

A Critique of Nigeria's National Development Plans from Independence to Recession: The Way Out

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Abstract

It is a common knowledge that the Nigerian masses are crying over the deplorable social order, manifest in the overall poor human condition. Despite many development plans made by successive governments of the country to tackle the development problem, not much has been achieved as the trend remains unabated, thus graduating to the current deteriorated economic situation termed recession. This paper critically looked at the various development plans/programmes in Nigeria since independence. The aim was to investigate the factors militating against meaningful development in Nigeria. The paper found out that the various development programmes were unsuccessful as none satisfactorily provided the desired goals. The circumstances that led to the failure were x-rayed thereby providing insights towards effective solution to the nagging socio-economic development problem in Nigeria. Recommendations were made among which was that the present government under President Muhammadu Buhari, GCFR, and subsequent Nigeria's Chief Executive Officers (CEO) should genuinely fight corruption which is the hub to all the factors militating against national development.

Keywords: Development, National development, Development plans, Recession

Introduction

Nigerian governments have been faced with the challenge of improving the welfare of the citizens since the country's independence in 1960. This quest for meaningful development has been elusive despite series of strategies or plans designed by the leaders at various times. The result is that the Nigerian economy has continued to dwindle, so much so that it has got to the present alarming stage termed recession. Recession is a general downturn in any economy which is indicated by high rate of unemployment, low gross domestic product (GDP), high inflation, and so on (Bowerl, 2002: 44). All these subject the masses to untold hardship.

This paper, however, seeks to critically examine the efforts made by successive Nigerian governments (through their development programmes/plans) to improve the welfare of the citizens and the factors which militated against these efforts. The essence is to proffer solution to the nagging socio-economic problems in order to ensure meaningful development for Nigerian nation and her citizens. To effectively do this, the researchers begin by defining some concepts such as development and indeed national development cum development plans. This is proper since the knowledge of that will make the reader to fully appreciate whether Nigeria as a nation has attained development or not. The researchers shall further examine Nigeria's development programmes with an aim of ascertaining whether they have been successful or not. Where they have failed, the researchers shall trace the factors that led to the failure, offer some suggestions on the way out and then present the conclusion.

Definition of Concepts

When one talks about development, one is talking about human and not animal development. However, the term has been seen by many scholars in different perspectives. For instance, Rodney (1972:9) captures it as "a many sided process" which at the level of an individual entails "increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being". At the level of social groups, it implies "an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationship" (Rodney, 1972:10). Furthermore, Udofot (2016:15) posits that it is "an incremental but

steady progress made by a human being, and the manifestation of the totality of the person's endowments (physical, intellectual and spiritual)".

Elsewhere, Todaro (1977) outlines three equally important aspects of development which include:

- (1) Raising people's living levels, that is, their income and consumption level of food, medical services, education, etc. through relevant income growth.
- (2) Creating conditions conducive to the growth of people's self-esteem through the establishment of social, political and economic systems and institutions which promote human dignity and respect.
- (3) Increasing people's freedom to choose by enlarging the range of their choice variables. This can be done by increasing varieties of consumer goods and services (see also Todaro and Smith, 2010:21-2).

In fact, development does not only entail an individual building mansions or having the best cars in the world and such likes. When a few of the country's population swim in prodigious wealth while the vast majority wallow in hunger and deprivations, such a country or population cannot be said to be developed; and of course those few rich individuals are not developed. Indeed, development is an improvement in the well-being of all the citizens of a given country. The major essence of development is to improve the generality of man and his environment. Let us, therefore, examine national development vis-à-vis development plans since they go in *pari passu* with development.

National development can be seen from the perspectives of standard and quality of life. Quality of life is inter-related with the standard of living. It therefore has factors such as nutrition, life expectancy, infant mortality, food distribution, scientific and cultural expression which measure it.

