



NIGERIA: AN UNDERDEVELOPED COUNTRY

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Abstract: *Underdeveloped nations are those nations that are not adequately established and plagued with relatively low economic level of industrial production, standard of living low per capita income, high rate of population growth and dependence on backward agriculture when compared to developed nations. One of the principal objectives of underdeveloped or less developed countries is to increase the rate of economic development. Thus, the central focus of this paper is to examine Nigeria as an underdeveloped nation by looking at the features and consequences of underdevelopment. The paper used library science method and collected data purely from secondary materials. The paper found that amongst the feature of Nigeria underdevelopment are; high rate of unemployment, inequality distribution of income and wealth, high level of insecurity, high rate of poverty, and monoculture nature of the Nigerian economy. These consequently resulted into not achieving macroeconomic objectives such as increase in output growth in all the sectors as expected. The paper therefore suggested articulated development plan and people-oriented government, improved governance and service delivery, respect for the dignity of labour, respect for the rule of law, well-defined national objectives of self-reliance and a social security system as well as leadership by example. All these will increase the level of socioeconomic and macroeconomic development in the economy.*

Keywords: *Economic, Development, Leadership, Monoculture, Nigeria, Per capita, Underdeveloped*

1. Introduction

Development reflects the totality of the wellbeing of individuals, family, society and nation. Seer (1972) sees development as a means of creating the condition for the realization of human personality. He postulated certain criteria for measuring development, that is, whether there has been reduction in poverty, unemployment and inequality; whether there is improvement in education and demographic characteristics; and whether there is self-reliance and social justice. A country that experiences a downward trend in the above criteria cannot be said to be underdeveloped. Thus, underdevelopment can be seen as lack of improvement in the reduction of poverty, unemployment, inequality, education, demographic characteristics, self-reliance and social justice. Thus, underdevelopment is achieved when people's needs and

aspirations are not met, and their wellbeing not been enhanced (Jhingan, 2013; Kindleberger & Bruce, 1958).

In the 19th century, many resource abundant countries such as the United States, Canada and Australia achieved economic development with their resource wealth. During this period, resource abundance was conceived as advantageous to development, and capable of helping developing countries make what Andrew Rosser termed "transition from underdevelopment" to development (Rostow, 1960). However, since the 20th century, the resource poor countries have achieved a faster rate of economic development more than their resource rich counterparts. For instance, the resource poor countries such as Japan, South Korea and Switzerland economically outperformed the so called resource abundant countries in low income Africa, like Nigeria (Auty, 1995; Sachs &

Developing Economy Journal

An official Publication of Center for International Research Development

Double Blind Peer and Editorial Review International Referred Journal; Globally index

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Warner, 2001). The poor economic performance of these resource rich developing countries raised concerns among economists, political scientists and researchers. This gave rise to the argument on resource curse (Auty, 1995).

Meanwhile, Nigeria as a nation has remained underdeveloped and in lockstep with instability since her independence in 1960, mainly due to the failure of past and present leaders to effectively managed abundance resources in the nation and/or reduce conflict drivers in the country. To surmount this problem and prevent the nation from careening towards the vortex of failed state, scholars have advocated for sincere and committed leader(s) to social justice and rule of law that help to promote stability is unavoidably the answer (Ezeibe, 2010).

In less than a decade after decolonization in Nigeria, the country has been immersed in seeming intractable leadership crisis. The fruits of peaceful co-existence, macroeconomic stability and socio-economic development have remained largely illusive in the country. To buttress this, Echezona (1998) rightly observed that “...the crisis which bestride every African country especially Nigeria... are at the same time ethnic, economic, social and environmental”

Liberal democracy proposed by the West as the political model for economic development appears to have proven incongruent with the Sub Saharan region that continue to be listed by United Nation and other international organization’s ‘bad books’ as the poorest, diseases- ridden and home to most ignorant people in the world. Nonetheless, the US first black President Barrack Obama, in his speech in Ghana reiterated that Africa has remained backward on account of the corrupt leadership since their various independents. He urged Africans to evolve strong institutions and not strong men. Obama also restated that America would no longer dictate to nations the path to political and economic development. The implication is that the US had done so in the past probably through the activities of IMF and World Bank whose conditionalities for loan to the poor regions of the world are at worst

described as harsh on the economies of the recipient countries (Echezona, 1998).

