

Regional Imbalances and Inequalities in Nigeria: Causes, Consequences and Remedies

Raheem, Wasiu M. (Corresponding author)

Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Faculty of Environmental Sciences,
University of Ilorin, P.M.B 1515, Ilorin, Kwara State. Nigeria.

Tell: +2348059425323 E-mail: raheemwasiumayowa@gmail.com

¹Oyeleye, Oyewale I. and ²Adeniji, Margaret A.

Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Faculty of Environmental Sciences,

Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, P.M.B 4000 Ogbomoso, Oyo State. Nigeria.

Tell: +234803812241¹; +2348069541241² E-mail: oyeleyeoyewale@yahoo.com; magpiel09@gmail.com

Aladekoyi, Opeyemi C.

Department of Cartography and GIS, Regional Centre for Training in Aerospace Survey (RECTAS)

Obafemi Awolowo University, P.M.B 5545, Ile-ife, Osun State. Nigeria.

Tell: +2348033771684 E-mail: Aladekoyi_opeyemi@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Regional inequality and polarization of activities have persisted in most developing countries despite their quest over many decades for socio-economic and political development and modernization. This condition contributes to serious distributional problems such as hyper-urbanization, spatial concentration of population and modern activities, unemployment and underemployment, income inequality and poverty, persistent food shortages, deteriorating material conditions of farm populations, and external dependency.

This paper seeks to evaluate the causes and consequences of regional imbalances and inequalities in Nigeria, and attempt the strategies that can be employed in correcting the imbalances.

It thereafter, recommends remedies such as special government policies, legislative measures, urban development planning, integrated rural development planning, and strict adherence to the principle of federal character as entrenched in the constitution of the country. It also recommends massive concentration of industrial development in rural areas across the nooks and crannies of the country as a way of reducing the imbalances.

Keywords: Region, imbalance, poverty, planning, development, causes, consequences, remedies

1. Introduction

Geographically, vast countries invariably face the problem of regional disparity because of bundle of factors that are multi-faceted in dimension. Basically, the factors can be grouped into two main categories termed the “hard and the soft” factors. The “hard” factors relate to those that cannot be changed or very slow to change. These are the natural endowments available to a country i.e. its geographical position and climate. On the other hand, the “soft” factors concern the institutional framework put in place by the governments; the policies, investments and programmes UNDP, (2011). In Nigeria, uneven distribution of natural endowments, difference in climate and physical condition and lopsided institutional policies all translate to non-uniformity of economic opportunities available to population residing in different regions. All these put together explain the concentration of manufacturing industries, government institutions, transport terminus such as sea ports and airports and other developmental programmes in certain areas than the others.

Also, historical background as well as the systems of administration adopted in the past or those in operation at the present has a positive correlation with inequalities of a particular region. These regional problems get manifest through several symptoms such as difference among regions in levels of per capita incomes, levels of employment, physical quality of life, human and capital development, access to education, property acquisition and so on.

This paper deals with the natural, economic, socio-political and administrative account of Nigeria as basis for her regional inequality. Without this account, it is much likely that any implementation of recommendations by regional planners and policy makers on the problems of regional imbalances in the country is akin to treating the symptoms rather than the causes. The differential rates of operation of colonial administrative, political, and economic development processes seem to have created the regional inequalities and imbalances. In other words,

the extant overwhelming regional inequalities are likely to have evolved during the one hundred year colonial period in the country (Nnoli, 1978; Ayeni & Mabogunje, 1982). Nonetheless, the politico-economic activities of the few Nigerian elite and petite bourgeoisie who took over the administration of the country after political independence in 1960 undoubtedly perpetuated the development of spatial inequalities. As a matter of fact, regional distortions are likely to occur in a developing country such as Nigeria with a large land area and many regions, with a population of 174.5 million people, NDP (2013), and an annual population growth rate of 2.1 percent. More so, the country is inhabited by 470 ethnic groups, distinguished by language, customs and religious beliefs and varies in size, power and influence. Groups in the southern region of the country have traditionally had much higher levels of education and employment in the public sector than groups in the northern region. Much of the country's politics revolves around methods of preventing or resisting fears of domination of one region or ethnic group over the others.

These fears emerged quite clearly during the 1950s in the period preceding independence. In 1953, a motion was moved in the House of Representatives by late chief Enahoro, calling for self-Government in 1956. While politicians from southern regions were supportive, those from northern regions opposed it, because they believed that their relative backwardness in education and public service employment would lead to their domination in an independent Nigeria by the southerners.