Many scholars have explained national development in various but related ways. For instance, Adedeji (1984:67) sees it as a constant and appreciable amelioration in economic, social, technological, political and cultural aspects of life of a people. Sharing the above view, Lawal and Oluwatoyin (2011:238) consider national development as "the overall development or a collective socio-economic, political as well as religious advancement of a country or nation". Furthermore, Obiegbu (2014:55) views it as "a total human development which emphasizes full realization of the human potential of the nation's resources for the benefit of all citizens".

Perhaps, in the light of the above, Todaro and Smith view development in strictly economic terms. Accordingly, development means "achieving sustained rates of growth of income per capita to enable the nation to expand its output at a rate faster than the growth rate of its population" (Todaro and Smith, 2010:14). Dudley Seers, quoted in Todaro and Smith (2010:15) points out the three basic tenets of development thus:

The questions to ask about a country's development are therefore: what has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If all three of these have declined from high levels, then beyond doubt this has been a period of development for the country concerned. If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, especially if all three have, it would be strange to call the result "development" even if per capita income doubled.

Sadly, a careful observer of the Nigerian situation will notice that all the core values of development pointed out above are lacking among the citizens. The central point in the above definitions is that a country's general resources should be used to give her citizens a holistic advancement in all ramifications of life. To be able to do this, a carefully thought out plan/development programme or strategy must be put in place by those at the helm of affairs. Once this first step is taken, it should be sustained and improved upon. Thus, a development plan or programme or strategy is a well-designed plan/programme/strategy by a country for achieving enhancement on the quality of lives of her citizens.

Nigeria has, since independence, embarked on quite a number of plans/programmes targeted at improving the lives of her citizens. Have these been successful or not? Let us discuss this and other issues as the researchers x-ray the country's development programmes/plans in the following sections.

Nigeria's Development Programmes: A Success or Not?

At this juncture, it becomes apposite to address the question of whether Nigeria's development programmes have been successful or not. To do this effectively, there is need to x-ray the various development programmes in Nigeria since independence. As it has been rightly observed by scholars, the only instrument for both diagnosis and remedy to development problem is development plan or "programme" as we are using it here. The various programmes embarked upon by Nigerian leaders include the first National Development Plan (1962-68). This was followed by the second National Development Plan (1970-74); the third National Development Plan (1975-80); the fourth National Development Plan (1981-85), and the non-realised fifth National Development Plan which later metamorphosed into Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). Other strategies adopted by the federal government include the three year Rolling Plans between 1990 and 1998. Furthermore, Nigerian government, under former President Olusegun Obasanjo, introduced National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS); Vision 2010; and the latest Vision 20:2020 cum Seven Point Agenda.

The objectives of the first National Development Plan were, among others, to bring about equal distributions of national income, to speed up the rate of economic growth, to increase the standard of living of the masses especially in terms of food, housing, health and clothing, and so on. The plan failed as most of its objectives were not realised. The political crises in the country then, which culminated in the thirty (30) months civil war, made this plan redundant. Ogwumike (1995) cited in Lawal and Oluwatoyin (2011:238) remark that it 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". Nevertheless, it achieved only a few infrastructural progresses like the Niger Bridge Onitsha, Kainji Dam, Port-Harcourt Refinery, Nigeria Security and Minting plant, etc.

According to Iheanacho (2014:52), "one of the basic tenets of second National Development Plan is indigenization policy". This plan, under the Gen. Gowon-led administration, was aimed at achieving economic independence. But beyond this, and given the just ended war background, the plan generally sought a united, strong and self-reliant nation; a just and egalitarian society; a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens; and free and democratic society. The implementation of this plan, again, was a problem even though some industries were rehabilitated and some roads reconstructed. For instance, despite the numerous indigenization decrees made to encourage Nigerians to participate fully in the commercial, industrial and financial activities of the Nigerian economy, only about thirty-three percent of the affected enterprises complied with the provisions of the first indigenization decree (1972) (Onah, 2010). Similarly, the aspects of free and democratic society were equally marred as military rule continued to hold sway within the period.

