

## **Social Issues in Nigeria Development: A General Overview**

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### **Abstract**

The paper attempts to demystify some of the social issues that have made it difficult to generate meaningful development in Nigeria despite the huge resources at its disposal. In doing, this we x-ray some of the development theories that informed the strategies adopted by various regimes in Nigeria since independence to achieve development. Adopting the political economy theoretical framework, the paper identifies analyses and proffer possible solutions to these social issues.

**Keywords:** Development, Modernization, Dependency, Corruption, Political Economy and Leadership.

### **1.0 Introduction**

Although Nigeria is the most populous nation in Africa and rich in material resources, its development aspirations and strategy have been fraught with crises since independence in 1960. Evidence of the failure of Nigerian developmental efforts are currently reflected in the pervasive cases of hunger, inflation, budget deficits, debt overhang, street begging, prostitution, frauds, high crime rates in major cities, terrorist insurgency, poverty, youth unemployment, collapse of manufacturing industries, corruption in public service and stagnation in entrepreneurial development (NISER, 2000; UNDP, 2006). Nigeria is permanently hunted by the specter of development in its fifty-four years of independence as it appears the only country where virtually all notions and models of development have been experimented (Aremu, 2003).

Two years after independence, the first National Development Plan policy was formulated between 1962 and 1968 with the objectives of development opportunities in health, education and employment and improving access to these opportunities, etc. This plan failed because fifty percent of resources required to prosecute the plan was to come from external sources, and only fourteen percent of the external finance was received (Ogwumike, 1995). Collapse of the first Republic and the commencement of civil war also distorted the plan. After the civil war in 1970, the second national development plan 1970 to 1974 was launched, the plan priorities were in agriculture, industry, transport, manpower, defense, electricity, communication and water supply and provision of social services (Ogwumike, 1995). The third plan, covering the period of 1975 to 1980 was considered more ambitious than the second plan. Emphasis was placed on rural development and efforts to revive agricultural sector. The fourth plan 1981 to 1985 recognized the role of social services, health services, etc. The plan was directed at bringing about improvement in the living conditions of the people. The specific objectives were: an increase in the real income of the average citizen, more even distribution of income among individuals and socio-economic groups, increased dependence on the country's material and human resources, a reduction in the level of unemployment and underemployment (Ogwumike, 1995).

During these periods, Nigeria's enormous oil wealth was not invested to build a viable industrial base for the country and for launching an agrarian revolution to liquidate mass poverty. For instance, the Green Revolution Programme that replaced Operation Feed the Nation failed to generate enough food for the masses. In the recent past, various strategies for development have also been tried with little or no result; among these were the structural adjustment programme (SAP), Vision 2010, national economic empowerment and development strategy (NEEDS), creation of development centers, Seven point agenda with vision 2020 of late President Musa Shehu Yar'dua and President Goodluck Jonathan current transformation agenda without any clear methodological approach towards achieving them. It is evident that the current results so far are a radical departure from what development connotes.

It is against this backdrop that, we seek to demystify some of the social issues that have made it difficult to generate meaningful development despite the huge resources at our disposal. To do this, it is necessary for us to understand what development and underdevelopment is all about.

### **1.1 Underdevelopment and Development Explained**

Like other social science concept, Development is a victim of definitional pluralism due to the plethora of definitions for development from different ideological perspectives. It is a difficult word to define. However, attempts have been made by erudite scholars to conceptualize development. Chrisman (1984) views development as a process of societal advancement, where improvement in the well being of people are generated through strong partnerships between all sectors, corporate bodies and other groups in the society. It is reasonable to know that development is not only an economic exercise, but also involves both socio-economic and political issues and pervades all aspects of societal life.

Naomi (1995) believes that development is usually taken to involve not only economic growth, but also some notion of equitable distribution, provision of health care, education, housing and other essential services all with a view to improving the individual and collective quality of life (Naomi, 1995).

Gboyega (2003) captures development as an idea that embodies all attempts to improve the conditions of human existence in all ramifications. It implies improvement in material well being of all citizens, not the most powerful and rich alone, in a sustainable way such that today's consumption does not imperil the future, it also demands that poverty and inequality of access to the good things of life be removed or drastically reduced. It seeks to improve personal physical security and livelihoods and expansion of life chances.