In the discussions that followed, it was agreed to make Nigeria a federation of three regions, North, East and West, with residual powers vested in the regions. By 1960, when the country gained independence, the ideal of fair representation of all the regions in federal appointments had become accepted, although without specific quotas. However, in recruitment into the officer corps of the armed forces and the police, a quota system was applied. This quota arrangement continued up to 1967, when twelve states were created to replace the three regions, and the formula was reviewed and applied on the basis of equal numbers from each state.

The geographical features and the historical developments have made an impact on the regional inequalities in Nigeria. The administrative political and economic development processes have created the regional disparities. The present overwhelming regional inequalities are likely to have evolved during the one hundred year - 1861 - 1960 periods in Nigeria, (Ebenezer, 1995). In any society regional inequality is noticed in all levels of national developments in terms of income, investments, employment, human resources, and education and health services. An accepted functional political and administrative system, city systems and others are inevitable during the early period of socio economic growth and political development. The geographic pattern of regional development is bound to be uneven, exhibiting core-periphery dichotomy as noticed in the case of Nigeria.

The birth of "Nigeria" could be at best termed "artificial" as socio political and administrative perspective acknowledges that it was created out of European selfish ambitions in West Africa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Nigeria is a collection of hundreds of hitherto autonomous ethno-linguistic groups. The boundaries were not out of physical, cultural, social, religions, economic and environmental homogeneity; rather, they were conceived mainly as a geographical organization for the administrative convenience of British imperialism. The diverse characteristics of Nigeria have aided over time to create diverse rates of socio-economic development, and ultimately, the regional inequalities which mean lack of development and threats to human prosperity. The study therefore, evaluates the causes and consequences of inequalities in the country with the view of recommending remedies to correct the imbalances.

1.1 Concept of a Region

1.1.1 What is a region?

There have been a lot of controversies on what "Regions" actually depict. Agbola (2004) defines region as a flexible concept referring to a continuous and localized area intermediate between national and urban levels. To some, a region is a real entity that can be positively identified. To others a region is merely a product of imagination and method of classification. A region is an important policy unit (Danson, *et al.*, 2000). According to Isard (1975), a region is an area which is meaningful because of one or more problems associated with it which we, as regional scientists want to examine and solve. Consequently, there is no clear cut and unequivocal approach to the concept of a region. However, the numerous views of scholars can be streamlined into two-objective and subjective views. The objective view claimed that a region is a real entity that can be physically identified and mapped. Henderson, (1905) in one of his articles divided the entire world into —Natural Regions on the basis of four criteria, namely: land configuration, climatic conditions, vegetation types and population

density. Similarly, Goh Cheng-Leong and Adeleke (1979) divided the whole world into 12 climatic regions based on distinct latitudinal locations, climatic conditions, natural vegetation types and natural resources.

According to the objective proponents, a region can thus be described as a large land area that has geographic, political, or cultural characteristics that distinguish it from others, whether existing within one country or extending over several. It is an administrative unit (i.e. a large separate political or administrative unit within a country or an ecological area (i.e. an area of the world with particular animal and plant life). Regions consist of sub regions that contain clusters of like areas that are distinctive by their uniformity of description based on a range of statistical data, for example demographic, and locales. A region has its own nature that could not be moved. The first nature is its natural environment (landform, climate, etc.). The second nature is its physical elements complex that was built by people in the past. The third nature is its socio-cultural context that could not be replaced by new immigrants.

The subjective proponents of a region on the other hand, did not see a region as a —static formal division of space but as an instrument for spatial segregation. Hartshorne (1959) therefore argued that an attempt to see the region as a universal concrete object has passed into history. Thus regions are seen as descriptive tools, defined according to particular criteria, for particular purpose. There can be many regions as there are criteria to define them (Glasson, 1974).

In summary, a region could be seen as a defined established area in space which has at least one of such indices of identification as political, natural, physical, and economic, socio cultural and administrative or political factors as a symbol of unity and identity.

1.1.2 Types of Regions

A. Political Regions

This is perhaps the oldest of the various concepts of regions. The region in this sense refers essentially to the boundaries of district political or administrative units or districts. These Political regions mark the historical, cultural and ethnic-linguistic division within a country that has federal structure. For instance, in Nigeria, the Federal Government created 12 States on the 27th of May 1967, 19 political states on the 3rd of May 1976, 21 political states on the 23rd of September 1987, 30 political states on the 27th of August 1991 and 36 political states on the 1st of October 1996 for the administration of the country.

B. Formal Regions

Formal regions are extensive geographical regions that share homogenous characteristics on the bases of selected criteria such as physical conditions, economic structures, and agricultural resources. They are otherwise called Natural regions. Udo (1970), divided Nigeria into 20 Geographical Regions based on physical, cultural and economic divides. These are:

Lagos Metropolitan District; Creeks and Lagoons; Cocoa Belt of Yoruba land; Benin Lowland, Scrap lands; Lower Niger Valley; Palm Belt of South-East, Cross River Basin; Niger Delta; Southwestern Grass Plains; Afemai, Ekiti and Western Kabba Uplands; Middle Niger Valley; Benue Valley; Jos Plateau; Bauchi and Gongola Basin; North Central High Plains; Sokoto-Rima Basin; Kano Region; Borno and Chad Depressions and Eastern Borderlands.

