

## **What do Social Capital and Trust tell us about January 2012 Occupy Nigeria Protest for Public Welfare?**

Yusuf Abdulazeez\*

### **Abstract**

The introduction of neo-liberalism by European scholars in the late 1930s and its principles, which include fiscal austerity; lower price control and trade barriers; deregulated capital markets; reduced public sector's size; enlarged private sector's role and size have had adverse consequences on the quantity and quality of public welfare expected and expended to people in many states. The trend continues, since Banque Nationale de Paris and Paribas (BNP Paribas) halted payments on three of its funds (Parvest Dynamic ABS, BNP Paribas ABS Euribor and BNP Paribas ABS Eonia) on August 9, 2007. These forces among others quickened financial crisis, economic depression, multi-dimensional poverty, inequality and social exclusion across states that assigned more private sectors to determine people's right to a quality of life. While trying to break this jinx, diverse forms of social activism occurred in Europe (England, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain), United States (Occupy Wall Street), Asia (HINDRAF's rally and Bersih 3.0 in Malaysia) and Africa (Arab Spring in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and January 2012 Occupy Nigeria). Using Nigeria as a case, this paper shows the categories of social activists and their pro-social strategies for public welfare. It examines how social capital and trust shaped activism against state's neo-liberal policies and inequitable welfare. Also discussed are the changes and challenges associated with social capital and trust-driven activism for public welfare. Given the global recession, international financial institutions' stringent conditions for bail-outs, huge remuneration gap between political office-holders and civil/public servants, political elites' passion for corruption, impunity and luxurious life-styles to the detriment of 62.8% of 168 million (Nigeria's 2011 population), who lived below US\$1 per day, the state embraces neo-liberal ideologies. As a response to this, many academics; celebrities; clerics; civil and human rights advocates; environmentalists; labour unionists; lawyers; non-governmental organisations; student unionists and trade unionists applied dialogues, strikes, protests, public lectures, litigation and social media to compel state to adopt people's friendly welfare agenda. Social capital and trust that evolved from individuals' reflective thoughts on shared obligations, common identities and foes, sparked off the Occupy Nigeria protest. The activists sacrificed their ethnic, social, economic, religious and regional differences for collective pursuance of public welfare and resistance against anti-public welfare, though tribalism, regionalism and political loyalty prevented some from joining the movement. Like in most protests, representatives of the activists and state resorted to collective bargaining, which led the latter to pledge a few palliatives and reinstate part of the subsidy that was removed on petrol. The activism also heightens people's awareness of their rights to public welfare, democratic dividends, transparent and responsive state. It is sad that lives were lost, properties destroyed, peace and tranquility disrupted, insecurity increased, hardships sky-rocketed, economic activities grounded, while both state and private sectors lost huge revenues during the uprising, but the activism worth doing and each requires a great amount of personal and collective sacrifices built on 'we-feeling.'

**An abstract submitted to the 'Social Capital Working Group' of the International Initiative for Promoting Political Economy for the Fourth Annual Conference entitled, 'Political Economy, Activism and Alternative Economic Strategies' scheduled for July 9-11, 2013 at the International Institute for Social Studies, The Hague, The Netherlands.**

---

\*Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, PMB 2346, Sokoto-NIGERIA and Anthropology and Sociology Section, School of Social Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800, Minden, Penang, Malaysia.