

Development in Nigeria: A Political and Economic Challenge

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Abstract

The focus of this research is on the political, social, and economic trends that have impeded development in Nigeria. The research focused on ethno-religious conflicts in Northern and Southern Nigeria; the background of these conflicts and their current manifestations. The research also discussed the dismaying economic crisis in Nigeria and the threat it poses to the new political dispensation. The general thrust of this research is that sustainable development is unattainable in Nigeria without political and economic integration.

Introduction

Nigeria like most African countries continues to struggle with what seems to be an elusive goal of political and economic integration even after forty years of political independence. The country has experienced counter coups after counter coups and has survived a secessionist civil war. Concomitantly, the country has also been embattled with poor economic conditions after the oil boom of the 1970's, and plundering of economic resources by corrupt leaders. In this regard Thomas Callaghy asserts:

Most of Africa is suffering from dual crises of the state and the economy. The state is seen as being in decline... Evidence abounds of diminishing control, repression and extraction, resilience of traditional authority patterns, corrupt and inefficient administration, enormous waste, poor Policy performance, debt and infrastructure crises...The foregoing assertion provides a sound perspective for understanding the enormous problems confronting African countries and Nigeria in particular. That is, one has to examine these problems in the context of the relationship between the state and the economy because these crises are intimately interrelated (Olaitan, 1995). It is within this context that this article finds utility in discussing

the political culture of Nigeria and how fractional elements of this culture are threatening to the political stability of the state. The specific is on the ethno- religious conflicts that proliferated in recent times in Nigeria, and its threat to the current political dispensation. Furthermore, this article will examine the poor economic conditions in Nigeria and how the plundering of state resources in the past and the present are inter-related. The focus will also be on the apparent disarticulation of the Nigerian economy and how the primary reliance on the oil sector does not seem to be a sound development approach. It is against this background that one should also examine how national development decisions impact the political process. Therefore, an analysis of the nature of the postcolonial state provides us with a theoretical foundation for a discussion of the political and economic challenges for sustainable development in Nigeria.

The Nature of the Post-Colonial State

Hamza Alavi's study on the nature of the post-colonial state provides a good starting point for our discussion. In Alavi's theory of the "overdeveloped state" he recognized three characteristics of the post-colonial state. The first is that the post-colonial state inherits from the metropolitan elite a powerful bureaucratic military apparatus that was overdeveloped in relation to the colonized society because of the necessity to subordinate the latter to colonial interests. The second characteristic involves a new relatively autonomous economic role by which the state appropriates a large part of the economic surplus and uses it in bureaucratically controlled activity in the name of development. Finally, Alavi asserts that the state plays a crucial role in creating territorial unity and legitimacy (Alavi, 1972). The inherent weakness of this analysis is the focus on the material structure of the state rather than its social relationship. Indeed Ntalaja Nzongola also asserts:

The nature and role of the state is not the state's material structure or apparatus. Instead, the state is above all a condensation of social relationships, a relation of power between struggling classes...

Furthermore, he posits that the state exists not to reconcile the relationship between the

struggling classes, but to moderate or contain the antagonistic contradictions of which it is a product, so as to maintain cohesion. He insists that the most relevant question about the post-colonial state is “ whether neocolonialism involves a significant change in the relationship of the African petty bourgeoisie and the foreign bourgeoisie (Nzongola, 1982). To this end, Victor Azarya offers this explanation: that the state is an organization within the society that interacts with other formal and informal organizations from families to economic enterprises or religious organizations (Azarya, 1988) It is against this background that one should examine how fractional elements of the political culture of Nigeria present a threat to the current political dispensation.

Ethnic Divide

The term “political culture” relates to the collective political attitudes, values, feelings, information and skills, in a society or in a nation. A fundamental question in a cultural analysis is to what degree do the groups within this culture share common attitudes and values. Accordingly, the political culture of Nigeria is dynamic and heterogeneous. Therefore, an analysis of the political culture of Nigeria should take into account the complex relationship between pre-colonial conditions and religious forces, especially from the Christian and Muslim groups in Nigeria (Aborisade and Mundt, 1999).

Nigeria has more than 300 ethnic groups speaking 250 languages and 1,000 dialects. Among these groups the Yoruba from the southwest, the Hausa- Fulani from the North, and the Ibo from the southeast are the three major ethnic groups. These groups have historically dominated the political and economic spheres of the country since independence, even though the Yoruba and Ibo have generally maintained marginalization by the Hausa-Fulani hegemony (Ezechukwu, 2000) Table 1 shows the distribution of ethnic identities in Nigeria.

