unleashed by a state police unit notoriously corrupt and criminal. Critics contended it came to broaden and metamorphosed into more of the exact type of criminal syndicate it was created to extinguish. The government's insensitivity to both local and international requests for urgent police reforms to avoid poor public ratings arising from frequent cases of torture, illegal detention and disappearance of suspects also exposed the lack of accountability and gross institutional failure in the country. A culmination of all these inadequacies fuelled a youth-led mass movement against police brutality and by extension against institutional failures in the acronym END SARS.

INCREASING POLICE PUBLIC POOR PERCEPTION IN THE FACE OF GOVERNANCE  
DEFICIT

The police's historical role, degree of effectiveness and repertoire of practices in dealing with ordinary people play a large part in explaining the deficit of public trust in the police (Goldsmith, 2005 p.444). As in the case of Nigeria, unprofessional activities of the Police tend to reduce public confidence in the Force and further question its legitimacy (Idowu & Nwosu, 2021:21)

Before the End SARS protest, contacts between the police and the citizens were characterized by anxiety, especially for the poor and powerless citizens (Alamika, 1999: p.2). The degree of confidence and public perception of the average Nigerian on the police force was very low. Brutality, illegal arrest, and unlawful detentions were among the very many unprofessional conducts recorded against the Police. Endong, (2018) claimed that the police show a lack of confidence even in its administrative policies and in applying the law due to how they handle the public. Citizen's anger against the police was further reinforced by the impunity with which the SARS unit of the police force operated all over the country. SARS before the mass revolt was a nightmare, mere mention of their name caused panic, fear and anxiety even among innocent and law-abiding members of the public. With increasing rate of violent crimes such as robbery, kidnaping, insurgency and terrorism and the apparent inability of the police and other security agencies to contain the situation further affected Police public relations to a point most Nigerian citizens lost total confidence in the ability of the Police to handle security challenges (CSO Panel 2012).

Amnesty International embarked on five field investigative research missions on the activities of SARS between January 2017 and May 2020. This effort according to Amnesty, reveals a pattern of abuse of power by SARS officers and the consistent failure by the Nigerian authorities to bring perpetrators to justice. It highlighted the deficiencies in Nigerian police force accountability that contribute to, and exacerbate these violations. The lack of strict monitoring and evaluation procedures and the absence of institutional accountability have always been a

major obstacle to quality service delivery and national development. Promises to reform the entire police force were coming after initial denials by the Force that its SARS unit was operating outside conventional procedures. The government however did not fulfil the expected reforms nor were SARS officials convicted on the grounds of any of the allegations. Amnesty International reported that though the Nigerian government adopted a law criminalizing torture in December 2017 however, to date, no SARS officer has been convicted of torture in any Nigerian court.

Perpetrators of torture continue to act with impunity as if they are above the law. The government's inability to respond to popular demands by effectively restructuring the police force as well as punishing deviant officials is not different from its disgusting position on the operation and management of other public institutions around the country. Due to the government's continued display of despotic tendencies and utter disdain for democratic principles (Adebayo & Nasir, 2014:240) public officials are rarely held accountable and institutions are not effectively monitored to ensure end users' satisfaction. The period of the END SARS demonstration was also at a time when the global economy was being ravaged by the epidemic of coronavirus. An epidemic that not only shook the economies of nations but challenged the emergency response mechanisms of most countries of the world (Okibe, H. 2021)

#### MASS YOUTH REVOLT AGAINST IMPUNITY

The immediate trigger of the END SARS protest was a video that exposed the shooting of a Nigerian young man by a SARS officer in Ughelli Delta state, then pushing the dead body of the assassinated young man out of his SUV car. The SARS officials in a notorious style of impunity drove off in the late man's car (Abosede George, 2020) This incident quickly added to the general loss of hope in Nigeria's democratic experiments especially by the youth population consistently facing the frustrations of meeting their life expectancies are

continuously losing hope of national growth and individual self-reliance. Prelude to ending the SARS protest in Nigeria were too many structural issues which were all symptoms of general governance deficit (Nasir & Adebayo, 2014:240) including high poverty rate, soaring level of unemployment, inept leadership system, insecurity, corruption at high places and COVID 19 cases (Okoye & Nwafor, 2022:345).

The picture of the state of Nigeria before the END SARS protest was bleak. For instance, the country's currency (Naira) consistently lost value to the US Dollar and by implication, the poverty rate increased amidst Nigeria's leadership failure to prove its capacity to find solutions to Nigeria's myriad problems (Anazodo, et al, 2015:42) This moment was further worsened by the emergence of COVID 19 pandemic which made Nigerian economy to suffer additionally from global economic meltdown which has adversely affected the labour market. (Anazodo, et al, 2015)

The COVID-19 era was an expensive experiment that exposed the colossal damage in the institutional service delivery in Nigeria. The health sector which was supposed to be the driving force for the containment of the scourge was not responsive to the emergencies. Before the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic Nigeria has been battling with a poor healthcare system. The menace is evident in public and private hospitals. Even the supposedly VIP Clinic located in Nigeria's seat of power (Aso Rock) supposedly meant to serve the health needs of the villa's VIPs is not spared (Ogunmade, 2017, cited in Ayogu, 2021:30). There were practically no structures on ground to fight a volatile scourge as Corona Virus. It was one moment Nigerians came to terms with the level of institutional rot in the country.