1.2 Meaning of regional inequalities

Regional inequalities can be simply defined as a situation of unevenness in the levels of economic development and social wellbeing of people living in different geographical areas or regions within the country. Owing to the geographical variation in the distribution of resources and by extension the non uniformity of governmental policies as applied to different areas, disparity arised. In other words, the process of economic, social and political development in geographical setting requires growth at different rates in different areas. (Teriba and Kayode, 1977). Nigerian as a country, is known to have developed economically, socially and politically, differently along regions, states, local, urban and rural setting, thus, creating a sharp imbalances in her regional development.

1.3. Theoretical Framework

1.3.1 The Primacy Theory and Concept

The theory indicates that urban primacy; socio-spatial and individual inequalities increase initially then decrease over time as socio-economic and political development and modernization progress within a nation or region. Urban primacy or the concentration of a significant share of the urban population in few central cities will no doubt cause regional inequality. Thus, policies that reduce the importance of urban primacy are likely to contribute to greater regional equality. Many regional development experts such as Hirschman, (1958); Kuznets, (1963); Mera, (1965); El Shakhs, (1972); Mera, 1975; and Gilbert, 1976 have noted that, in any capitalist (market and mixed) society, regional inequality in all levels of national development in terms of income, investments, employment, human resources, education, health services, a generally accepted functional political and administrative system and city systems, is inevitable during the early period of socio-economic growth and political development. The imbalance, they argued, tends to diminish during the more mature and advanced stage of development due to the equilibrium forces of the market.

1.3.2 Growth Pole Theory:

Growth pole theory, as originally formulated by Perroux, assumes that growth does not appear everywhere at the same time, but it manifests itself in points or poles of growth. With variable intensities, the growth spreads by different channels and eventually affects the economy as a whole. It is widely argued that Perroux's initial concept of growth pole denoted an individual plant; one that occupied an abstract economic space, rather than a specific geographical space such as a city or region. Perroux refined his concept of growth pole as a dynamic unity in a defined environment.

The relevance of these theories in this context is basically to explain the rationale behind the development of certain areas at the expense of others thereby creating room for inequality.

1.4 Causes of regional imbalances and inequalities in Nigeria

a. Uneven distribution of natural resources.

This is the first important factor responsible for inequalities in the Nigerian regional setting, and as it applies to other countries of the world all over. It is as old as the country itself, arising mainly from the disparity in regional endowment of natural resources. Difference in climate, soil, vegetation and the topography of regions in Nigeria account for, to a large extent the imbalances experienced across the regions. For instance, while the southern part of the country enjoys longer period of rainfall, forest vegetation, and proximity to the continental shelf, its northern counterpart experiences shorter rainfall, grass vegetation and has a link with the desert. All these account for differential in the concentration of industries as well as activities across the regions. Specifically, industries are found in natural resources endowed regions where production costs can be minimized and profit can be maximized. In the same vein, certain categories of investment tend to locate down south, very close to the sea ports due to the bulky nature of their raw materials and easy access to exportation.

b. The Administrations of the Royal Niger Company and British Colonialism.

The activities of the British-chartered Royal Niger Company, a commercial enterprise, had some spatial consequences on the socioeconomic and political landscape of Nigeria. The Company shifted its headquarters (capitals) from one part of the nation to the other until its charter was revoked in 1899 (Geary, 1965). Its charter as a government lasted from July 10, 1886 to December 31, 1899. The location of these headquarters at different areas in the country originated some important population and activity nodes that created the framework for regional inequalities. Such nodes include, among others, Calabar, Asaba, and Lokoja.

This process of the location and relocation of administrative headquarters at different geographic areas in Nigeria by the Royal Niger Company (RNC) and British Colonial Administration was a special type of administrative decentralization which created regional inequalities, because:

- (1) There were not many administrative headquarters located at different places at the same time to create balanced growth nodes throughout the country;
- (2) This colonial period was associated with having limited financial and human resources by the British to run their colonial outposts; and
- (3) The relocation process was motivated by administrative convenience of the British colonial powers, and was not continuous, only to be stopped at the turn of 1920.