Table 1: Distribution Of Ethnic Identities In Nigeria

GROUP	PERCENT OF POPULATION
Hausa-Fulani	29.5
Kanuri	4.1
Tiv	2.5
Nupe	1.2
Yoruba	20.3
Edo	1.7
Igbo	16.6
Ibibio-Efik	3.6
Ijaw	2.0
Other	18.5

Source: Oladimeji Aborisade and Robert J. Mundt (1999)

Politics in Nigeria, New York: Longman Publishers.

Given the distribution of ethnic identities in Nigeria, it is important to note that these ethnic groups are not homogenous and have had a pre-colonial history of rivalries and it is frequently resurrected by political and economic competitions (Aborisade and Mundt, 1999). Such was the case in 1997, in the economic capital of the Delta region, Warri. An inter-ethnic conflict erupted between the itsekiris and the Ijaws over the relocation of local government headquarters from Igbe-Ijoh and Ijaw enclave, to Ogidigben, an Itsekiri town in Warri North. In the ensuing conflict hundreds of lives were lost on both sides, waterways were blocked, and more than 120 Shell Petroleum workers were held hostage (Obasa, 1998). Concomitantly, in Edo State on October 6, 1998 an inter-ethnic crisis at Ikpako-Ekewan, in Ovia North-East local government led to the death of several people. This particular conflict was between the Ijaws, on one hand, and the Urhobos and the Itsekiris on the other (Obasa, 1998). Then on July 22, 1999, approximately more than 300 lives were lost as a result of inter-ethnic conflict between the Yorubas and Hausas in Kano and Sagamu. This particular conflict began in Sagamu, Ogun State, a Yoruba

dominated state. The Yoruba indigenes of this town attacked Hausa settlers for defiling their sacred Oro festival with the alleged nocturnal outing of two Hausa prostitutes. This festival is usually celebrated in secrecy with a curfew for all residents (Adeyemo, 1999). The anxiety that has emerged in Nigeria as a result of these ethnic conflicts is also a reflection of the economic frustration endured over time by these groups. This is the case in the Delta region where the bulk of Nigeria's revenue is derived from crude oil extracted from this area. The Delta communities are provoked that the proceeds from oil were being used by the government to develop other areas of the country while they were left to bear environmental problems of oil exploration (Obasa, 1998). In this regard, Obasa further asserts:

That traveling through the creeks and rivers in the area, one is confronted with the dangerous gas flares, oil wells and pipelines flow-stations and seismic lines cross-crossing farmland and water-ways. Pollution of the air is aggravated and oil spills have disrupted the ecological balance making both farming and fishing impossible for many communities... Given the dynamics of ethnic conflict in Nigeria at present, it is evident that some of these conflicts are being shaped by both political and economic factors that are threatening the political stability of the state.

Religious Divide

Religious affiliation in Nigeria is as equally dynamic as ethnic identity. The 1963 census reported the population to be 49 percent Muslim, 34 percent Christian and 17 percent following other traditional religions. The people of Nigeria had their own religious institutions and beliefs established before the arrival of Christianity and Islam. However, southern Nigeria was influenced by Christian missionaries who established formal education in this region. This explains why Christianity is concentrated in the south. The Northern region has remained dominated by Muslims primarily as a result of colonial agreement between the colonial administration and Northern emirates that barred Christianity from the North. Though over a period of time southern Christians that have migrated to the North have established churches (Aborisade and Mundt, 1999). Prior to the 1970s and the oil boom period there were few

incidents in which religion was manipulated for political purposes. But at the end of this period in the 1980's, Nigeria experienced a rise in religious conflict primarily between Christians and Muslims. The rise in religious conflict in Nigeria seems to coincide with a global rise in fundamentalist movements. For example the Maitatsine Islamic movement that led to a bloody conflict in the Northern city of Kano between followers of the movement, and Christians claimed several thousands of lives (Aborisade and Mundt, 1999), (Chazan and Levine, 1991).