The third National Development Plan was aimed at increasing per capita income; reduction in the level of unemployment; diversification of the economy; more even distribution of income, etc. It projected an investment of thirty billion naira, initially, and later forty-three point three billion naira (which is about ten and fifteen times those of the second and first plans respectively). The third National Development Plan has been adjudged by scholars as being over ambitious without being matched with proper actions. Iheanacho (2014:53) notes:

The assessment of the plan showed it focused to give priority to projects and programmes that would directly impact positively on the rural dwellers, but meager allocations to agriculture and social development schemes did not indicate sincere intention of the government to achieve the objective.

It is disheartening to note that agriculture received only five percent while social development scheme (education, housing, health, welfare, etc.) received only eleven point five percent of the financial allocation contained in the plan. These areas that impact directly on the common man were shockingly under-estimated. Therefore, insincerity, carelessness and of course insensitivity on the planners and government made the third plan not to achieve its targets.

The fourth National Development Plan was indeed the first prepared by the civilian administration under Alhaji Shehu Shagari. This, like all others, had lofty objectives such as increasing the real

income of the average citizen; reduction of the level of unemployment and underemployment; increase in supply of skilled manpower; development of technology; promotion of new national orientation conducive to greater discipline; better attitude to work and cleaner environment, amongst others. A projected capital investment of eighty-two billion naira (N82b) was envisaged; it was hoped to be generated from oil.

Unfortunately, the targeted income was not realised – only fifty-four percent of the export proceeds projected was realised in 1984. Iheanacho (2014:54) remarks that as a result of the dwindling resources, “the Nigerian Economy witnessed debt service and balance of payment problem coupled with high rate of inflation”. Thus, many of the projects were abandoned, unemployment among school leavers increased and the standard of living of common man reduced. By then, the period of oil boom had gone, the economy deteriorated and the country became the worse off. With the failure of the fourth National Development Plan to produce the desired goals, an attempt to develop a fifth National Development Plan was made. A conference to that effect was held at the University of Ibadan in November 1984. The necessary provisions were made in the plan but unfortunately the fifth National Development Plan did not materialise. It was, however, incorporated into a two-year Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). Under this period, Nigerians experienced untold economic hardship that SAP was nicknamed “Stomach Adjustment Programme”. SAP, as a matter of fact, did not produce the desired goals.

Then came the Perspective and the Rolling Plans (1990-98) introduced by the Gen. Ibrahim Babangida regime, since he abandoned the previously fixed five-year development plans. The Perspective Plan was to provide a realistic long term view of the problem aimed at providing an enduring solution to the country’s search for development. It was to cover a period of, say, twenty years. Like many Nigerian projects, this plan never took off from 1990 to 1996 when the late Gen. Sani Abacha, then Head of State, set up the Vision 2010 Committee. The report of this Committee recommended that the Vision should provide the focus of all plans, including long (Perspective), medium (Rolling) and annual (Budget). Unfortunately, the Vision failed following the death of its author, Gen. Abacha, in 1998.

Another strategic search towards a meaningful development for Nigerian citizens was christened National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). It came on board in 2003, during former President Olusegun Obasanjo’s second term in office. The main focus of NEEDS was on: empowerment, wealth creation, employment generation and poverty reduction as well as value re-orientation. It is noteworthy that the country’s annual budget crossed the threshold of billions into trillions of naira; yet per capita income of Nigeria fell into one dollar per head level of the poorest countries.

Under NEEDS, the number of educational institutions from primary to tertiary increased. For example, Universities increased from forty in 1999 to eighty-nine in April 2007 with greater private sector participation. Contrary to expectation, education which should empower citizens became more exorbitant than ever. Private Universities charged, on the average, not less than two hundred and fifty thousand naira per session; State owned Universities equally charged high. The federal Universities were not enough to accommodate the teeming population seeking admission. Thus, the number of citizens that have access to higher education was reduced; and consequently, empowerment of such citizens was seriously hampered. According to Iheanacho (2014:56), “the four main objectives viz: employment generation, poverty reduction, wealth creation and value re-orientation remained only on paper”. Indeed NEEDS, like the previous development plans in Nigeria, did not achieve the expected results. While NEEDS existed, the Nigerian leaders led by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo equally introduced Vision 20:2020. This was aimed at making Nigeria one of the first twenty best economies in the world by the year 2020. The rural areas in Nigeria must be transformed from the age-long poverty and misery centres to urban status of world standard. Nigeria must move from her 158th position in the UNDP (2007) human development ranking to the 20th position in the world. This, the researchers think, is indeed what Achebe (1983:9) refers to as “false image of ourselves” orchestrated by Nigerian leaders.

