



The Underdevelopment of Nigeria: Who is to Blame - Failure of Leadership or Her Political Economic System?

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the underdevelopment of Nigeria: who is to blame: Failure of leadership or its' political economy. The paper highlights the features of underdevelopment in Nigeria. These range from, high rate of unemployment, inequalitarian distribution of income and wealth, high level of insecurity, increase level of absolute poverty low level of social and political consciousness, to an increase in illiteracy rate, poor health services, housing condition and government services to mention but a few. It concludes that the underdevelopment of Nigeria is cause by the politico economic system she adopts. This is anchored on the following reasons; first, in Nigeria what determines a person status is the amount of wealth he is able to accumulate. Second, is that in Nigeria it is possible and indeed easy for people to cheat the entire society and get away with it. This is because we don't ask questions about peoples' wealth, but we revere them. To salvage the situation the paper recommends, a new politico-economic system characterize by the followings – A people oriented government, respect for the dignity of labour, respect for the rule of law, a well spelt-out and religiously pursued national objectives of self reliance, a social security system to mention but a few.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria 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.

At independence in 1960, the structure of the economy was positively skewed in favour of Agricultural sector as a source of foreign exchange earning, employment generation and contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). By 1970, event take a drastic turn, oil become the propelling

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wheel of the economy contributing about 90 percent of foreign exchange earnings and about 65 percent of budgetary revenues. The oil boom of 1973-74 and 1979-80, 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 nosedived.

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 1980-1990, the per capita income of Nigeria declined at an annual average rate of 3 percent (Todaro and Smith, 2003). The rate of decline of per capita income reduced to an annual average of 0.3 percent over the 1990-2000 decade (Todaro and Smith, 2003).

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 1962-84.

Plan period	Primary plan (₦ million)	Sector Actual (₦ million)	Manufacturing and craft plan (₦ million)	Actual (₦ million)
1 st (1962-68)	41.0	36.9	88	49.9
2 nd (1970-74)	79.5	69.3	154	41.2
3 rd (1975-79)	1012.6	1311.2	7587.6	3727.1
4 th (1980-84)	5400.0	3492.4	1177.0	3484.0

Source: Nigeria's National Development plans (Various periods)

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 earning and GDP, (Kayode, 2004).

The objective of this paper, is to x-ray the Nigerian situation as to discover the root cause of her underdevelopment, in order to prescribe the right dosage in it's treatment.

The paper is divided into five sections immediately after the introduction in section one, is section two which deals with conceptual issue. Section three highlights the features of underdevelopment in Nigeria, and section four examine who is to blame. Section five is the conclusion and recommendation.

Conceptual Issues

The term under-development is rather difficult to give a precise definition Nmom (2002). There is not a single definition that is so comprehensive as to encapsulate all the features of an underdevelopment.

In view of this Kuznets (1976) suggests three definitions of underdevelopment:

- (i) First, it may mean 'failure to utilize fully the productive potential warranted by the existing state of technical knowledge – a failure resulting from the resistance or social institutions'.
- (ii) Secondly, it may mean backwardness in economic performance, compared with the economically leading countries of the period.
- (iii) Thirdly, it may mean economic poverty, in the sense of failure to assure adequate subsistence and material comfort to most of a country's population.

Underdevelopment and development are like two sides of a coin (a head or a tail); if a country is not developed, it is underdeveloped, crude yes. In view of this underdevelopment is the opposite of development; therefore, for us to understand what underdevelopment is, there is need for us to define what development is.

Development is defined by Todaro (1981:70) thus:

Development, in its essence must represent the entire gamut of change by which an entire social system, tuned to the diverse needs and desires of individuals and social groups within that system moves away from a condition of life widely perceived as unsatisfactory and toward a situation or condition of life regarded as materially and spiritually "better".

In specific terms, development became defined in terms of three cores interrelated conditionalities or core values ala Todaro (1981).

The first core value is Life sustenance. Here, development requires sustainable improvement in the ability of a socio-economic system to provide the basic material needs of its people. These needs include food, shelter, health, education, and a clean environment.

The second core value is self-esteem i.e. the "Sense of worth and self respect, of not being used as a tool by others for their own end,"

The third core development value is that of freedom from servitude.

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Freedom here is not to be understood in the political or ideological sense (e.g. the free world), but in the more fundamental or emancipation from alienating material conditions of life; and freedom from the social servitudes of men and women to nature, ignorance, other men and women, misery, institutions and dogmatic beliefs (Todaro, 1981:71)

Akpakpan (1987) and Wilson (2002) defined development qualitatively as a process of improvements in the general welfare of the entire society, usually manifested in desirable changes in the various aspects of life of the society. Example of such changes are:

- (i) a reduction in the level of unemployment;
- (ii) a reduction in the extent of personal and regional inequalities;
- (iii) a reduction in the level of absolute poverty;
- (iv) a rise in real output of goods and services and improvements in techniques of production;
- (v) improvement in literacy, health services, housing conditions and government services;
- (vi) improvements in the level of social and political consciousness of the people;
- (vii) greater ability of draw on local resources (human and material) to meet local needs i.e. become self reliant; and,
- (viii) a reduction in the rate of pollution and/or environmental degradation.