However, the religious divide in Nigeria was further heightened in 1986 when the Babangida administration recommended that Nigeria join the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC). Then in June 13, 1997, the Abacha administration opened old sores by proposing Nigeria's membership in the Developing Eight, a group of Muslim countries that planned to ascend the ladder of industrialization. Since the proposed membership in the Developing Eight, Nigeria has experienced religious tension across several states.(Odunlami, 1997). At the heart of this tension recently is the decision by some of the Northern states to adopt the Islamic legal principles of "al- Shari ah", versus secular laws. The shari-ah according Nasr (2000) "for traditional Muslims represents the concrete embodiment of the divine will and to practice Islam means to follow the Shari-ah." Since Nigeria is not an Islamic state, a promulgation of the Shari-ah by Northern leaders appears to be inconsistent with the Nigerian constitution and clearly serves as a threat to the secular foundation of the nation (Constitution of the Federal Republic Of Nigeria, 1999). Accordingly, a recent cover story by Niboro (2000) asserts that the Shari-ah is "billed as a way of life for Muslims, but those instigating the shari-ah agitation's in the North may have a different agenda.... getting rid of the present government and ending the latest attempt at lasting democracy." In this regard, one must view the recent religious tension as detrimental to efforts of political integration in Nigeria.

Economic Development and Integration

As the most populous African nation, Nigeria views itself as a leader in the search for national economic growth and independence (Mabbs-Zenno, 1986). However, the struggle among rival ethnic groups seeking economic dominance, mismanagement and corruption in the public and

private sector have led the country to near economic decay. The problems in the economic sector are also a reflection of the development strategies that are related to the colonial blue print adopted by the Nationalist leaders after independence.

The Nigerian economy experienced unprecedented boom in the 1960s and the 1970s. But by the 1980s the country experienced economic problems. The travails of the Nigerian economy stem largely from two main factors. First the oil boom of the 1960s and the early 1980s brought about major windfall for the country which consequently led to less priority being accorded to the Agricultural sector,; which was once a vital sector of the national economy.

Another reason for the structural deficiency of the Nigerian economy which is discussed throughout this study are the twin problems of mismanagement and corruption by the political elite in Nigeria under various military and civilian regimes. In this regard, Tom Forests posits that “state managers and the military government totally failed to manage public expenditure or impose any sense of direction or priority upon it” This was further reinforced by Nigeria’s clientilist patterns of politics that are mobilized along ethnic lines (Forest, 1987). Consequently, the dynamism of these political and structural factors has led to the decline of the economy.

In light of the foregoing, the question is how does the present administration intend to achieve economic integration? Thus, President Obasanjo addressed a joint session of the National Assembly in January of 2000 and spelled out his fiscal policy as such:

1. Enhance capacity utilization in agriculture, manufacturing and mining industries;
2. Provide appropriate protection of domestic industries against unfair protection from import and dumping;
3. Encourage diversification of foreign exchange earnings through increased export activities;
4. Reduce operating costs and inflationary pressures; and
5. Provide appropriate incentives for investment in manufacturing, agriculture and mining with a view of making the economy private sector-led.

Given the foregoing fiscal policy, it appears that the administration has opted for an economic policy that is private sector led and export oriented. This is consistent with the policy direction of

multilateral agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for developing countries since the early 1980s (World Bank Report, 1984), (Mills, 1989). In light of what appears to be a swing in the development strategy from state initiative, ownership and control the Nigerian economy has not fared well (Yahaya, 1993). The country is struggling with the process of the privatization of public parastatals and those that are privatized are not managed effectively. Furthermore, Nigeria's manufacturing sector has continued to decline in the 1990s culminating in an average negative annual growth of 1.6 percent between 1990 and 1996 (Udeala, 1999). At the same time the local value of foreign holdings in Nigeria based enterprises has risen over the past two decades, fresh foreign investments have only trickled into Nigeria. (Economist, 1994). However, a significant part of Nigeria's economic problem is related to the dependency on crude oil and the lack of economic diversity. Thus one can argue that in order for Nigeria to have an integrated and competitive economy, an economic policy that does not rely heavily on the oil sector will have to be pursued by the current civilian regime. Table 2 shows the extent of Nigeria's dependency on oil and why economic diversification is imperative.

Total 2: Revenue From Oil And Non –Oil Sector

Year	Oil Revenue (1)	Non Oil Revenue (2)	Total (3)	1 as a% of 3	2 as a % of 3
1970	166.5	467.4	634	26.3	73.7
1971	510.1	658.7	1168.8	43.6	56.4
1972	764.3	640.8	1405.1	54.4	45.6
1973	1016.0	679.3	1,695.3	59.9	40.1
1974	3724.0	813.4	4,537.4	82.1	17.9
1975	4271.5	1243.1	5514.6	77.5	22.5
1976	5365.2	1400.7	6765.9	79.5	20.7
1977	6080.6	1961.8	8042.4	75.6	24.4
1978	4555.8	2815.2	7371.0	61.8	38.2
1979	8880.8	2031.6	10912.4	81.4	18.6
1980	12353.8	28880.2	15234.0	81.1	18.9