Development of these colonial administrative and trade headquarters actually sowed the seeds of lopsided spatial development and structures. These headquarters were and are still the strategic points. They are sea ports like

Lagos, Calabar and Asaba. The confluence of two rivers i.e. the rivers Niger and Benue at Lokoja also makes it a strategic location. Kaduna and Lagos were developed as military headquarters, and/or as the transportation nodes. It can be stated that the location of these centers enormously influenced the development of Nigeria's special structure, because the allocation of location was not continuous. All these led to spatial inequality as resources and people were attracted to the few areas that were developed (Portes, 1976). Inevitably, resource inequalities between the cores headquarter and the region as its periphery increased. That is, growth and politico-administrative development tend to feed each other during a deliberate national socio-economic development effort.

Since headquarters exhibit modernization influences in their immediate environs through the increased availability of public services provided by municipal and national governments (Booth & Seligson, 1979), the non-availability and non-relocation of the headquarters to the periphery tend to rob the remote areas of some modernization impulses. Undoubtedly, these headquarters underwent some kind of transformation in the process of acting as administrative, trade and transmission centres for the extraction of primary raw materials from their hinterlands to Britain. Consequently, some physical, socio-political and administrative infrastructures were invested in them to facilitate their functions and, at the same time, make them stand out from other important centres.

Similarly, looking at these centres from the dependency theory perspective, they were actually the satellites of the British metropolis as they were linked to British economy and political hegemony (Sunkel, 1972; Frank, 1966), hence, phasing them out for development. But because their development was neither self-generating nor self-perpetuating as they were outward-looking than inward-looking in connection with their hinterlands, leading to their existence as independent and at the same time parasitic, rather than generative, in relationship to the hinterlands, their role in the national system of cities quickened the onset of regional imbalances.

c. Regionalism and State creation

The regionalism concept was introduced into the administrative framework of Nigeria shortly before independence. It was entrenched through a series of constitutional developments and Amendments. The Constitutional Development and Amendments were included in the 1946 Richards Constitution, 1952 McPherson Constitution and the 1954 Louis Chick or Federal Constitution. These laid the seeds of ethnicity and tribalism. The creation of regions and states was the outcome of the constitutional changes and determined the course of the future unequal development and the characteristic spatial configuration of Nigeria. The beginning of the fragmentation and separatist tendencies and regional economic disparities were bunched in Nigeria. The constitutional conferences took place in London in 1945 and 1953 and in Nigeria in 1954. The federation of the three regions of Nigeria was recognized in these conferences. The Northern Region has its headquarters in Kaduna, the Eastern Region with headquarters in Enugu and the Western Region with headquarters in Ibadan. Consequently, different ethno regional political parties were formed with regional attachment. There was the Action Group in the Western Region, Northern People's Congress in the Northern Region and the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons in the Eastern Region.

The origin of the idea that, one region was different from the other could be traced implicitly from Lord Lugard's policy of Indirect Rule or "Divide and Rule" of the amalgamated Nigeria. Lugard's policy of regionalizing his administration under the Lieutenant Governors actually aggravated the increasing differences between the Northern and Southern Regions (Bums, 1964). Administrative standards were set for different regions. For example, in the North, administration was by Indirect Rule through the Emirs and salaried officials and "Sharia court" system of justice.

In the South, it was the institution of the British system of justice for a large number of matters, as well as the institution of local administration of District Officers (DO) and Warrant Chiefs in the Southeast, and the endowment of exclusive power to the Oba in the Southwest. The uneven administration and preparation of budgets for the two "Nigerias" resulted in social and economic disparities being created between the two regions by the Colonial Administration, as well as the emergence of confrontational ethnicity. Undoubtedly, economic growth between the two regions became spatially different enough that Lugard went as far as diverting revenues from the South to balance the Northern deficit (Crowder, 1973:233). These consequences, among others, constituted the platform for the agitation for state creation based on cultural and linguistic precepts. The agitation started in earnest after political independence in 1960 and adamantly continues till today. The demand for more

states grew, so much that in 1967, twelve states were created out of the original four regions based on "...making for even proportion and balanced development for all" (Ayeni & Mabogunje 1982:15). About thirty one states were still demanded, out of which on February 3, 1976, seven more were actually created. Two more states were added in 1987 bringing the total number to twenty one states. In 1991 and 1996, the number of states rose to thirty one and thirty six respectively with the creation of additional new states. There are many who have started to mount stiff opposition to the further disintegration of the country, but some proponents of state creation argued that unless various ethnic groups have a direct access to decisions about the resources allocated to their population, the national wealth would not be equitably distributed. However, it is obvious that after more than 50 years of independence, the creation of states has not solved the nation's socio-economic disparities, regional inequalities, inter-ethnic rivalries, and political problems. Rather than serve as agents of overall development across board, the new state capitals are the only new large centres, since they have more than their fair share of development activities. According to Adeniyi (1978), these state capitals (major urban centres) together command about 77 percent of the total number of industrial establishments in Nigeria, as well as over 86 percent of total industrial employment in 1970. While the new growth points were in the already relatively over-developed areas, state creation did not lead to new growth points in the remote areas or rural areas within the states (Dudley, 1976; Egunjobi, 1990). Attention was drawn to the fact that while these centres have attracted a good deal of investment which has stimulated their development, the spin off effects on rural hinterlands have been minimal and a substantial proportion of the hinterland is so distant to the state capitals that meaningful urban-rural interaction is hardly feasible (Baker, 1990).