These change work together to improve the living conditions of the entire society. The implication is that for a country to be described as developed today the above positive changes and improvements must be occurring. Where these changes and improvements are not occurring or are getting worse then the country without mincing words, is underdeveloped. The paper therefore defines underdevelopment as a deterioration in the general welfare of the entire society, usually manifested in undesirable changes in the various aspects of the life of the society such as;

- i) high rate of unemployment;
- ii) inegalitarian distribution of income and wealth;
- iii) high level of insecurity;
- iv) low per capital income;
- v) an increase in the level of absolute poverty or an increase in the level of poverty incidence;
- vi) a decline in real output of goods and services and dependence on foreign technology for production;
- vii) an increase in illiteracy, poor health services, housing conditions and government services;
- viii) low level of social and political consciousness of the people

- ix) dependence on foreign resources (human and material) to meet local needs;
- x) increasing rate of pollution and environmental degradation;
- xi) heavy external debt burden.

Features of Underdevelopment in Nigeria

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 1998) and about \$300 in 2003 (Todaro and Smith, 2003). 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), pointed out the key features of the Nigerian economy. These features manifest the underdeveloped level of the Nigerian economy. They are as follows;

- (i) Dependence on foreign technology;
- (ii) Monocultural dependence on crude oil;
- (iii) Dependence on the foreign sector for raw materials and spares;
- (iv) Inadequate supply of skilled labour;
- (v) Low productivity and low per capita income;
- (vi) Underdeveloped agriculture;
- (vii) High rate of unemployment;
- (viii) Inegalitarian distribution of income and wealth;
- (ix) Heavy external debt burden;
- (x) Poor attitude to work, particularly in the public sector and
- (xi) Systemic corruption.

Let us take each in turns: Dependence on foreign technology is a normal feature of an underdeveloped society or economy. Okowa (1994) posits 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. Design and fabrication capacity for simple industrial plants is non-existent. Hence, the country's industrial sector has to import virtually all industry machinery and spares.

Ukpanah (2010) expresses this sorry state of the economy thus;

I can produce anything, but import everything.
So 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;
my vegetable oil is made in Malaysia ... My
taste is far-flung and foreign p.8.

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In addition to the above, my industrial machinery and spares are made in United States of America and Britain, my cars are made in Japan

Monocultural dependence on crude oil: Crude oil is the mainstay of our economy with its attendant resource curse. Revenue from it has put us on war part, as a result of its mismanagement.

Dependence on the foreign sector for machinery and spares. Dependence on the foreign sector in terms of machinery is 100 percent. To some extent the picture is the same in the case of spares since the country is yet to register presence in the capital goods industry. With regards to raw materials the degree of dependence is more than 60 percent.

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 is about \$300 (Todaro and Smith 2003). The productivity of the country is low therefore, dependence on foreign supply (import).

Underdeveloped Agriculture: The agricultural sector is underdeveloped and dominated by an unskilled largely illiterate labour. The use of crude implement dominated the sector. Ukpanah (2010) aptly captures the scenario thus;

I have enormous tracts of land and vast volumes of water, but cannot feed myself. So I spend \$ 1 billion to import rice and another \$ 2 billion on milk. I produce rice but don't eat it. I have millions of cows but no milk. I am 50 (Nigeria) please celebrate me, p.8.

Yes we produced rice but don't eat it because of the poor winnowing process adopted. We have millions of cows but import milk because the technology of producing it is not within reached because of neglect. What a pathetic story of a giant (Nigeria) but with clay legs. That at 50 years of independence the country cannot feed her teeming population.

The rate of unemployment and underemployment is high. National Bureau of Statistic (2008) 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. Perhaps, the greater problem is that of underemployment. It is a

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regular feature to see workers in the various government ministries and parastatals 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 situation is even worse in the rural areas where the youth, to educated to go to the farms and work, yet not educated enough or not well connected enough to acquire urban paid employment, constitute an ever enlarging army of trouble makers, petty criminals and politicians' thugs (Okowa, 1994).

Ukpanah (2010) expresses this sordid state of the nation as follows:

My youth have no past, present nor future. So my
sons in the North have become street urchins; And
his brothers in the South have become
kidnappers. ... I am grief stricken, p.8.

What a lamentable situation in the midst of plenty. The hopes of our youth have been dashed disgruntled as they are, they constitute themselves into social nuisance.