On the socio-economic front, the story of the Nigerian economy is worse as her economy is mono-cultural. Nigerian government underpays and over -tax her citizens. Not only that, the country has one of the highest unemployment rates in the world, the manufacturing and other allied industries are either dead or performing below capacity. In addition, social infrastructures and services that would have helped to promote socio-economic development are in deplorable conditions. Sustainable economic opportunity in the region is at an average of 58% and human development at about 50 %. This is in contrast with the 80% and 92% rate 85% and 90 % rate found in North America and in Europe respectively (Jebbin & Wilson, 2011). The roads are death traps, while electricity supply is erratic and people in urban areas often live in crowded squalor from Lagos to Abuja. In the light of the above, it is understood why the environment of lawlessness and its consequences are fertile seedbeds for the flourishing of area boys, ethnic militias, child labour, industrial disputes, religious crisis and many other socio-economic predicaments across the country. It is in connection with these political, economic and social crises that various ethnic groups and civil society organisations in Nigeria are calling for either National Conference or Constitutional Conference to address what they have tagged the “Nigerian question”.

Meanwhile, Nigeria government over the years has continually put much effort at increasing the pace of development and changing the structure of the economy. Unfortunately, the efforts have not been matched by the outcomes, which have remained largely unimpressive (Kayode, 2004). A quick appraisal of the Nigerian economy shows that the basic feature of the economy have not changed much from the situation of the 1960s; rather, it is growing worse. This is because at independence in 1960, the structure of the economy was positively skewed in favour of agricultural sector as a source of foreign

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exchange earnings, employment generation and contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). By 1970, event take a drastic turn, oil become the propelling wheel of the economy contributing about 90 percent of foreign exchange earnings and about 65 percent of budgetary revenues. The oil boom of 1973-1974 and 1979-1980, resulted in a shift of wealth to Nigeria, which prompted the then, Head of State to say that, the problem of Nigeria is not money but how to spend it. The agricultural sector that had been the mainstay of the economy before the discovery of oil plummeted. The per

capita income decline to about U.S. %1000. By the year 2003, it has declined to about U.S. \$300, an overall decline of 70 percent. Over the period 1980-2010, the per capita income of Nigeria declined at an annual average rate of 3 percent (Todaro & Smith, 2011) Although things have not changed much structurally, as indicated above, it is imperative to note that government, especially at the federal level, has put in a lot of effort in terms of expenditures. These efforts can best be appreciated during the era of national planning. A summary of the capital expenditures in two sectors is given in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Planned and Actual Federal Expenditure 1962-1989

| Plan period | Primary plan (₦ million) | Sector Actual (₦ million) | Manufacturing and craft plan (₦ million) | Actual (₦ million) |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|--|--------------------|
| 1 st (1962- 1968) | 41.0 | 36.9 | 88 | 49.9 |
| 2 nd (1970- 1974) | 79.5 | 69.3 | 154 | 41.2 |
| 3 rd (1975- 1979) | 1012.6 | 1311.2 | 7587.6 | 3727.1 |
| 4 th (1980- 1984) | 5400 | 3492.4 | 1177 | 3484 |
| 5 th (1985-1989) | 3206.3 | 2401.8 | 4382.3 | 3605.6 |

Source: *Nigeria's National Development plans (Adapted from Jebbin & Wilson, 2011)*

From the plan, it is obvious that the Nigerian government is manufacturing sector biased. But unfortunately, the effect of the manufacturing sector on especially the agricultural sector has been minimal or insignificant because of dependence on the importation of raw materials, intermediate material, and equipment. This minimal impact of the manufacturing sector frustrates genuine efforts at speeding up Nigeria's economic development; the petroleum sector appears to have driven the final nail into the coffin of agricultural development. Actually, two nails are involved; one, dealing with the structure of the sector, and another, paradoxically, with its substantial impact on government revenue, foreign exchange earnings and GDP, (Kayode, 2004).

Given the background above, the paper examined why Nigeria is an underdeveloped country.

2. Concept of Development and Economic Development

Development, as a concept, is all encompassing and reflecting the totality of the wellbeing of individuals, family, society and nation. Thus, it is defined by many scholars' from different perspectives. Seer (1972) sees development as a means of creating the condition for the realization of human personality. He postulated certain criteria for measuring development, that is, whether there has been reduction in poverty, unemployment and inequality; whether there is improvement in education and demographic characteristics; and whether there is self-reliance and social justice. A country that experiences a downward trend in the above criteria cannot be said to be developed. Development can be seen as an improvement in the reduction of poverty, unemployment, and inequality, improvement in education, demographic characteristics,



self-reliance and social justice. Thus, development is achieved when people's needs and aspirations are met, thereby enhancing their wellbeing (Akpakpan, 1987).