However, we shall accept a working definition provided by Akpapan (1987), who defined development as:

*An anthropocentric process of improvements in the general welfare of the entire society usually manifested in desirable changes in the various aspects of life of the society.*

This means that development must be people centered. For development to take place there must be the motivation of all members of the society to be mobilized, and receive a fair share of collective efforts (Anikpo, 1984). Development is a holistic process whereby man attempts to remove all natural and social obstacles to achieving a self-fulfilling, comfortable and peaceful life. The opposite of this is underdevelopment. The major indices of underdevelopment are perennial poverty, economic dependency, cultural chaos, and political instability. These chief indices of underdevelopment are the characteristic features of the Nigerian society. It is imperative at this juncture to explain the theoretical formulations that emerged to explain why some countries are underdeveloped and which consequently informed the developmental strategies of Nigeria since independence. We shall focus on three theories, mainly Modernization, Dependency and Marxist theories of development and underdevelopment.

### **1.2 Modernization Theory**

Wilbert More in Offiong (1980) defines modernization as total transformation of traditional societies into the types of techniques and associated social organizations that characterized the advanced, economically prosperous and politically stable countries. Fundamental to modernization paradigm are a perceived dichotomy between two parallel, qualitatively unequal sets of values, and a notion of evolution declared Naanen (1984). Underdevelopment is seen as a condition prior to development generated by inappropriate attitudes or non-capitalist values. Therefore, development is possible through conscious diffusion of Western capitalist values, liberal political values, injection of capital to aid industrialization and the training of the entrepreneurial elite in the values of and motivation most likely to promote free enterprise.

From the modernization perspective therefore, development is the change by which poor countries look more like rich ones. The perspective assumes that:

- Development is primarily a measure of wealth
- To develop is to become more like rich countries
- It is poor countries that require development.

This bourgeois conception of development has come under severe attack. This is because development should be the realization of the potential of the human personality, and not primarily a measure of wealth. While an increase in income is part of the development process in most countries, its achievement is not sufficient for development. Secondly, to develop is not to become more like the rich countries, rather to develop is to satisfy certain human needs. Thirdly, it is not only poor countries that need to develop. The inability of some rich societies to achieve some or many of their goals is well known.

### **1.3 Dependency Theories**

This paradigm emerging in opposition to modernization theory provides an antithetical explanation of underdevelopment. We find Hopkins succinct phrasing in Naanen (1984) very useful:

*Whereas modernization attributed economic backwardness to internal constraints of 'traditional' societies and presume that external contacts would be instrumental in removing them, the dependency thesis argues that it is the external links which have created underdevelopment by forcing chains of dependence and inequality between a privilege core (advanced countries) and an exploited periphery (developing countries), whereas modernization was essentially a-historical, the dependency thesis holds that underdevelopment can only be understood as a historical process.*

Thus, underdevelopment far from being an original condition of underdeveloped countries is a condition imposed by the international expansion of capitalism and its partner imperialism. This is the message in the works of Rodney (1982); Ake (1981); Frank (1981); Amin (1976) and Kay (1975). Dependistas prescribe delinking (autarky) as the way out of underdevelopment.

### **1.4 Marxists Theories**

Marxist theory is sometimes referred to as mode of production theory. The theory seeks to reconcile modernization and dependency theories by blaming underdevelopment on external and internal factors. It argues that, the level of development of productive forces and relations of production is important in understanding underdevelopment. Underdevelopment is blamed on the dialectical relationship between existing local classes in developing countries social formations, and thus prescribes restructuring of relations of production as a way out.

On a critical note of the three theories, Olukoshi (1991) notes:

*Whereas modernization theory entirely ignores the impact of colonialism and imperialism on underdevelopment, dependency focal point, notably the external factors constitute its main weakness. External factors undoubtedly crucial but not the only cause of underdevelopment, moreover it provides no alternative to autarkism.*

*The Marxist theory tends to focus more on the central dynamics of a global capitalist mode of accumulation.* Using the political economy approach as a synthesis we, conceptualize the specific characteristics of underdevelopment within the context of the general dynamics of the global capitalist economy. This implies our holistic consideration of internal, external factors as well as the existing mode of production in explaining development dilemma in Nigeria.

