

Sixty-Five Years of Nigeria's Nationhood and the Challenges of Development

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to examine the reasons responsible for the lack of development in Nigeria. The paper identified some salient impediments to development in Nigeria which includes; poor governance, corruption, insecurity, unemployment and high fertility rate. The paper further deliberated the centrality of politics as an obstacle to development in Nigeria. The paper brought out how a focused political leadership can bring about development. The ability of the political leadership in China to develop her country is brought to bear. Chinese leaders are known to have over time come up with conscious programs and policies that amounted to the development of the country. The paper therefore recommends the need to entrench good leadership in Nigeria. That it is only such leadership that can utilize the abundant human and material resources the country is endowed with to develop.

Key words: Nationhood, Development, Politics, Leadership, and Challenges

Introduction

The African continent is faced with enormous developmental challenges (Adewole, 2021). Many African states have not exhibited the needed capacity to perform their ultimate functions. Africa though the richest continent in the world in terms of natural resources, yet it is the poorest continent in terms of socio-economic development (Oyeleye, 2022). The story of Africa is that of continent with a paradox of being so rich, yet very poor, so endowed with human and material potentials, yet very underdeveloped economically. Underdevelopment neither means absence of development nor absence of human resources. This is because all nations of the world have developed in one way or the other. But while some nations have achieved significant degree of development that adds value to life of their citizens and as a result enviable, Africa has not (Okechukwu, 2024). In agreement with the foregoing, Akuul and Ashaver (2012) affirmed that, there is no doubting the fact that Africa is blessed with abundant natural resources, and quality manpower. If properly harnessed the level of development would have been unprecedented by now. However, very little has been achieved since the departure of the colonial masters.

As a result, the continent is faced with lack of infrastructure and almost total absence of social amenities. It is factual that, development does not occur accidentally. It remains a product of a conscious process. As a result some amount of sincerely is required by African leaders in bringing about programmes that will stimulate development. It is the allocation of the available scarce resources in the society that either facilitates or retards development. That bring to the fore, the role of leadership which is provided by politics. Obviously the realization of good governance is always a product of deep visioning and the putting in place a credible action place that can deliver. The history of national development tells us that great nations the world over owe their fortunes basically to their visionary leaders who typically displayed unusual amount of commitment to the ideas of their nations. They made self-sacrifices for the progress of their countries and trade personal pressure for pains if their citizens. This is the classic story said of

Churchill's Great Britain, Gandhi's India, Napoleon's France, Mandela's South Africa, Lenin's Russia and Roosevelt's America and a host of others.

This paper therefore attempts an interrogation of the role politics has played as an obstacle to development in Nigeria. The paper is divided into five folds viz; methodology, obstacles to development in Nigeria, The relevance of politics in China's Transformation, lessons for Nigeria and conclusion/recommendations.

Methodology

The paper made use of existing textbooks journal and various website data that are useful to the topic under review. That made the methodology adopted to be qualitative in nature. That allowed for a proper analysis of politics as an obstacle to development of the African continent with particular reference to Nigeria.

Obstacles to Development in Nigeria

In order to make a proper interrogation of the connection between politics and development in African. It is necessary to first establish those issues considered detrimental to her development. Though there are many obstacles to development in Africa, this paper have identified the following as most critical. They include; Poor governance, Corruption, Unemployment, Insecurity and high fertility rate.

Poor Governance: Very central to the obstacles of development in Africa is poor governance. Many leaders in Africa find themselves in places of authority with no clear vision and the much needed preparedness to rule. That is one obstacle that continues to generate an enabling environment for the rest of other factors to take centre stage. Governance generally has to do with the way and manner a country is administered. That is the exercise of authority in the management of available scarce resources toward improving economic outcome and the quality of life for a people or not is what makes it poor or good governance. Nigeria unfortunately is identified with the former. Lepapa (2017) is of the opinion that African countries have undergone two forms of governance liberation, yet they remain stuck in the middle of the third one. First it was the struggle for independence from the colonial rule then liberation from dictatorships that emerged from independence. Presently many Africa countries are struggling to get proper democratic governance. Lepapa (2017) further contends that in most Africa countries, incumbent long serving political leaders have found ways to manipulate

the electoral process. Aside from increasing tenure of office they evolved ways to manipulate opposition parties and leaders along with civil societies so as to gain undue advantage. Nyamuda (2018), posits that human right is an inalienable component in the development and growth of most countries and most importantly those at the integration stage into the global village. Nyamuda expressed sadness that most African countries including Nigeria for the past years have been lacking behind in the promotion and respect of human rights, stalling development and perpetuating poverty and suffering of the ordinary citizens. The challenge of most African government regardless of system used is the creation and implementation of policies which reflect immediate and future need of the people. The above scenario remains a good expression of situation on ground in Nigeria. Adzaigba (2023) agreed that leaders on the continent lack the capacity to initiate sound socio-economic and political programmers that can rejig the continent.

