

*Review*

# National development in Nigeria: Issues, challenges and prospects

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Development is critical and essential to the sustenance and growth of any nation. A country is classified as developed when is able to provide qualitative life for her citizenry. Nigeria in the last fifty years has been battling with the problems of development in spite of huge human, material and natural resources in her possession. The paper discussed the problems affecting national development as well as strategies for achieving sustainable development in Nigeria. The paper adopted secondary data as sources of information. The paper concluded that faithful implementation of development plan, commitment on the part of the leaders and absence of corruption are required for the achievement of sustainable development in Nigeria.

**Key words:** National development, development, Nigeria, developing society, governance, development plan.

## INTRODUCTION

The pride of any government is the attainment of higher value level of development in such a way that its citizens would derive natural attachment to governance. How-ever, for a nation to be in a phase of development there must be some pre-requisites, which include socio-political and economic stability.

The gap between the developed and the developing countries is not static or narrow but is continually widening. A large majority of the world's population in developing world lives in a state of poverty. The problem of urban population, rural stagnation, unemployment and growing inequalities continue to face less developed countries, which Nigeria belongs. Hopes of accelerated development are difficult to realize. This gloomy situation is of great concern to stake holders and the concerned citizenry. Nigeria has not been able to engender meaningful development in spite of her huge resources endowment. This has greatly affected her quest to improved quality of life of her citizens. Poverty, unemployment and starvation still pervade the nook and cranny of the country.

Development is essential and critical to growth and sustenance of any country. In order to successfully

enhance meaningful development, effective strategies must be evolved. Here, we examine the trend of national development in Nigeria, and provides a workable method of approach to national development. The paper is further divided as follows: First, we introduce the study and clarifies some key concepts. Next, we look briefly at some attempted development strategies in Nigeria and the problems of national development; then we examine briefly models of development across Asian continent. Finally, the concluding aspect, provides recommendations based on the study of Asian model of development as a viable option for Nigerian national development aspirations.

## CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

### Development

Development as a concept is a victim of definitional pluralism. It is a difficult word to define. However, attempts have been made by erudite scholars to conceptualize development. Some of these definitions will be explored for the purpose of this study.

Gboyega (2003) captures development as an idea that embodies all attempts to improve the conditions of human existence in all ramifications. It implies improvement

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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.

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).

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.

## **National development**

National, according to Longman dictionary of contemporary English, refers to a phenomenon that embraces a whole nation. National development therefore can be described as the overall development or a collective socio-economic, political as well as religious advancement of a country or nation. This is best achieved through development planning, which can be described as the country's collection of strategies mapped out by the government.

## **National development plans in Nigeria**

We have had series of development plans in Nigeria. Nigeria is permanently hunted by the spectre of development. Its forty-nine years of independence actually are rolling by daily in search of development. The myth of growth and development is so entrenched that the country's history passes for the history of development strategies and growth models from colonial times up to date. No term has been in constant flux as development. This seems 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 needed to finance 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 disrupted 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, defence, 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 revamp agricultural sector. The fourth plan 1981 to 1985 recognized the role of social services, health services, etc. The plan was aimed 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 centres, etc. currently, seven point agenda of the present administration with vision 2020 without any clear methodological approach towards achieving them. It is obvious that the current results so far are not what development connotes.

## **The problems of national development in Nigeria**

In spite of series of development strategies, put in place by successive governments, and sometimes with good intentions, all attempts to generate meaningful development proved futile.

Based on this, one is now confronted with these puzzles: "Were those previous development plans or strategies bad in their context, or wrongly projected?" If nothing was wrong with the plans, then why is it still difficult to generate meaningful development in spite of the huge resources at our disposal? The solutions to these puzzles are not far fetched. A lot of factors have combined together to fetter nation's development.

One, there are in most cases, no executive capacity responsible for the formulation and implementation of the plan. What we usually see are officials entrusted to such a position but without any meaningful executive authority.

Some of the previous development plans failed because; there was little or no consultation of the general public. Planning is supposed to involve even the

peasants in the villages. Even, the Local Government officials who are close to the people were not consulted. Planning is not an edifice where technocrats alone operate (Mimiko, 1998).

Lack of good governance also militates against national development. Where there is no good governance, development becomes a mirage. This is as a result of bad leadership in the country. Most of our leaders have no 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”*.

High level of corruption and indiscipline is another barrier to development. Nigeria state is corrupt, managed by corrupt leaders who have made the state an instrument of capital accumulation, rather than using it to project the interest of the citizenry. A very good plan supervised by a thoroughly corrupt state can hardly do a thorough good job (Mimiko, 1998). Corruption and development are antithetical to each other, the two cannot cohabit, and so, where one is present, the other suffers.

Another important factor is the 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 a sustainable development (Mimiko, 1998).

### **Models of development: Asia in context**

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, other several 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).