The entire process of fighting the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria was not only engrossed in different forms of controversies but carried along additional challenges. The government lockdown approach without the required palliatives for this kind of far-reaching decision threw Nigerians into much difficulty. The vast majority of people outside the formal sector were hit



devastatingly by the lockdown which had a significant impact on the ability of many Nigerian families to meet their most basic needs (Morka, 2020). Most families could no longer feed during the lockdown. Prices of food items equally went up, which meant more pain for common people who could no longer afford essential food items for their families. COVID-19 lockdown in Nigeria translated to unprecedented hardship. Frustration, hunger and anger compelled ordinary people to defy the lockdown by going out in search of livelihood. In some cases, such violation of lockdown rules was resisted by repressive state apparatus leading to several deaths. Cases of killings attributed to security forces during the lockdown period made Nigerians wonder how the police and the army could be killing people more than the coronavirus (Okibe, 2021:69). Still in other cases, COVID-19 palliatives meant for the public were diverted, hoarded, repackaged and pilfered away for possible resale by influential and powerful members of the society, (Obiezu, 2020; Gbaoron, 2020, cited in Ayogu, 2021:34) while the less privileged helplessly groaned in want of their fair share of commodities acquired with public funds and for public interests.

The outbreak of coronavirus brought about serious emergency management challenges that Nigerians were not prepared for. It uncovered the government's cosmetic lies about its performance in the economy, health, education, agriculture for food sufficiency and security, science and technology, public safety, poverty eradication and citizen's welfare (Okibe, 2021:70). Heightened mutual suspicion, war tensions and divisive verbal threats that defined general public lives within that period were all expressions of frustration which made imminent youth protest like END SARS inevitable.

#### CRITIQUE OF GOVERNMENTS MANAGEMENT OF COMPLAINTS AGAINST SARS

The unprofessional faceoff with SARS across the country generated a monumental outcry from local and international authorities. On 12 October 2016, a coalition of 23 human rights

organisations and lawyers demanded an immediate investigation of a Police official and head of the Akwuzu unit of the organisation on allegations of human rights violations and other forms of unprofessional conduct. Amnesty International's reports in 2016 consistently recorded the failure of the government to conduct an independent and transparent investigation into allegations of impunity against SARS personnel irrespective of glaring evidence of misconduct. The government, for example, had disbanded the Special Anti-Robbery Squad multiple times within five years — first in 2014, then in 2015, and again in 2017 but all these amounted to hypocrisy and did not transform into elaborate reorganisation which Nigeria's vice-president Mr Yemi Osibanjo promised Nigerians. As such, its latest announcement on 11 October 2020 that the police unit had been again disbanded was viewed with scepticism (BBC, October 2020). On 15 August 2018, the Federal Government mandated the National Human Rights Commission to constitute a panel on the reform of SARS (Premium Times, 2019). Accordingly, a personal Panel of Investigation was constituted. The Panel received 113 complaints and 22 memoranda from the public and was able to identify several forms of violation. Among the recommendations was the dismissal of 37 SARS and prosecution of 24 others to demonstrate government commitment to uphold justice, rule of law and democratic principles as is obtainable in civilised societies. To date, there is no evidence that these recommendations were implemented by the government (Amnesty International, 2016).

## CONCLUSION

The fragility of institutions nurtures restiveness in society as vividly demonstrated in the youth mass protest against the government's failure to live up to its constitutional responsibilities in general and correct and address police brutality in society in particular. Despite huge budgetary allocations and the state's promises to deliver on its constitutional roles, Nigerian Bureaucratic institutions lack the needed strength to deliver on its mandates. Government failures to evaluate

the performances of these institutions and exercise effective control are evident in the poor state of critical sectors such as Health, Education, Transport, Social services and overall growth of the national economy. Policing in Nigeria has always come under the scrutiny of local and international concerns with the conclusion that the Nigerian police force has degenerated into an elite repressive instrument which like most other public institutions performs below the expectations of the citizenry. Onubuogu, (2020) contended that,

“The aggression and violence of Nigerian security forces especially a disbanded unit of Nigerian police known as SARS did not exist in a vacuum, but a built-in part of a broader failure of the Nigerian state to exercise control and ensure responsiveness of institutions of government such as the police.”

The End SARS protest was not just a call to disband and reform the police but a mass revolt against state institutions which rather than bring a path to national development flagrantly deviates uncontrollably into an instrument of oppression against the public. The protest sought to awaken government consciousness that its institutions are performing below expectations and that it is the right of citizens to be served right. Nigerian youth used the moment to rise against lopsided resource allocation distribution. This is evident in their swoop on hidden and public warehouses housing COVID-19 relief materials presumably locked up by corrupt and dubious leaders of the public.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The research findings recommend;

1. An elaborate reform of the Police Force to ensure effective and efficient service delivery.
2. Regular training both local and international to ensure police conformity with international best practices.
3. Insurance of a police force that is subject to civil control and the rule of law.

4. A Government periodical and regular strict monitoring and evaluation of all public institutions to ensure that service delivery produces targeted results and goals and objectives.

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