1981	8564.4	3615.8	12180.2	70.3	29.7
1982	7814.4	3949.5	11763.9	66.4	33.6
1983	7253.0	3255.7	10508.7	69.0	31.0
1984	8269.2	2922.0	1191.2	73.9	26.1
1985	10915.1	3691.0	14606.1	74.7	25.3

Continue:

Year	Oil Revenue (1)	Non Oil Revenue (2)	Total (3)	1 as a% of 3	2 as a % of 3
1986	8107.3	4194.7	12302.0	65.9	34.1
1987	19027.0	6027.0	25054.0	75.9	24.1
1988	20933.8	6377.0	27310.8	76.7	23.3
1989	41334.4	8937.7	50272.1	82.2	17.8
1990	54713.2	12182.2	66895.44	81.8	18.2
1991	68832.2	19,326.5	88158.7	78.1	21.9
1992	54,661.8	10,515.7	65,177.5	83.9	16.1

Source: Nigerian Economist "Revenue From Oil and Non-Oil Sectors" June 6, 1994

In 1986 Nigeria pursued a macro-economic policy of structural adjustment with the objective of diversifying the country's export base. Economic performance during this period demonstrated that Nigeria remained heavily dependent on the oil sector for export revenue. Concomitantly, the non-oil sector, which has contributed about three-quarters of Nigeria's total revenue in 1970, appears to be neglected since the oil boom period. Its contributions to total revenue dropped from 22.5 percent in 1975 to 18.9 percent by 1980, rose to 25.3 percent in 1985 and fell to 16.2 percent by 1992 (The Nigerian/Economist, 1994). The present administration, so far, has not made any concrete effort to depart from the government's enormous reliance on this industry. As part of the administration's efforts to consolidate this sector as the nation's highest revenue earner, the federal government recently concluded plans to carry out investment worth about \$40 billion within the next five years (Abba, 2000).

However, the dependency on oil exposes the economy to domestic and global surge in oil price. This was the case when President Obasanjo announced in May of 2000 that the petroleum

subsidy would be eliminated; therefore a price increase of 50% would be established (Daily Mail and Guardian, 2000). This decision led to a nation wide strike that almost paralyzed economic activities in the country (Ojewale and Ubanna, 2000). An agreement between the Nigerian Labor Congress (NLC) brought the strike to an end. It was agreed that a liter of petrol would now be sold for N22.00 as against N30.00, while diesel will cost N21.00 per liter as against N29.00; kerosene will sell at N17.00 instead of N27.00 per liter (Ojewale and Ubanna, 2000).

The global and domestic dimension of Nigeria's reliance on oil is manifested in the external debt crisis that began during the oil boom period of the 1970s. Nigeria's external debt which is estimated at over \$30 billion continued to rise because the windfalls from the oil receipts during the 1970s were used as welfare expenditures, for wasteful projects that were not carefully planned, and in some instances were plundered by political leaders for personal gains (Anunobi, 1992). At the same time the country continued to borrow money at a faster pace from foreign lending agencies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and private banks in Europe and North America (Anunobi, 1992), (Aborisade and Mundt, 1999). Consequently, the economic crisis in Nigeria as in other lending countries was further entrenched by the conditions set forth by these lending agencies. For example Aborisade and Mundt (1999) assert that the "servicing costs on foreign debt of over \$25billion equaled over 70 percent of Nigeria's annual export earnings." In principle it means that Nigeria as a borrower does not possess the economic leverage for a favorable balance of payment because over 50 percent of its export earnings are used to service external debts (Prayer, 1989). Given this background, President Obasanjo and other leaders from indebted low-income countries are asking for debt forgiveness from lending agencies. In Obasanjo's address to the 54th Session of the United Nations General Assembly he argues:

I make bold to assert that debt relief for developing countries is not a plea for charity, but an urgent matter of social and economic justice...

Furthermore, he subscribed to an approach to debt relief that will engage the rich countries especially on five main issues: 1. Eligibility limited to unpayable debts, 2. Cancellation of debt that is not predicated on institutional harsh conditionality of structural adjustment; 3. Recognition

on both sides of the bargaining table that lenders and borrowers share joint responsibilities for debt crisis; 4. Joint action is needed to recover stolen resources by past regimes; 5. Debt cancellation that benefits ordinary people. (Obasanjo, 1999).