Perhaps, as a necessary complement to the Vision, the immediate past administration of Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan introduced a Seven-Point Agenda. But both the Vision 20:2020 and the Seven-Point Agenda lacked any clear methodological approach towards achieving them. The Seven-Point Agenda failed eventually, thus launching Nigeria, arguably, into recession in the current President Buhari's administration. As can be seen, the Vision 20:2020 was indeed nothing but a mere vision; it has not been realised even after two years of its time expiration!

In what may be seen as a swift move to cushion the impacts of the recession, the current Nigerian leader, President Muhammadu Buhari, unveiled in 2020 a Nine-Point Agenda termed "Economic Recovery and Growth Plan". This, according to him, is a three-year medium term initiative aimed at restoring economic growth and development (Daily Trust Online Newspaper, 29 August 2020). Contrary to the objectives of the Buhari's Economic Growth and Development Plan as evidenced by the current socio-economic realities facing the masses, it is obvious that this Plan has gone the way of the previous ones. It is clear at the moment that Nigerians are facing poor power supply, deprivation, hunger and starvation, high cost of education and Medicare, underdeveloped rail system, dilapidated road network, in fact a total collapse in infrastructural development and insecurity of lives and property.

From the foregoing, it is clear that Nigeria has embarked on quite a number of development programmes/plans. However, these successive development plans have not been able to effectively address the three core values of development (**sustenance** in terms of the basic human needs; promotion of **selfesteem** for her citizens; and **freedom** by providing ample alternatives for choice) elucidated by Todaro and Smith (2010:21). The current results so far are not what development connotes. Therefore, the researchers succinctly posit that Nigeria's development programmes/plans have been an abysmal failure. At this juncture, it becomes necessary to address the major factors that militated against development programmes in Nigeria and makesuggestions aimed at achieving solutions, that is, ways out of recession. These are presented in the following sections.

Factors Militating against Development Programmes in Nigeria

Looking at the harrowing strings of **unsuccessful** development programmes/plans in Nigeria since her independence, one begins to wonder where the problem lies. But as Achebe (1983:1) posits:

There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which is the hallmarks of true leadership.

Even as the researchers write, there is still nothing wrong with those elements pointed out by Achebe above!

Therefore, **lack of effective leadership**, purposeful and committed efforts on the authors and managers of those programmes led to poor and non-implementation of those programmes, hence the failure. In his very humorous but satiric work, Njoku (1990) paints many examples of the level of inefficiency by those in government, in Nigeria's second republic. The following example will suffice:

during the period, no single brewery was allowed to close. This is easy to understand considering that the social tempo of the era was essentially buoyed by alcohol.... In some states, cement factories closed permanently during the period. Chief executives in these states simply did not understand why there was need for cement. In any case, if such need was established, was it not easy to import it with foreign exchange than to go into the ceremony of producing it locally? (Njoku, 1990:48-9).

In fact, there were preponderant cases of misplaced priorities among Nigerian leaders which equally had their tolls on the implementation of the Development Plans. This is why Njoku (1990:50) succinctly concludes that "If government business concerns did not prosper, it is essentially because even elementary management principles were not obeyed".

The above factor is driven by the second one – **corruption**. A long time ago, Achebe (1983:38) has remarked that “corruption in Nigeria has passed the alarming and entered **the fatal stage**” (emphasis, the researchers’). Today, the situation is even worse than Achebe had remarked about forty years ago. A little illustration may help to buttress the point.