The World Bank quoted in Bojang (2017) avers that; underlying the litany of Africa's development problems is a crisis of good governance. By governance it is meant the exercise of political power to manage a nation's affairs. Appropriate handling of power has been lacking, state officials in many countries have served their own interest without fear of being called to account. In self-defense, individuals have built up personal networks of influence rather than hold the all-powerful state for its systemic failure. In this way politics becomes personalized and patronage becomes essential to maintain power. The leadership assumed broad discretionary authority and lose its legitimacy, information in controlled, and voluntary associations are co-opted or disbanded. The environment cannot readily support a dynamic economy.

The above submission by the World Bank in a true reflection of what the continent has found herself. Most leaders apart not being unprepared for leadership, does not care about the development of their various state (Agan, 2023). What matters to them is their personal and ethnic agenda that often spark discontent leading to wars. The implication of that situation is the escalation of poverty on the African continent. Casanovas (2025) posits that, African countries dominates the list of twenty poorest countries in the world.

Corruption: Another salient issue that has strangled development in Nigeria is corruption. It is obvious that, to many political leaders in Nigeria corruption is a way of life. This unfortunate

situation has further worsened the agonies of the masses in Nigeria. Oyedeyin, (2023) is of the view that studies have proven that African leaders extract billions of dollars every year from their economically impoverished countries. In confirmation of this situation, Akuul and Ashaver (2012) agreed that, corruption is at the center of Nigeria's problem. Corruption in Nigeria frequently manifests as both petty bribery in daily life and grand-scale financial fraud within public institutions. Common examples include police officers extorting motorists, civil servants placing "ghost workers" on the payroll, and politicians inflating contract costs (Ijewereme, 2015). Fundamentally, there are many cases of money laundering, contract scams to non-declaration of assets are abound. Post-independence African leaders do not seem to be doing much due to the inherent corrupt tendencies in them". This unfortunate situation is alleged to have mortgaged development in Africa. It appears that corruption is perpetrated in all life facets from medicare, schools and jobs in the grand scale of it all like award of contract and use of public resources. When corruption affects key sectors such as health care, education and infrastructure the result is poor living condition a situation evident of Africa. Namo, Agwadu & Amokolomu (2024) postulated that, there is a great level of inequalities both in access to service from government offices as well as opportunities for investment. Misappropriation of public funds and biased awarding of tenders compromises on the quality of services available to members of the public. Institutions have been established to fight corruption. However, these institutions have been unacceptably ineffective, there are instances where their officials are found compromising and many other actions and inactions have shown they are incapable of fighting corruption in order to enhance good governance that will spur development. Corruption has reached its pinnacle; no institution is spared.

Igwe (2010) agreed that, corruption fundamentally discourages investment and growth. Igwe (2010) further acknowledges that corruption impacts negatively on the political economics, social and environmental well-being of the people. Politically it leads to loss of legitimacy. Accountable political leadership is difficult to develop in a corrupt climate, when political power is used to allocate the available scarce resources for private advantage. Economically, corruption leads to depletion of national wealth (Adeleke, Ababebe, Osayomi & Iyanda, 2021). This happens when available scarce resources are unreasonably channeled into highly uneconomic high profile projects to the detriment of fundamental projects such as school, hospital and roads, power and water. Socially corruption creates

room for apathy (Nwabuko, Njoku & Omiunu, 2024). The people lose interest in the system a situation that depletes civil society and enable the appropriation of government property to personal effects. On the environment front, corruption leads to non-compliance with environmental regulations (Okechukwu, 2024). Those responsible for doing that receive bribes and allow all sort of activity capable of endangering the environment to take place. The exploitation of natural resources, from timber to minerals and other animals such as elephants and hippopotamus among others, by both domestic and international agents has impacted negatively on our environment. As a result of corruption, developmental projects often receive huge budgetary provisions that siphoned into private pockets.