### **1.5 Factors in Nigerian Development**

**1.5.0 The Economic System:** An important factor that has rendered the developmental efforts of Nigeria prostrate is the externally oriented mono-economic base of the country. The country largely depends on crude oil for her survival to the detriment of other resources. All other sectors of the economy are neglected. For instance, agriculture, which constitutes the mainstay of the Nigerian economy in the 1950s and 1960s, has been thrown into limbo over the years. How would government encourage export promotion when there is virtually nothing to export? The economy is not diversified and this is not suitable for sustainable development (Mimiko, 1998).

The disarticulated, externally oriented and dependent nature of developing economies appears to be the foundation upon which other features are built. Fanon argues that, the period of merchant capitalism and colonialism forced a specialization of production on “Third World” countries that was primarily export oriented, of limited range and geared towards the material needs of the imperial powers (Frank, 1967). Idise further observed that:

The Third World elite were incorporated into this system and could do little to establish a more diverse form of economic activities. For instance, Nigeria a typical TWC has been conditioned by imperialism into the production of export cash crops like Cocoa, Cotton, Timber and until recently crude oil in a global economic environment where industrialization and technology constitute the basis of growth and development.. In any case the Oil and Gas sector that is technology oriented is largely dominated by multinational interest: with the oil reserve on Nigeria territory, while exploration, exploitation and control are in tight grip of multinational firms (Idise, 1999). Describing the role and strength of MNCs in the Third World Garvin declares:

*A large growing share of production in the Third World is under the control of a few MNCs and by the end of the decade will own about 62% of the fixed assets of the entire globe (Garvin, 1967).*

MNCs through their monopoly of global technology have continued to dominate and control Third World economies in vast areas of production, manufacturing, mining, distribution, advertising, insurance, banking, shipping, construction and development (Akpuru, 1998). In 2005, for example just ten companies control 86% of the \$262 billion global communication business. In fact, the economic clouts of these MNCs often exceed that of Third World governments, and as Amnesty International points out: human and labor rights are not priority in their agenda (Awake, 2003:7). The European Union (EU) helps to channel capital and sustain the health of European based MNCs as well as maintain trade, production and political links with ex colonies of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

It is now a common knowledge that for every dependent nation to develop, the first step should be to restructure its economy. Ndoh Cyril (1995: 96) , has argued that “there is no doubt that the present ruling class in Nigeria will likely reject any demand for a radical restructuring of the Nigerian economy, and so the only alternative for transformation to a more enlightened and equitable development may be a revolution”. The present comatose capitalist economy in Nigeria has reached a crisis situation. Except one chooses to play the ostrich one can not fail to see the bloody revolution handing over the head of the Nigerian elite.

**1.5.1 Educational System:** Colonialism bequeathed to Nigeria a distorted academic system. An educational not meant for the development of the nation but the westernization of the intelligentsia (Ndoh and Emezi, 1997). Human resources development is a sine qua non to Nigeria national development; this was demonstrated in Japan and Korea (Lawal et al., 1976). Development depends very much on human knowledge and skills. This must be such that a high quality of education and training is achieved for a large majority at a reasonable price and the context and quality of such education and training should be relevant and adequate to the country’s development needs.

The new policy on education in Nigeria needs to be given massive support to succeed. It is only when our educational system is geared towards harnessing the environment that we can develop. This can only succeed through improved funding (as currently demanded by NUT, ASSU, ASUP and ASUCE) of our educational institutions to provide free education to all the citizens. Mass education brings about enlightenment of the citizens which enhances their support for any development efforts. Proper education provides much needed technological know-how for the country