Imagine a situation, as it is prevalent in Nigeria, where a person executing job is left with meager resources (say half of the total amount of the contract value even when he has signed receipt of the total amount). If roads construction is involved, he does a shoddy job since the authority has compromised and would no longer supervise him. Thus, such roads spoil even before the end of the said administration that awarded them. The implication is that another administration returns to rebuild the same roads thereby keeping stagnant other areas of infrastructural development or abandoned the roads to status quo. In fact, corruption has led to the poor or non-execution of projects in Nigeria. On the contrary, if the complete amount for the value of the job had been given to the contractor, he would not have done a shoddy job as there would have been effective supervision and monitoring of the job. Consequently, other areas would not have suffered.

The next factor, borrowing the words of Achebe (1983:9), is “**false image of ourselves**” (emphasis, the researchers’). The tendency among Nigerian leaders and the designers of the country’s development programmes to live in a world of unrealistic expectations has been inimical to the success of the development plans. Let us quote two world leaders, cited in Achebe (1983:9), for illustration. In June 1979, former Chancellor Helmut Schmidt of West Germany made the following remark about his country:

Germany is not a world power; it does not wish to become a world power.

In August the same year, then as incumbent Head of State, Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, in his “Thank You Tour” of Ogun state said:

Nigeria will become one of the ten leading nations in the world by the end of the century.

The high level of Germany’s advancement by 1979 is well known, yet that was played down by her leader, contrary to the Nigeria’s case!

False image of the country followed all the development plans in Nigeria. The plans have been over ambitious, even without matching the bogus expectations with genuine actions. The consequence is failure with the attendant untold hardship meted to the masses. It is common knowledge that Nigeria becoming “one of the ten leading nations in the world” by 1999, the last year of that century, was not achieved. Such fate also followed “Education for all her citizens” by the year 2000. Similar fate equally followed her becoming one of the first 20 best economies in the world, by the year 2020; moving from her 158th position in the UNDP (2007) human development ranking to the first 20 position in the world by the year 2020; so on and so forth!

Another factor militating against development plans in Nigeria is the **non consultation of the people** (the masses) for whom the plans are made before embarking on the plans. Consulting the people pays in the sense that their various areas of priorities will be made known to the government who would in turn incorporate these needs into the plan. Moreover, whence the people are given a sense of belonging, they will definitely co-operate with the government to ensure the success of the plan; otherwise they are bound to be apathetic towards the plan’s realisation.

Furthermore, **Nigerian leaders fail to consolidate on whatever plans made by the previous administration(s)**. This lack of continuity of government programmes by the succeeding administration retards development. The many cases of abandoned projects scattered all over the States of the country is as a result of this ugly phenomenon. Corruption again is the main reason for such attitude since every succeeding leader is interested in initiating his own projects which will serve as his conduit pipes for milking the nation’s treasury.

Lastly, but not the least, **the promotion of tribe and ethnicity in government platforms** has equally rendered development programmes in Nigeria ineffective. This manifests itself even from the point of conception of the programmes, as members of the plan committee begin to scramble over what goes where, without adequately considering where a given project is really needed and where the country

at large will benefit maximally. Tribalism has indeed promoted the cult of mediocrity, to the point that people are entrusted with positions not because of merit but because of where they come from.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The situation appears hopeless but not completely out of hand. The fact that the previous development plans failed should not discourage subsequent Nigeria's Chief Executive Officers (CEO) from designing and embarking on new ones. The factors which this paper has already identified as major reasons for the failure of earlier development plans/programmes have in turn provided insights to what subsequent leaders must do or avoid to establish a new social order. Thus, the present leadership, under President Muhammadu Buhari, and subsequent Nigerian Presidents should strive to instill discipline amongst the citizens and fight corruption which is the hub to all other factors militating against national development. When this is done, other factors which enhance development like the development of the agricultural sector, a system of mass education, development of indigenous industries, consistency and policy stability, de-emphasising of tribe, encouragement of private sector co-operation with the government, an effective system to fight insecurity, etc. should be put in place. Thence, the recession will be a thing of the past and Nigeria will be better positioned for meaningful developments.

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