Given the foregoing discussion on the oil boom of the 1970s and ensuing debt crisis of the 1980s it is important to note that one of the important challenges for Nigeria economically and politically is the distributive nature of revenue and resources among various constituents. As was already mentioned in the preceding passage Nigeria is a constellation of ethnic, regional, religious and class conflicts and these cleavages do have an impact on the distributive process of resources (Herbst and Olukoshi, 1994). Therefore, the fundamental challenge for the present administration is how to achieve economic integration against a background of ethnic division and religious polarization between Muslims in the North and Christians in the South (Herbst and Olukoshi, 1994). The widespread violence among the various ethnic groups both in Northern and Southern Nigeria is also a manifestation of these cleavages, which are threatening the political and economic stability of Nigeria.

Another disheartening factor that has impacted Nigeria economically is the level of corruption in Nigeria in recent times; especially under the various military regimes since 1983, but particularly under the military regimes of general Babangida and Abacha. These two generals are known for their blatant squandering of public resources. Under these two generals, massive looting of Nigeria did not only take place, governance was also turned into a family business (Vanguard May 9, 1999). In this regard Table 3 illustrates the magnitude of the looting under the military regimes.

Table 3: United States And Switzerland Disclosure Foreign Accounts Of Looters

Under The Abacha Regime		
BANK	ACCOUNT NO.	BALANCE
Barclays Bank Plc. (London)	Levy Account	
Barclays Bank Plc (London)	Ship Acquistion and Ship Building Fund A/C	\$5,648,470,55 CR
Barclays Bank Plc (London)	Rent Account	GBP 1,447,142,55 CR
Barclays Bank Plc (London)	London Office Current Account	GBP 288,946,14 CR

Union Bank Plc (London)	Levy Account	\$17,271,783,47
Midland Bank Plc (London)	Call Deposit Account	GBP166,949,31CR
Midland Bank plc (London)	Fixed Deposit Account	GBP 435,657,47 CR
First Bank PLc (London)	Levy Account	DM 360,500,17 CR
FSB Int. Bank	Levy Account Non-Checking	\$1,396,688,28 CR
UBA Plc (New Yok)	Private Account	\$2,367,123,03 CR
FSB Int. Bank	Income Account	\$7,342,818,60 CR
UBA Plc (New York)	Levy Account	\$14,888,714.54CR

Source: Weekend News Flash “ US., “Switzerland Disclose Account of Looters” July 6, 1999

Table 3 shows a short list of accounts into which former military regimes have diverted public funds. In light of what appears to be a commitment by the present administration to eradicate corruption under the Anti-Corruption Act, this Act will become meaningless if past military regimes are not probed and if political leaders under the new dispensation are not held accountable for their actions as it relates to corrupt practices.

Conclusion

The fundamental challenge and question for political leaders under the current dispensation is how to attain sustainable development given the proliferation of ethno - religious conflict and the dismaying economic condition in Nigeria. A review of models for resolving ethnic and religion conflict seem to suggest that these models are not realistic in the Nigerian situation. Accordingly, Lemarchand identified four models: (a) Power sharing, which suggests a grand coalition of cabinets. This has been unrealistic thus far in Nigeria since most minority groups remain marginalized; (b) Hegemonic control, has not been realistic in Nigeria, since no single group has been able to establish its hegemony. (c) Federalism, where the boundaries of the federal units are roughly conterminous with those of ethnic communities, concomitantly these ethnic communities enjoy a degree of autonomy. The Federal arrangement has not been effective in Nigeria given the demise of the three unit federal system in Nigeria whereby the Northern region held a dominant position vis a vis the other two regions, (d) Arbitration, which could involve an external or internal arbitrator. But given the complexities of ethno-religious conflict in Africa and

Nigeria in particular the viability of this model is questionable because it does not guarantee success. (Lemarchand, 1995). Given the complexity of ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria, it appears that the solution will only emerge through the commitment of competing groups in Nigeria to forge a pact to establish an institution that will not exclude any group (Aborisade and Mundtz, 1999).

In the area of economic development, sustainable development can become attainable in Nigeria with a commitment by the present and future leaders to diversify the economy, whereby existing economic sectors are complementary and intertwined. Furthermore, the commitment of the leadership to resolving the debt crisis through sound economic planning is imperative for the survival of average Nigerians who continue to endure the harsh economic conditions that accompany indebtedness. In the same light, the hope for sustainable development will also require a public commitment to eradicate blatant plundering of public and private resources.

Thus, it is the position of this article that the hope for sustainable development in Nigeria will remain elusive if adequate measure is not taken to address the growing ethno-religious conflicts and the current economic crisis.

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