**1.5.2 Political Leadership:** The socio-economic and political development of any country depends largely on the ability of its political leadership to facilitate, entrench and sustain good governance. Importantly, good

governance is a manifestation of committed, patriotic and discipline leadership (Tolu, Kayode and Ilokpe, 2012; Ogbeidi, 2012). It is instructive to state that political leadership in the context here refers not only to the government or to the leadership of an organized state, but encapsulate the totality of the political class that has the capacity to exert influence on the apparatus of government even from behind the scene. Nigeria has existed for nearly fifty- four years with little or no record of socio-economic development. The ugly trend is not unconnected with poor leadership. It is logically unbelievable and appalling that despite the long years of independence, Nigeria the so called “giant” of Africa is still battling with the problem of good governance. The crop of leaders that have attained leadership position since independence had in one way or the other lacked vision and sense of commitment to development. Mimiko (1998) captures the situation this way:

*The decolonization allowed the crop of leaders that aligned with colonial power to take over Nigeria. This ensured the sustenance of a neo-colonial economy even after political independence. These leaders on assumption of power quickly turned up the repressive machinery of the colonial state rather than dismantling it. Significantly, they have no vision of development to accompany the efficient instrument of repression they inherited. All they were interested in was access to power and privileges and not development.*

Commenting on the experience of the Nigerian nation, the renowned novelist, Chinua Achebe, insisted that the root cause of the Nigerian predicament should be laid squarely at the foot of bad leadership. “The trouble with Nigeria,” Achebe argued:

*Is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land, climate, water, air, or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to their responsibility, to the challenge of personal example, which is the hallmark of true leadership (Achebe, 1984).*

Commitment by political leaders is a necessary condition for reform without which development is impossible. Tanzania, Cuba, and recently South Africa provide outstanding examples where committed leadership has brought about revolutionary changes in the society. The reverse is the case with the nature of Nigerian Political leadership summarized by Adio thus:

*Those that were not misguided and corrupt, were just plain inefficient, or mere replacements for the colonial masters: either in military or civilian garbs, they were of the same hues, more interested in power and wealth than in the emancipation of their people and sustained by neo-colonial and imperialist interest, they cultivated personality cults, repressed their people, pursued bogus policies and grandiose projects and turned the state into personal possession (Adio, 2002).*

With leaders of this nature, it is not surprising that Nigeria is yet to achieve democracy or development.

To achieve meaningful development, there must be a complete change of attitude on the part of the Nigerian political leadership class. The need for discipline and honesty on the part of the project implementers cannot be compromised; such officials should show enough discipline, interest, willingness, dedication and honesty. Without these attributes and the will to pursue set economic goals, all other ingredients of development present would amount to nullity. Furthermore, leaders must see themselves as servants and not bosses of the people irrespective of their ethnic or religious backgrounds and “carry” the people along with the development policies of the state. Furthermore, political and higher bureaucratic appointments must cease to be a means of easy accumulation of illicit wealth and a new political culture that abhors corruption in public life and humiliates corrupt public servant must be encouraged.

**1.5.3 Cultural factors:** Culture is defined as the totality of the ways of life of a people. Nigerian culture refers to the totality of the customs, values, knowledge, politics and economic practices of Nigerians which are either influenced domestically or internationally. Thus, the cultural practices that are associated with the Nigerian state and Nigerian society are what we refer to as the Nigerian culture.

Agchanada Bharati (Irvin Swerdlow, 1963) defined cultural factors as “the traditional attitudes or customs which are part of the cultural base in a particular region of which constitute barriers to innovation”. It should be noted that programs generates resistance when their innovating thrust collide with traditions and customs to which the people are deeply attached. For example, the concept of pudah in Islamic religion affects the realization of the potentialities of women in social development. If development is to take place, social attitudes, values and institutions will have to change. This is only possible through mass education and knowledge. The citizens should be conscious of the objectives before them and have the capacity to attain them. Where there are social obstacles to economic progress, they should be removed or their characters altered so that they may be more favorable to development. This is because certain cultural attitudes stand in the way of progress and they keep social, economic and political institutions in a state of backwardness which retards development.