Economic development is the expansion of capacities that contribute to the advancement of society through the realization of individual, firm and community potential. Economic Development is measured by a sustained increase in prosperity and quality of life through innovation, lowered transaction costs, and the utilization of capabilities towards the responsible production and diffusion of goods and services.

In the words of Meier (1964), economic development is a process whereby an economy's real national income increases over a long period of time". This definition fails to take into account the changes in the growth of population. If a rise in real income is accompanied by faster growth in population there will be no economic development but retardation. Okeke, Mbonu and Ndubuisi, (2018) opined that, economic development entails combined action and all-encompassing, long-term investment. Thus, Okeke et al. (2018) opined that economic development talks about the critical conditions needed for the micro economic working of the economy.

Economic development embraces economic growth measured in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) and its distributional dimensions. According to Kindleberger and Bruce (1958), economic development is generally defined to include improvements in material welfare especially for persons with the lowest incomes, the eradication of mass poverty with its correlates of illiteracy, disease and early death, changes in the composition of inputs and output. Kindleberger while making a distinction between economic growth and economic development argues that: "economic development implies both more output and changes in the technical and institutional arrangement by which it is produced and distributed"

Drewnowski (1983) defines development in terms of economic and social welfare, "In the standard of living of people economic development is supportive and it involves

increased per capita income and creation of new opportunities in education, healthcare, employment sectors.

Friedman defines economic development "as an innovative process leading to the structural transformation of the social system" while Schumpeter defines development in terms of a discontinuous and spontaneous change in the stationary state which forever alters and displaces the equilibrium state previously existing.

2.1 Measurement of development

Development being a multivariate concept having many dimensions, there is no single measure of development that completely captures the process. It has now become a common practice to measure development in terms of composite indices such as HDI (Human Development Index), GDI (Gender Development Index), HPI (Human Poverty Index) etc. but per capita income has been a widely used indicator for measuring economic development.

The trend now is that development is measured in terms of composite indices of development which take account of different aspects of development. Several such indices have been developed, some of which are discussed here.

a) Physical quality of life index (PQLI): This was developed by Morris D. Morris in 1979. He calculated the PQLI taking account of literacy, life expectancy and infant mortality. Thus, it shows improvement in the quality of life with increase in life expectancy (LE), fall in infant mortality rate (IMR), and rise in basic literacy rate (BLR). This index was considered inadequate as it did not cover important aspects of development and it did not measure total welfare either.

Human development index (HDI): HDI was invented by Lord Meghnad Desai and Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen and launched by Mahbubul-Haq, a leading Pakistani economist. The HDI is a composite index of three social indicators: life expectancy, adult literacy and years of schooling. It also take into account real GDP per capita. Thus the HDI value of a country is calculated by taking three indicators Longevity, Educational attainment and



decent standard of living. HDI ignores other indicators of human development such as infant mortality, nutrition etc and it measures relative rather than absolute human development. Human development index ranges from 0.897 in high human development countries while for low human development countries it is 0.436.

c) Human poverty index: The United Nations Development has created a measurement system based on what is lacking in different areas of the world. This measurement is called the Human Poverty Index. Human Poverty Index was first launched in 1990 and it is used by the United Nations to signify the standard of living in a specific country. It measures the amount of deprivation people experience in different countries. Thus, factors such as short life expectancy, low literacy rates and overall living conditions are recorded in the human poverty index. A recent innovation has been the publication of a new poverty index (HPI-2) measures poverty in industrial countries.

3. Why is Nigeria an Underdeveloped Nation?

The Nigerian economy is an underdeveloped dependent one. This was the case at independence in 1960 and still remains true today (Okowa, 1994). Per capita income was \$258 in 1998 (World Bank, 2005) and about \$300 in 2003 (Todaro & Smith, 2011). Manufacturing accounts for less than 10 percent of the GDP. Crude oil accounts for over 90 percent of export earnings. Mass poverty is a visible phenomenon. Degree of mass poverty is a lot more now than at independence in 1960 (Okowa, 1994). A Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was introduced in 1986, to revamp the economy via diversification as to reduce dependence on crude oil into a more balanced growth-enhancing structure. Okowa (1989) pinpointed the key features of the Nigerian economy; and these features manifest the underdeveloped level of the Nigerian economy. These are; dependence on foreign technology; monocultural dependence on crude oil; dependence on the foreign sector for raw materials; inadequate supply of skilled labour; underdeveloped agriculture; high rate of

underemployment and unemployment; and systemic corruption amongst others.