It is noticed that the Southern states like Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Delta, Abia, Anambra among others have more industrial establishments than the Northern states like Bauchi, Adamawa, Yobe, Niger, Benue and others. The development strategy that was carried out in Nigeria has been ineffective as its focus was on the national needs rather than basic needs. Unwarranted unevenness in the development is inevitable on account of inadequate administrative machinery, lack of clear distribution mechanism, non-diversification of economy and technology and limited employment opportunities. Ethno-centrism has fuelled and perpetuated regional imbalance in the country.

d. Disproportionate allocation of investment funds.

The inequalities in regional setting of the country are further compounded by the imbalance in the allocation and distribution of developmental funds across the various sectors of the national economy. This has over time been carried out based on favoritism and ethnic inclination, with no consideration for geographical spread and effects of social and economic investments and infrastructural facilities on the space economy. This consequently exerts wide gap between the poor masses of the agricultural regions and the wealthy few in the prosperous industrial regions.

e. Regional economic specialization.

The attachment of regions to long historical economic specialization on varying commercial activities, exportation of cash crops, and prosperous industrial undertakings accounts for regional inequalities. The Southwest which specializes in the production of cocoa and kola nuts, the Southeastern region which produces palm oil and the Northern region with comparative advantage in the production of groundnuts and cotton have relatively differential level of development based on production differences.

f. Government and institutional Policies.

Deliberate concentration of economic and social investments in selected urban centres across the country has more often than not created a dichotomy between the urban and the rural areas on one hand, and among the urban centres themselves on the other hand. In an attempt to develop some areas to serve as engine of growth, inequalities occur. Lagos, Kano, Kaduna, Port Harcourt, Onitsha and other commercial cities in Nigeria enjoy massive concentration of investments thereby attracting immigrants from the less developed regions. The resultant effect of this phenomenon is the infrastructural development of the cities at the expense of the hinterlands where no such opportunities occur. Also, differences in policy implemented by different states of the federation further create disparities in the country. While some state governments adopt free education, agricultural and economic policies that result in relatively high level of income to jump start the standard of living of the citizens, others may not be that lucky.

g. Communal conflicts and unrest.

Though seems trivial, conflicts, war and unrest have been responsible for deliberate underdevelopment of certain areas in the country. For instance, during the civil war in Nigeria (1967-1970) both government and private investors were not willing to site investments and industries in the war zones of the Eastern part of the country. Also, areas notable for perennial communal clashes are less-developed because development only thrives in a peaceful environment. Just as recently too, no rational business entity will choose to establish in some parts of northern Nigeria where both lives and properties are not secured. Similarly, persistent hostility in areas such as the Eastern part of the country makes such region lag behind in terms of development, as investors are not willing to invest their hard earned resources in unsafe regions. In other words, peaceful atmosphere has over time dictated the direction of concentration of investments in Nigeria.

1.5 Consequences of regional imbalances and inequalities in Nigeria

Nigeria is a nation with diverse cultures, languages, traditions, beliefs, norms and values inter alia. Nigeria has been observed to be made up of diverse ethnic groups and different geographical areas of varying material and human resources (Jelili M.O, et al, 2008). In the opinion of Chief Akinjide in one of his articles in Nigerian tribune titled “Nigerian Amalgamation is a Fraud” in 2013, where he proves that it was only on the paper that Northern and Southern parts of Nigeria were amalgamated, and never the people were amalgamated. Chief Akinjide believes that the northern and the southern Nigeria were amalgamated on paper in the sole interest of the westerners (the Europeans) for their economic benefits and never for the economic benefits of Nigeria. There is zero or little regionalization in Nigerian politics. A registered voter in a particular state cannot use the card to vote in another state during national election. An indigenous person to a particular state of the country will never or have it so difficult to find his or her way to the government employment in other different states of the country. In education sector, there are different cut-off marks for granting admissions to the applicants of many Nigerian higher institutions and the school fees are not the same in some cases due to indigenous issues. A typical Yoruba (the south western, Nigeria) person sees another Yoruba person as a relation and treat Hausa, Fulani, Igbo and other tribes as another person from another place and consequently reduces the extension of gesture of goodwill to such persons.