Unarguably, Otusanya(2019) established that, corruption has played a pivotal role in causing serious damage to the economics and social landscape in developing countries. This in turn, has undermined social welfare and also investment in both public and private services, thereby eroding the quality of life resulting to a decline in average life expectancy. Therefore, corruption stands tall among obstacles to development in Africa. Most African leaders pay little or no attention to issues that their countries are faced with due largely to the inherent corrupt tendencies in them.

Insecurity: Security is a concept that is prior to the state, and the states exist in order to provide that concept. Security is the prime responsibility of the state (Omoyibo & Akpomera, 2013). Unfortunately, African states on constitutional responsibility has failed to provide a secured and safe environment for lives, properties and the conduct of business and economic activities. The disturbing level of insecurity in Africa has fueled the crime rate and terrorist attacks across the continent, creating unpalatable consequences for the continent's economy and it growth. To Lapapa (2017) insecurity is rampant across Africa hindering progress at national and regional levels, from the urban crime to terrorist groups like Al-Shaabab in Samolia and Boko-Haram in Nigeria to civil wars in Sudan, South Sudan and political instability in Libya, Condo, D.R and many others.

The struggle for political power by most African heads of government has resulted into many security threats on the continent a good example is that of Uganda. In fact, most African heads of governments either directly or indirectly caused conflicts because of envisaged political gains. It is therefore not a surprise that, many choose to spark crisis for survival. The inability of African states

to provide a secure and safe environment for lives, properties and the conduct of business and economic activities has also led to resentment and disaffection among ethnic groups (Nwabuko, Njoku & Omiunu, 2024). This has resulted in ethnic violence, communal clashes and religious violence which have destroyed lives and properties, disrupted business and economic activities and retarded economic growth and development (Ewetan, 2014). Unarguably, the prevailing state of insecurity across the Africa continent has posed an obstacle to the much needed development. According to Utume, 2012 the state has failed to mobilize/deploy national resources to meet the human needs of the people. To him reduction in poverty or any form of deprivation is achievement of social security. Meeting the people's needs is satisfying. A people so satisfied cherish the values of their society, which they can voluntarily choose to protect. Such a society reduces incidents of violence. Such a society is available for mobilization towards achieving national goals. This paper is of the view that, this is lacking in almost all states of Africa. Those in authority are so self-centered in their conduct and careless about the people. The implication of which is the dwindling security situation on the continent which is un-conducive for domestic business to thrive and foreign investors to do businesses.

Unemployment: Agan (2023) avers that, there is a huge volume of unemployed able bodied men and women on the African continent. Though all over the world there are issues of unemployment the case of Nigeria is much more precarious. Adzaigba (2023) hypothesizes that unemployment acts as a primary obstacle to development by trapping economies in vicious cycles of lost productivity, reduced consumer spending, and human capital degradation. When large portions of the workforce particularly the youth are idle, it triggers widespread poverty, social instability, and severe economic stagnation. Agan (2023) also agreed that, unemployment causes profound challenges, including individual financial instability, reduced consumer spending leading to economic stagnation, and increased government burdens on social welfare. It fuels social ills like high crime rates, poverty, and political unrest, while creating lasting psychological distress, such as anxiety and reduced self-worth in individuals. This explains why the present standard of living in Nigeria, where unemployed youths have become ready tools in the hands of politicians to unleash mayhem on the people whenever they want. In agreement, Lepapa (2017), availed that as the labour force increases, there is a huge disconnect between the older generation in majority of the policy and decision making organs

and the ever expanding youth population. As a result from education to employment opportunities and entrepreneurship plans and assistance, the government finds it difficult on how best to deal with the situation.

Unfortunately, unemployment contributes to lower family income with many dependents' resulting to crime due to joblessness and a host of other social issues. That give rise to problems that have financial and psychological bearing which may lead to problems like ill-health, premature deaths, and even suicide. This situation make many of the unemployed to engage in negative activities that constitute an obstacle to development. It is the observation of Akande (2014, p.6) that public policies directed at addressing youth unemployment have faced different challenges including finance, the absence of good administration and implementation, consistent policies, un-impressive responses from would-be trainees and unqualified resource personnel handing the training programmes. Almost all of which, can be attributed to the failure of those at the helm of affairs to treat the issue of unemployment properly.