(i) Dependence on foreign technology: Dependence on foreign technology is a normal feature of an underdeveloped society or economy. Okowa (1994) posited that, “technological dependence is the fundamental defining condition of underdevelopment”. The country lacks a capital goods industry. The steel plant is yet to function properly. The petrol-chemical industry is in its infancy and foreign dominated. Ukpanah (2010) expresses this remorseful state of the economy when he posited that, “I can produce anything, but import everything-my toothpick is made in China; my toothpaste is made in South Africa; my salt is made in Ghana; my butter is made in Ireland”

(ii) Inadequate supply of skilled labour: Both technical and managerial skills are in short supply in the country. Hence, dependence on foreign supply to fill the gap. Low productivity and low per capita income: The per capita income of the country in the sixty’s (60’s) was about \$1000 (Kayode, 2004) but currently the per capita income has fallen below \$1000 (Todaro & Smith 2011). The productivity of the country is low therefore, dependence on foreign supply (import).

(iii) Underdeveloped agriculture: The agricultural sector is underdeveloped and dominated largely by unskilled labour. The use of outdated implement dominated the sector. With the enormous vast land and volumes of water, Nigeria agricultural system is still largely subsistence in nature and this cannot translate to development. As a result of the subsistence system of agriculture, the country depends largely on imported agricultural products such as rice, dairies etc. These and many more cumulated into what make Nigeria after 50 years of independence cannot feed her teeming population.

(iv) Unemployment and underemployment: Perhaps, one of the greatest macroeconomic problems facing the Nigeria nation is that of unemployment. This is because; people who are willing and capable to work at the



prevailing wage rate are without any work. Also, underemployment is manifested in the various government ministries and parastatals when workers are busy' sleeping or gossiping during the so-called official hours. The more honest ones simply do not pretend to stay around their offices (Okowa, 1994). The rate of unemployment and underemployment is high. Central Bank of Nigeria (2018) estimated the unemployment rate to be 50 percent. The true rate is much higher since most of the unemployed do not bother to report to the official employment agencies because of the insensitivity of the government (Obayori, 2014).

Moreover, Nigerian labour market is characterized by high labour supply and low labour demand leading to high unemployment, giving the employer greater bargaining power (Udeorah & Obayori, 2020; Gbosi, 2019). The inability to pay also led to the loss of employees in both the public and private sectors.

(v) Systemic corruption: Systemic corruption is an inborn or culture pattern of corruption. Put differently, systemic corruption is an institutionalized corruption that is raised to the level of a structural parameter (Okowa, 1989). Although, it is difficult to provide statistical substantiation of the above phenomenon, the truth is, corruption is pervasive and has become normalized in Nigeria. Therefore, as a result of corruption, Nigeria has been experiencing backward development in all the sectors of the economy. This is because, corruption impact negatively on economic growth and slow down or restrict development. Corruption weakens economic growth and that its consequences and effects are also on the increase (Obayori, Robinson & Udeorah, 2014)

(vi) High incidence of poverty: In Nigeria, the rate of poverty is rising at alarming rate. Indeed the Central Bank of Nigeria Statistical Bulletin (2018) estimated a poverty incidence of 72% (poverty Head count using self-rated lines). This has resulted into many living in slums and shanties and the increase in the crime waves in the country.

(vii) High rate of insecurity: The level of insecurity in the country is very high. This is manifested through the frequent cases of kidnapping, Armed Robbery, assassinations and unwanted destruction of life and properties. A case at hand is the bombing in Abuja on October, 1st 2010.

(viii) Low level of social and political consciousness: The moral base of the Nigerian society is deformed. People become millionaires and billionaires overnight without questions being raised. Public officers openly display ill-gotten wealth, but the anti-corruption authorities do not see them. As if to complement their effort we give them chieftaincy titles and at the national level award them Commanders of the Order of the Negro, (CON). Those who steal in millions and billions are congratulated while those that steal to assuage hunger are roasted alive or have their bodies rend in pieces with bullets. Nigerians in general have lost the culture of respect for the rule of law. Politicians' rig themselves into power openly, but only not seen by the judiciary. Political thugs kill and maim and go scot free by a mere phone call from a politician. The political consciousness of the people is been dampened, because of lack of democratic norms and the institutionalization of political prostitution. Politicians in Nigeria rig themselves into power, therefore they steal, kill and destroy in order to remain in office. This blatant rigging is a manifestation of the low level of political consciousness of the people in a democratic era. Electorates in Nigeria are denied the right to vote with the help of thugs armed to the teeth. Next is the issue of political prostitution. The essence of acquiring political power is service to the community or the people. But this is in total contradiction to the practice in Nigeria; politics in Nigeria has degenerate to the level of political prostitution as coined by Okowa (1994). He described the political situation thus: The ultimate aim in the acquisition of political power is service to the community When, however the purpose of political activity is reduced to the material imperative of enabling the participant to take part