The various causes of regional inequalities in Nigeria has multitudinous effects on the regions generally and the people in particular. Apart from the low overall development and growth of the less developed regions, regional inequality manifests itself on the standard of living of the inhabitants of the area. While the people in the developed regions are relatively prosperous with high per capital income, their counterparts in the depressed or under developed regions are below the poverty line, owing to their low level of access to economic investments. The consequences of inequalities identified by the study are highlighted below.

- a. Unemployment:** One area where regional inequalities greatly exert its influence is the area of unemployment. The under developed regions where little or no economic investment is available usually suffer acute shortage of jobs for the inhabitants. All other things being equal, the higher the level of economic development, the lower the level of regional unemployment. This development further leads to low standard of living and increases poverty- stricken population. The resultant effects of this are increase in crime rate and out migration.
- b. Weakness of development potentials:** The selective out flows of capital and skilled man power resources from the poor to the prosperous regions create acute shortage of labour for agricultural development and reduce population threshold that can support economic investments in the former. Therefore, the ability of the poor regions to attract economic investments and basic infrastructural facilities to compete for development are greatly weakened due to the massive out migration of the able bodied people.
- c. Over- population of the developed regions:** The inflow of human resources from the poor regions to the rich regions will greatly increase the population sizes of the latter, thereby creating complex socio economic problems of unemployment, overcrowding residential accommodation (Oyeleye, 2013), undue pressure on transport networks, electricity and so on. A good example here are the urban centers in Nigeria(Lagos, Ibadan, Kano, Kaduna, Enugu, Port Harcourt among others) with high number of youth population without jobs, and majority of who still cling to the cities seeing menial jobs and committing crimes as alternatives.
- d. Varying per capital income:** The per capital income of a particular region is one of the indicators of its affluence and prosperity. Economically depressed regions experience low per capital income, while the more prosperously buoyant regions have relatively high per capital income. The accompanied effects on the former are low standard of living, limited opportunities for self development and widespread poverty.
- e. Environmental degradation:** The standard of living of the people in a particular area often determines the quality of their physical environment. The environment of undeveloped regions is usually unplanned, untidy

and unattractive. These often result in outbreak of diseases, low productivity and out migration of the inhabitants.

- f. Under utilization of resources:** Regional inequalities lead to under utilization of both natural and human resources. Most of the under developed regions in Nigeria are sitting on one mineral resource or the other, but because they are left undeveloped, the resources lie untapped and idle. For instance, the rich agricultural resources such as economically valuable trees, vast grassland, watersheds, and river basins of some under developed regions which should be meant for overall national economic development are not tapped. Many other latent resources are equally not noticed at all. The same thing is applicable to the numerous cheap labour in the rural areas, majority of who are unable to migrate to urban areas due to family ties or other reasons.
- g. Pressure on infrastructural facilities:** The inflow of migrants from the depressed regions to the prosperous regions has a greater consequence on the available facilities in the latter (Oyeleye, 2013). For instance, the influx of labour migrants to Lagos in Nigeria results in congestion leading to shortage of housing facilities, high cost of maintaining road networks, water, electricity and host of other infrastructural facilities.
- h. Marginalization and rebellion:** Regional inequalities in Nigeria have raised a hitherto unheard issue in the country. Marginalization now becomes a household name in many part of the country; people who feel marginalized because of disparity in allocation of financial resources, economic investments, basic infrastructural facilities and political appointments, now cry out and result to violence and unrest to gain attention of the government of the day. A good example here is the Niger Delta region where the people feel they are short paid by the government and therefore have to hold the country into ransom. This led to the formation of different militant groups such as MEND, NDDVF and host of others. Similarly, though with a slight disguise, the issue of Boko Haram insurgency in the North has also been highlighted as a product of long period of regional underdevelopment and neglect.

1.6 Recommendations and policy implications

In order to address the nightmare of regional inequalities and imbalances in Nigeria, government most especially needs to take holistic measures and exhibits higher degree of sincerity in carrying out policies as they affect regional development without prejudice. The study therefore recommends the following measures:

- a. Integration of sectoral planning with spatial planning:** Sectoral allocation of resources and free market economy has been observed to not only lead to increase in gross domestic product and national income but also widen the disparity among regions in terms of economic developments. In other words, while sectoral planning targets sectoral growth, spatial planning ensures development across regions. In order to correct this anomaly therefore, spatial allocation of resources should be employed to equitably distribute development funds among the various regions that make up Nigeria.
- b. Good implementation of regional planning policies:** For regional disparity to be eliminated or at least reduced, regional planning as a mid way between national and urban planning should be holistically implemented. This policy sees to equity in the distribution of resources into the various regions that make up the country. In this case, all regions are seen as an entity that should enjoy overall development rather than been selective.
- c. Adoption of legislative measures:** Legislative pronouncements such as fiscal and monetary policies can be used as instruments to redistribute economic investments across regions. Payment of heavy taxes on industrial site and activities can be used to discourage further concentration of investments in the prosperous regions, while tax reliefs and other incentives can also be granted investors in the rural and poorly developed regions to accelerate developments. While this mechanism does not retard growth in the industrial regions, it allows for concentration of investments and accelerated development of regions lagging behind.
- d. Growth Pole Concept:** The growth pole centre strategy represents the most popular approach in regional development planning in the developing world. The strategy starts from the realization that since development cannot occur at all places at the same time, it is necessary to promote equitable regional development by de-congesting the few areas of primate development through the establishment of industries in selected areas that generate the driving force for development. The development of small and medium sized towns and cities is seen as consistent with decentralization policies. In order to eliminate regional inequalities in Nigeria, this concept can be used as a policy instrument. Concentrating large scale agro-allied industries together with matching infrastructural facilities that depend on agricultural raw materials in the rural areas will stimulate agricultural production. In addition, it will provide incomes and employment opportunities for the rural farmers and traders. In the long run, this development will promote inter regional trade and reduce unnecessary rural-urban migration which ends up creating urban nuisance.

- e. Shifting of States and Local Government Headquarters:** The creation or relocation of capital cities generally dates back to the post-independence periods of the respective states. Nigeria (Abuja), Cote d'Ivoire (Yamoussoukro), Tanzania (Dodoma), Malawi (Lilongwe) and Botswana (Gaborone) are the African countries that have relocated their capital cities since independence. The creation of new capital cities is more like the creation of growth points, or growth poles, so that the success or otherwise of the strategy may be evaluated from the perspective of the effectiveness of growth poles in achieving decentralization and stimulation of development in the immediate hinterlands of the capital cities. Government should evolve a policy as an experiment where, from time to time, administrative headquarters (capitals) are shifted from city to city or town to town with the hope of redistributing the benefits of socioeconomic development and modernization. This is because, in Nigeria, like elsewhere in the world a substantial amount of investments and development efforts always go in favour of the capital cities. E.g. the relocation of Nigerian Federal Capital from Lagos to Abuja has recorded a milestone development in Abuja while retaining already developed infrastructural facilities in Lagos.
- f. Evolve of Urban Development Planning:** Deliberate planning and development of new urban centres in under developed and neglected regions will open up new areas, more infrastructural facilities such as good roads, pipe borne water and electricity among others massive investments would find their way into the nook and cranny of the newly developed regions. For instance, the opening up of Abuja as the new federal capital territory in Nigeria has accelerated unprecedented development and attracted many people from within and outside the middle belt of the country.
- g. Integrated Rural Development:** Integrated rural development involves the development of a set of strategies that generate a series of qualitative and quantitative changes within a rural population through improved living conditions and increased production capacity and also through the creation of social infrastructure necessary for increased production. It encompasses activities such as mechanization of agriculture, provision of electricity, clean potable water, decent housing, marketing and storage facilities for farm products, improvement of networks of feeder and access roads and the organization or re-organization of human settlements. Integrated rural development programmes are very many in Africa. Some examples are Tanzania's mechanized settlement scheme at Nachingwea, the Gezira and Zande Schemes in the Sudan, the Mwea Irrigation Scheme as well as the Million Acres Settlement Scheme in Kenya, the Senegal River Valley, the Upper Valley Operation in Mali and the Bandama Valley Authority in Côte d'Ivoire. Similar programmes were introduced in Nigeria in the past administration but are ailing now. They include River Basin Development Authority (RBDA), Agricultural Development Programmes (ADP), Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS) among others. Such programmes, if reinvented will go a long way in addressing regional inequality issue.
- h. Strict adherence to the principle of federal character:** There should be strict adherence to the principle of federal character as it is applicable to development and investment allocation, employment, education, political appointments among others.

1.7 Conclusion

The study has given a vivid revelation of the causes of regional inequalities in Nigeria. It highlighted uneven distribution of natural resources, administration of the Royal Niger Company and British Colonialism, regionalism and State creation and institutional policies among other as the causes leading to the imbalances between the North and South, the prosperous and poor regions and the core and the periphery. It further showed that these inequalities had generated some ethno-regional sentiments that are reflected in the inter-ethnic socio-economic competition and the evident inefficiency in the country.

Consequently, the study showed that, inequalities have caused unemployment, weakness of development potentials, and overpopulation of the developed regions, environmental degradation and pressure on infrastructural development among others.