High Fertility Rate: Quite a number of factors are considered responsible for the high fertility rate in Africa. These factors range from desire for large families, prevalent child mortality, lack of knowledge on the reasons for family planning and lack of access to quality family planning services (Bakilana and Hasan 2016). Be that as it may, the swelling population in Africa has constituted a barrier to development. The little available social amenities are over stretched and many have remained out of school therefore illiterates with little or no capacity to contribute to any development effort. Rather as reflected under insecurity they are readily available for negative application by the few who have found themselves in places of authority.

In consonance with the above Lepapa (2017) established that the African continent has the highest fertility rate and population growth in the world. This statistics alone possess a huge challenge now and years to come. While the average world fertility rate is 2.5 children per woman, in Africa it is 4.7 children per woman. The current population of the African continent is 1.2 billion people up from just under half a million people in 1980. The UN project that by 2050 the annual growth increases of the continent may double. By that estimation though population growth rates in the rest of the world decreases Africa will contribute 54% of the overall world population growth by 2050. All of which

affirm the dangers posed by this growth in population without a corresponding improvement in the already overstretched meager social amenities. There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that principally why there is lack of the needed development on the African continent is the great obstacle imposed by politics. In general political factors such as regime type and policy management often influence economic development by supporting or disrupting the process of development. In order to properly situate the role of politics on the development process requires our understanding of politics itself. Interestingly, Anifoswose (1999) made a search of political science textbooks and found out that there are numerous definition of politics stating thus; Politics is the process of making and execution of government decisions and policies, the authoritative allocation of values or who gets what when and how; the quest for power; order and justice, the art of influencing manipulating and controlling others; a process of resolution of conflict in society and a struggle among actors pursuing conflicting desires on public issues. Politics is the activity (negotiation, argument, discussion, application of force, persuasion etc) by which an issue is agitated or settled.

Central to this array of definitions by scholars of political science assembled by Anifowose (1999) is that politics to a large extent determine human affairs. That draws our attention to Thomas Hobbes social contract theory. This theory affirms that individuals do submit their right to a legal authority to superintend over them. The legal authority here refers to government and it is politics that institutes these legal authorities. Having established that politics involves the formation of government that take decisions and formulate policies on behalf of the people, and as well allocate the available scarce resources, the centrality of politics in the conduct of governmental affairs cannot be said to be over accentuated. The conduct of governmental affairs is what is referred to as governance which is carried out by politicians whom through political process assumes positions of authority / leadership. This paper is of the opinion that the relationship between politics and governance has been established as the former produces actors that perform the latter. At this point we can draw our attention to the definition of good and bad governance provided by the world Bank (1989) which this paper considers of special relevance for the developing world particularly Africa; Good governance is epitomized by predictable, open and enlightened policy – making, a bureaucracy imbued with professional ethos acting in furtherance of the public good, and the rule of law, transparent processes and a strong civil society participating in public affairs. Poor governance (on the other hand) is characterized by

arbitrary policy making unaccountable bureaucracies, unenforced or unjust legal systems, the abuse of executive power, a civil society unengaged in public life, and wide spread corruption.

This focus on governance by the World Bank (1989) draws our attention to the first obstacle to development in Nigeria identified by this paper which is poor governance. Poor governance can be equated to poor / bad leadership. All other obstacles to development in Africa enumerated and not are all up shoots of poor governance. As earlier stated, hence those in charge of governance are products of politics. Politics can be considered a major obstacle to development in Africa. Substantiating Akpa (2011), maintains that, countries that failed to realize their developmental potentials in the past half century have invariably suffered growing deficit of good governance. This is the most single deadly obstacle to sustainable and all round development. Compromising an interesting view that shows African leaders had not taken the issue of development seriously but continue to use it as a diversionary tactics to confuse the populace Ake (1996), was unequivocal when he maintained that; The new leaders of independent Africa saw that to hold on to their power and to divert their people from demands for redistribution and for the structural transformation of the colonial economy, they had to find something to replace the nationalist ideology of self-government, something that would, they hoped, create a sense of common purpose. In the end they settled for the ideology of development.

That is to say in most leaders in Africa are not interested in development. They keep bringing up policies and programs that would further impoverish the people. Adeyemi (2017, 2) avers that; it has become obvious that it is politics that drive the economies of nations. Adewale (2021) assert that, the major difference between developed countries and developing countries is in their evolution. Developed countries have political and economic systems that are inclusive and offer opportunities to most people to create wealth. However, most developing economies have political and economic systems that are extractive. Those in the ruling class have a strong hold on political power, and use it to channel economic resources to benefit themselves and those close to them. The point to note here is that, good leadership is requisite to good governance and sustainable growth. In other words they complement each other.