**1.5.4 Corruption:** Corruption and development are antithetical to each other, the two cannot cohabit, and so, where one is present, the other suffers (Oghi, 2013). Though corruption is a worldwide phenomenon; it has been identified as a social malady that has eaten deep into the fabrics of the Nigerian nation and has retarded all efforts at development. Corruption manifest in various ways in the Nigerian society which includes inflating of contract costs, misappropriation of funds, ethnocentrism, and nepotism, lack of proper consideration in the citing

of industries, receiving of bribes, embezzlement of funds, etc. It is so pathetic to note that despite the effort of the Federal Government at combating the menace, the incidence of political corruption has defied major diagnosis. Thus, at the state level, it has become a major avenue for mismanagement of public funds and pursuit of economic interests which portend many dangers for sustainable development. Corruption has so pervaded the entire Nigerian society such that it is difficult to identify people who are still morally upright. The worrisome aspect of corruption in the Nigerian state has become so threatening that a scholar classified the forms to include:

- (a) Money Transfer fraud;
- (b) Advanced Fee Fraud (419),
- (c) Falsification of Records,
- (d) Impropriety,
- (e) Foreign Exchange Malpractices and
- (f) Fictitious Purchase. (Osemeke, 2011).

What then, are the variables that have encouraged corruption? Seven major factors have been ascribed to it and they are:

- The absence or lack of implementation of the detailed operational manual leading to unregulated limits of the powers of the operators
- Poor internal control or inefficient application of internal control measures
- Bad leadership that has encouraged single staff initiating and completing all stages of a transaction from start to finish.
- Poor personnel policies that have led to de-motivation, lack of job satisfaction, low job enrichment that promote fertile grounds for fraud
- Poor accounting records, Inability to maintain proper books of accounts and failure to reconcile the various accounts on daily, weekly, monthly basis as appropriate.
- Low level of probity prevailing in the society and the accepted value system whereby wealth is glorified irrespective of its source and the impact of extended family commitment.
- Laxity of the law Enforcement Agents to prosecute offenders (Ibironke, 2005).

Paradoxically, even the judiciary which is suppose to be impartial in bringing to “book” perpetrators of corrupt practices appear not to have woken up to this responsibility. Otherwise, how could we explain a situation where one Yakubu Yesufu, who was convicted of stealing N23.3 billion of Police Pension fund be given a ridiculous option of N750,000 fine? The law as an instrument of social engineering ought to be applied to achieve its purpose of deterrence and retribution predicated on the principle of fairness (*The Guardian, 2013*)

The most devastating effects of corruption on development are the supports it is giving to rent-seeking thereby hampering capital development projects. Large scale government industrial projects had been ruined by corruption in the past and a lot more are still being constrained by the pandemic (World Bank, 1997; Onimode, 2003; Saturday Vanguard, 2008). For the Nation, the effects of corruption can be summarized to include: (Igbinovia and Aigbive, 2009) wastage of resources resulting in:

- Near total collapse of infrastructure
- Poor delivery of Service
- Ill-equipped and ill-trained bureaucracy
- Politicization of the Civil Service resulting in manipulation of the electoral and judicial process
- Loss of billions of Naira into private pockets through looting by public officials resulting to low GDP, GNP, etc.
- Undeveloped economy resulting from sharp practices and poor corporate government due to inefficient and ineffective regulation and supervision by regulatory bodies.

Corruption in Nigeria’s financial system has been described as one of the problems of underdevelopment in the country. By the end of 1990s, banks which ought to play a prominent role in attracting international investment had lagged behind the global capitalist competitive markets. Worried by the financial recklessness and indiscipline in the banking industry, the Federal Government under President Olusegun Obasanjo had to merge the surviving banks into 25 Mega Banks. This was done in December, 2005 in order to refocus the banks for the challenges of the 21st century global capitalist system. The guiding philosophy of the Federal Government in this regard was that the private sector needed a financial system that could withstand international standard, and that could bring about sustainable economic development (UNDP, 2007); and for that process to take place the corrupt and wrecked financial system of the past must be a thing of the past.

For development to take place there must be an inward looking approach in which every Nigerian should become more patriotic and start to think of what to contribute to the development of the nation and not a means of looting the national wealth.