To this end, the paper concludes by suggesting remedies to correct the regional imbalances. These include integration of sectoral planning with spatial planning, good implementation of regional planning policies, shifting of States and Local Government Headquarters and integrated Rural Development among others. If these are holistically applied and implemented, they will go a long way in solving the regional imbalances and inequalities as experienced in Nigeria.

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Table 1. Creation of Regions and States in Nigeria

Year	Number of states	Number of Local Governments	Regime
1954	3*	0	Prior to Independence
1963	4*	0	Sir Tafawa Balewa
1967	12	0	General Yakubu Gowon
1976	19	301	General Murtala
1987	21	453	General Ibrahim Babangida
1991	30	589	General Ibrahīm Babangida
1996	36	774	General Sanni Abacha

Source: Authors’ survey, 2013

*region

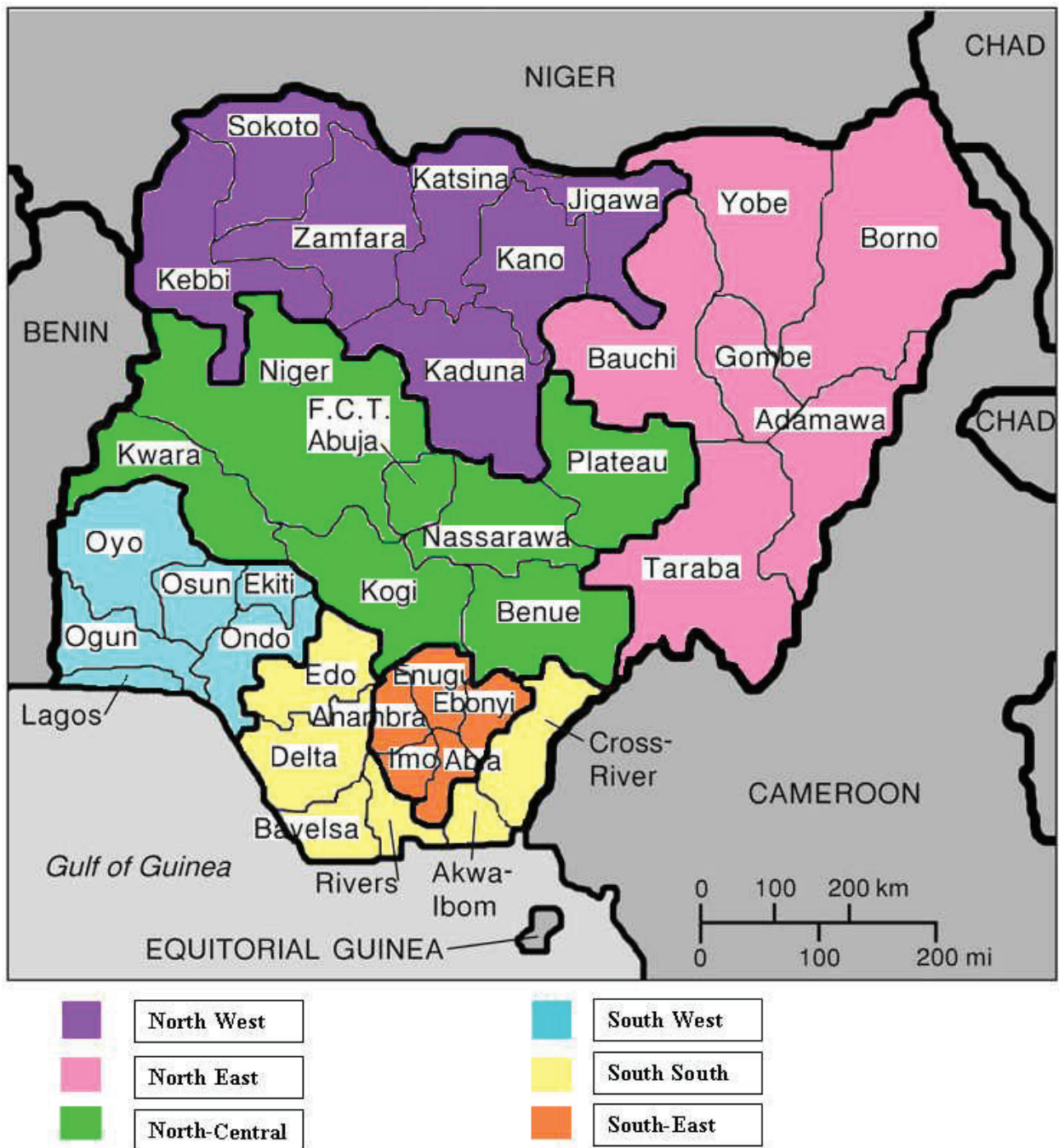


Figure 1: Nigeria's States and Regions (*Adapted from Sklar et al, 2006*)

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