According to the executive director of the WAILA (2015) leadership failure has been a major problem facing African development for decades. Africa has all the human potentials and material resources to achieve development, but because of corruption and political instability as well as war and crisis, the continent today is the most under development in the world. African political leaders have continued to indulge in corruption, embezzling the continents common wealth as well as siphoning it into their private foreign bank accounts in Europe, America and other parts of the world.

In fact while political corruption has continued to consume the enormous resources required for Africans development, war and crises have on the other hand obstructed domestic and foreign investments. The approach adopted by Chinese leaders to develop their country is worthy of emulation. Political actors in China at various instances took decisions geared toward the co-existence of the country and her economic progression. Much has been said about this by scholars. Nake and Jiang (2015), for example, points out that the genesis of China's remarkable upswing in relatively short span of time goes back more than five decades to 1948 when China emerged an independent state after World War II upon the defeat of Japan by the United States. China's leadership was bifurcated between Chairman Mao Zedong's communist party and Chiang Kai-Shek's Kuomintang regime raising concern of a pending civil war. To China's good fortune, the two leaders' views coalesced and a coalition government was formed. The absence of a civil war and the peaceful political transition of leadership largely explain the remarkable ascent of China's political economic fortunes.

It is worthy of note that, prior to the initiation of economic reforms and trade liberalization nearly 40 years ago, China maintained policies that kept the economy very poor, stagnant, centrally controlled, vastly inefficient, and relatively isolated from the global economy. Since opening up to foreign trade and investment and implementing free-market reforms in 1979, China has been among the world's fastest-growing economics. Collaborating, Kai (2017), for example asserts that; the continuity of national development strategies and policies, architected by a strong and effective leadership obviously played an indispensable important role. This shows that, though the task of development is not an easy one determination is what it takes to overcome. Chinese rise is not an exception it has been made possible due to the resilience of the leadership. The economic innovation in China started in the early eighties beginning with Deng Xiaoping through HuJintau implementing

innovative economic policies which lifted China's sluggish economy by introducing private ownership, market economy, and less government control contributing to robust economic performance. A succession of leadership in China including president Hu Jinping and follow-up by the current president Xi Jinping's flexible and innovative economic policy took advantage of globalization and export orientation, attracting foreign investment, and maintaining a sound monetary and fiscal policy. China became a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and hosted a very successful International Olympic Games.

All these clearly demonstrate that, the political leadership in China since 1948 to date has been visionary and as a result instrumental to the development of the country. That shows that, when those that have a thorough knowledge of what their country wants, are in positions of authority, politics remain key to development. They take decisions as to how their country relates with others in a manner that will be beneficial to their country. They also organised politics in a manner that, the people are made to know where they are coming from, where they are going and what is their individual and collective roles toward achieving such goals. The political authority in China as from 1979 when economic reforms began up to date has sustained the vigor with which it was initiated thereby making China rise from a poor developing country to a major economic power a feat that has remained outstanding .

Conclusion/Recommendation

This paper have argued that politics is the key obstacle to development in Africa and it is politics that can lead Africa out of it present state of underdevelopment. That is because, so long as the political context is not favourable, all efforts to create an enabling environment and build capacities will be wasted. Fundamentally, Nigeria cannot develop without a strong and committed political leadership. The experience of China and India have shown that with committed and corrupt-free political leadership third world countries, especially those on the African continent that were integrated into the world capitalist economic order at a subjugated position, can alter the global economic order and reposition themselves.

Secondly, dealings along religious lines should be discouraged. The Chinese experience where even though all other religions exist they are on a common ground through confucianism should be

encouraged. These include the core teachings of love, unity and selfishness. All should think Africa first. In addition African countries should emphasize Agriculture. The present situation where all attentions are on oil and other raw materials to the detriment of agriculture is not good for our economy. Government should encourage the setting up of agro based factories (particularly in the rural areas) and provide incentives to farmers to encourage commercial farming. Because why capital investment is crucial to growth, it becomes even more potent when accompanied by market oriented reforms that introduce profit incentives to rural enterprises and small private businesses. African political leaders should also encourage science and technological based education to help develop her skilled manpower.

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