### **Strategies for national development**

The beauty of any development plan is the faithful implementation of such plan, which its success lies with the implementers. In our previous discussion, it was mentioned that most of the past development plans failed as a result of implementation problem and lack of committed leadership etc.

Based on this fact, new development policies and strategies are currently in place as alternative strategies for development, such as Seven Points Agenda, Vision 2020, etc. These policies and vision appear to be all embracing but they are not sacrosanct in their totality. But if faithfully implemented, the nation at least will move towards path of development.

It is in our opinion that to successfully implement the Seven Point Agenda of the present regime, there some lessons we can learn from Asian models of development.

First, development requires total commitment on the parts of the leadership. 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.

Second, this country should learn that wholesale liberalization; the type advocated by the apologists of orthodox SAP is not necessarily synonymous with development. It goes without saying therefore that a level of state involvement (heterodoxy) is imperative even in the face of the crucial need for structural adjustment. But whatever the degree of state involvement, private ownership of properties must be guaranteed for investment to get stimulated (Mimiko, 1997). Although, it is another question whether Nigerian state as presently constituted can play this critical role given its embarrassing level of corruption, inefficiency and incapacitation by commitment to sundry primordial values. Be it as it may, the goal should be to evolve a process of reformation of the state to make it able to play the type of highly constructive role that its counterparts are playing in the whole of East Asia (Mimiko, 1997).

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

aggrandisement.

There is the need for Nigeria to revamp the agricultural sector; this sector was instrumental in the development of Japan. Agriculture used to be the mainstay of Nigeria economy but the discovery of crude oil succeeded in putting agriculture into state of oblivion.

Human resources development is also 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. Literature on development stresses the axiom that it is the people who develop and that unless there are large numbers of suitably qualified people, development cannot take place.

There is need for attitudinal change. Nigerians must as a matter of fact change their pessimistic attitude towards development. The idea or belief that "things cannot work in Nigeria or Nigerian factor" should be discouraged. Real development is achieved through internal activities rather than from external influences. Development is seen as a process generated within a society by forces propagated and invigorated by the actual members of that society. It is believed that true development can neither be started nor sustained by outsiders. Although, no country can develop in isolation, but heavy emphasis should not be placed on foreign resources for the country's development. The models of development of Japan and China show how these countries utilize their internal resources both human and material for rapid economic development. It is reasonable that Nigerians should inculcate a high sense of patriotism as demonstrated by the Japanese and Chinese.

Importantly, citizenship should be promoted over indigeneity in order to achieve cooperation and participation of all communities in the development process. Omotoso (2008) noted that the 1999 constitution is directly or indirectly promoting indigeneity in the country. For example, section 318(1) of paragraph (IV) supports indigeneity. The constitution sets parameters for indigenes and non-indigenes. It equally gives legal bases to various discriminatory policies that actively promote indigeneity, contrary to some sections that argue against discrimination. This is very contradictory. Leadership in Nigeria must behave in a way to inculcate the spirit of patriotism in the minds of the people, so that they will be ready to stand with the government in her development efforts. When Nigerians see themselves as one and not as belonging to one section of the country as portrayed presently, the urge to develop Nigeria will be germinated and sustained.

Additionally, the need to reform electoral process is imperative for socio-economic and political development. Electoral fraud is one of the banes of Nigeria's

development. The role of leadership in development cannot be overemphasized, all efforts towards development must be coordinated and directed by the leaders, therefore, the leaders must be development conscious, have genuine interest for development and the political will to propel such development. The leaders must also have the cooperation of the people, because, it is the people that develop a nation. Honestly, the aforementioned ingredients cannot be possible without a legitimized mandate for the leaders by the people. When a leader assumes office illegitimately or through electoral fraud, such leader is bound to fail in his effort to generate meaningful development. This is due to the fact that such illegitimate leaders tend to display characters that repress development such as; selfishness, corruption, pride, thuggery and inefficiency and also, there is apathy and natural detachment to development plans by the people as they did not see such emerging leaders as the products of their consent through voting. Based on the foregoing, the electoral process should be reformed in such away that nobody assumes power (political) through crook or fraudulent means. The process should be made opened, free, fair and competitive. All legal battles preceding the elections must be concluded before any swearing in. This, it is believed, will create genuine environment conducive for development. Lastly, development plan should not be exclusively regarded as economic issue it should be seen as holistic and encompassing national issue that cuts across economic, social, political and psychological aspects of human endeavour.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has carefully discussed national development in Nigeria. It examined the problems of national development in Nigeria, and carefully outlined the driving forces of development in some of the Asia countries as models for Nigeria's development. The paper also suggested some viable strategies needed to engender sustainable development in Nigeria. It is the belief of this chapter that if these options and models are faithfully and judiciously pursued and imbibed, Nigeria will be well positioned in the global economy by the year 2020.

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