in the looting of the public treasury, then the activity has been reduced to the level of prostitution. Political prostitution therefore defines the condition in which political activity is directed toward personal enrichment through corruption. It is an element of systemic corruption. Indeed, because of the key role of political leadership in defining social values and propensities, political prostitution is a most dangerous phenomenon. It perhaps constitutes the greatest impediment to Nigerian development.

The above citation reflects the degenerating level of our political consciousness.

(ix) No economy diversification: One of the reasons why Nigeria is underdeveloped is the monoculture dependence on crude oil. The nation country focuses all her energy on crude oil as the driver of its economy, and as a result, had failed to diversify the economy. Nigeria as a country believed that without oil, the economy could not be sustained, so the country is stuck in terms of development, as it relied only on oil for the sustenance of its economy. Thus, revenue from it has put the nation on war part, as a result of its mismanagement.

(x) Lack of investment in science and technology: Nigeria is underdeveloped as a result of the fact that despite, some kind of investment in the area science and technology, but such investments does not correspond with the taunt need of technology advancement Nigeria needs to drive growth and development. Unlike most of the developed and developing countries of the world that have invested heavily in science and technology because of the need of the time. It is a kind of investment that would have helped in creating wealth. Thus, to achieve the all-round developments the natural wealth and human resources, as well as, effective policy execution, so as to create wealth that will by-pass those created by other nations must be put in place.

(xi) Poor power generation and supply: Another reason why Nigeria is underdeveloped is that, Nigeria's electricity supply is poor, unsteady, sometimes the electricity

providers will go with the light for months, imagine. At this age Nigeria supposed to supply constant electricity. You cannot imagine life without power generation – electricity. Therefore, Nigeria ought to generate constant power supply, so as to make the people to become more economically productive.

3.1 Underdevelopment of Nigeria-Who is to be Blame?

A good number of people in the country hold the notion that the problems of underdevelopment facing the nation are due to the “failure of leadership and the political economy system”. They contend that the development efforts in the nation have failed because; the country did not have the right men and women in charge of the affairs of the nation economy. They buttress their view with the many specific instances of failures and the generally wasteful attitude that have characterized leadership in the country since independence.

Of a truth, an independent mind in Nigeria cannot point to an administration in the country since independent about which most people in the country will honestly speak in glowing terms when the record of performance with regard to developmental achievements for the entire society is considered. Instead, we have had leaders about whom there are stories of unprecedented, brazen and unimaginable corruption and other forms of abuse of office. Thus, leadership problem and the many other social, economic and political problems plague the nation developmental process. This finding is supported by Udenwa (2002), when he pointed out that, “the primary headache of the nation rests: no so much (upon) dwindling resources nor bad leadership but a brazen display of unpatriotism by a greater percentage of her citizenry”.

4. Concluding Remarks

The paper examined the underdevelopment state of the Nigerian economy and concluded, that the underdevelopment of Nigeria emanated from the type of politico-economic system been practice as well as the leadership problem. The cause of the woes of the Nigeria is squarely at the feet of the nation leadership. This is



because all the aforementioned reasons for the underdeveloped state of the Nigerian economy such as systemic corruption, high rate of poverty, no economy diversification; high rate of insecurity amongst others are tied with political will of the leadership. This implied that both past and present generations of Nigerian leaders have failed in their services to the citizenry. Conversely, this claim purely stretched Achebe's thesis on Nigeria to Africa. Achebe (1983:1) wrote that, "the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership..." Thus, the Nigeria leaders possess the inability to rise to the responsibilities and challenges of personal examples which are the hallmark of true leadership. To salvage the situation, the paper therefore suggested articulated development plan and people-oriented government, improved governance and service delivery, respect for the dignity of labour, respect for the rule of law, well-defined national objectives of self-reliance and a social security system, and leadership by example, both in the religious and government spheres. All these will increase the level of socioeconomic and macroeconomic development in the economy.

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