**1.5.5 An indigenous base:** A fundamental factor for any development process is that it must have a domestic base within the society with the people having ownership and control. Anikpo noted that a major challenge to most development projects in Nigeria is that, they are more often than not Top-button in origin and approach with the attendant consequence of loss of control over the productive process, as the intended beneficiaries (poor

majority) have no decision making power over its conception and even implementation (Anikpo, 1984). Gaining consensus, domestic ownership and commitment on the part of majority of stakeholders is a quintessential condition for the successful implementation of reform and development. Alapiki notes:

*Development is an organic process that is man centered which can not be "delivered" from above. It is an endogenous process and there are no "front runners" (Alapiki, 1999).*

Therefore the initiative to make material progress must arise among the nationals of the country. Development must be willed by the country itself. It can not be implanted from the outside. External forces should stimulate and facilitate the national forces. They should supplement and not supplant them. Foreign aid can only initiate or stimulate development; it can not maintain it. Development will falter in the absence of sufficient internal motivation. Unless the momentum of development comes from within the society, the initiative for development will be disputed and short lived. To achieve this, there must be mass mobilization of the people towards the developmental process

**1.5.6 Lack of Continuity of Policies:** One of the major problems in Nigeria is the lack of continuity in policies and projects. Constant changes in government have been largely responsible for this problem. Examples bound of projects initiated by a government that have been abandoned by successive governments. Operation feed the nation (OFN) was quickly abandoned by the Shagari government with the introduction of Green Revolution (GR). Better life for Rural Women was abandoned with the introduction of Family Support Program (FSP). Seven Point Agenda of late President Shehu Musa Yar'Adua was quickly jettisoned by President Good luck Ebele Jonathan for his Transformation Agenda. Development is a continuous process but with discontinuities in government programmes, no meaningful development can be achieved. Also, stability and continuity of policies encourage investment and propel development. For instance, in Korea, when park was assassinated, his policies remained and were building on. Nigeria leadership must learn to build on policies rather than to jettison them for new ones for the sake of party politics and personal aggrandizement.

**1.5.7 Unity in Diversity:** A fundamental question in a cultural analysis is, to what extent are groups within Nigeria sharing common attitudes and values? Accordingly, the political culture of Nigeria is dynamic and heterogeneous with more than 300 ethnic groups speaking 250 languages and 1,000 dialects. Among these groups the Yoruba from the southwest, the Hausa- Fulani from the North, and the Ibo from the southeast are the three major ethnic groups. These groups have historically dominated the political and economic spheres of the country since independence, even though the Yoruba and Ibo have generally complained of marginalization by the Hausa-Fulani hegemony (Ezechukwu, 2000). It is only when there is unity in the country that Nigeria can achieve her developmental goals. The government is expected to play a leading role in this regard. Emezi, (1996) has outlined the following measures adopted by the government to achieve unity in diversity in Nigeria as follows: establishment of the Federal Character Commission, Unity Schools, National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), National Reconciliation Commission etc. Development in Nigeria can be achieved in the near future when all Nigerians see themselves as one and not Hausa, Yoruba, Ibo, Urhobo, Ijaw or Ekpeye. This will reduce the politicization of development projects and make it easier for the mobilization of the masses for participation in development processes

## **1.6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

The enviable growth and development patterns of several Asian countries are well known. East Asia is the only region in the world that has been able to maintain strong, consistent growth patterns over several decades, led first by Japan and the newly industrializing economies of Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan, etc (Mimiko, 1998; Adelman, 1995).

Apart from the homogenous nature of these societies, several other factors were responsible for their development. These were: development of agricultural sector, a system of mass education, development of indigenous industries, export-oriented strategy, the Spartan discipline of their leadership, existence of efficient bureaucracy human resources development, encouragement of a dynamic private sector working in co-operation with the government towards a society-wide vision of development, institutional capacity building and attention to the problems of governance, consistency and policy stability, etc (Mimiko, 1998).

Development occurs when the people are capable of harnessing the environment using the available human and material resources to their own benefits and that of the society at large. Nigeria is naturally endowed with human and material resources that can enable her develop on her own without external assistance. There is need for Nigeria to look inward and discover all the hidden talents and utilize them to the fullest. The time has come for all Nigerians irrespective of their tribes of origin, religion or ideology, to come together to see what they can do for the development of the country.

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