Inegalitarian distribution of income and wealth: Government Reserve Areas (GRAs) and Bundu Water front both in Port Harcourt, epitomize the gross inequalities of the Nigerian political economy. The evidence of this inequality exist in all parts of the country, in replicas of GRA and Bundu in all major settlements, as well as the wretched poverty of the rural countryside (Okowa, 1991). The wealth of the country is in the hands of a few minority, the privilege thieves.

Despite the huge external debt, there is nothing to show in terms of modern physical structures. According to Okowa (1994) the debt issue is the conclusion that behind the issue is indeed a far more fundamental issue of dishonestly, incompetence and systemic corruption on the part of the political leadership of the country.

Poor attitude to work, particularly in the public sector: Workers particularly in the public sector, do not take their job seriously. People come to work and close whenever they want to do so. They absent themselves from work without due permission. Tell magazine (1993) has this to say:

Nigerians are so dishonest, lazy and weak, we
have allowed dishonest to grow deep that most
people are not ready to work, everyone wants to
get rich p.19.

The evidence of this nonchalant attitude of the Nigerian public servants or civil servants is display in our ministries or parastatals.

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Next is systemic corruption: Okowa's (1989:23) definition of systemic corruption is apt and to the point, and we shall reproduce it below:

Systemic corruption defines a situation in which corruption has been institutionalized and raised to the level of a structural parameter. It has become part of the culture of society.

Although, it is difficult to provide statistical substantiation of the above phenomenon, the truth is, corruption is pervasive and has become normalized. The editorial of the city News (1993) described the situation as follows:

In the government circles, corruption has become a legalize phenomenon.

High rate of poverty: In Nigeria the incidence of poverty is rising at alarming rate. Indeed the National Bureau of Statistics (2008) estimated a poverty incidence of 78.30% (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.

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. The National Bureau of Statistics (2008) estimated the number of armed robbery cases reported to police to be 2,506 in 2007. Ukpanah (2010) described the level of insecurity in the country as follows:

I have no security in my country. But I send troops to keep peace in another man's land.

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.

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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.

Ukpanah (2010) laments on the low political consciousness of the people thus:

For democracy's sake I stood all day on Election Day. But before I could ink my thumb, results had been broadcast. When I dared to speak out, silence was enthroned by bullets. My leaders are my oppressors, and my policemen are my terrors. I am ruled by men in multi, but I am not a democracy. Please celebrate me, p.8 .

In addition to the above, votes are allotted to candidates, based on their ability to pay and to demonstrate blind loyalty. Electorate 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 (1994:72). 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 (p. 72).

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

Poor Health service, Housing and Government services on the issue of health services, Health facilities in Nigeria have generally decayed and preventive diseases have sent millions to untimely grave. Infant mortality is

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high and life expectancy has falling short of expectations. Table 2 will help to buttress the above assertion.

Table 2: Health profile of a sample of developing countries 2003.

Country	Infant Rate	Mortality	Life Expectancy (Years)		
			Total	Male	Female
Nigeria	75		52	52	52
Ghana	56		57	56	58
Tunisia	23		73	71	75
Egypt	41		68	66	70
Malaysia	11		73	70	75
Indonesia	46		69	68	70
Bangladesh	66		59	59	59
Less Development World Average	61		65	63	66
Development world Average	7		76	72	79

Source: Population Reference Bureau (PRB) (2A3) – World Population Data Sheet. (www.prb.org).

Table 2 shows that Nigeria is performing below average with respect to the rest of the developing countries. Infant mortality is the highest (75) and life expectancy the lowest 52. Life expectancy is below the minimum level 65 years for developing countries and infant mortality above the minimum level of (61). Ukpanah (2010) describe the health situation of Nigeria as follows:

Preventable diseases send me to hospitals without doctors, medicines or power,.... I have the highest maternal and infant mortality rates in the world. And future generations are dying before me. I am hopeless, hapless and helpless..... They said at a time that my hospitals were MERE CONSULTING CLINICS; today they and their accolites run to India, Germany, America, Korea, South Africa, Spain, etc to treat catarrh, because my hospitals are now GLORIFIED MORGUES... I have no verve, no vote, no voice p.8.

Oh what a hopeless situation for the future generations. Our doctors and nurses are always on strike, the few that cannot withstand leave for foreign countries to continue their medical practices.

The housing condition in the country is pathetic. A situation where 10 people live in a single room apartment, described in the Nigerian parlance as

“face me–I-face you” is disgusting. The situation is worse in the slums and shanties. National Bureau of Statistics (2008) estimated that 68.2 percent of Nigerians live in single rooms; 43.0% of Nigerians used covered pit latrine and 15.6% used uncovered pit latrine.

This portrays the level of backwardness of our nation. In terms of government services, not 10% of our rural areas registered the presence of government infrastructure. If it is skeletal in the urban area, what do we think will be the situation with the government rejected areas (rural areas).? Ukanah (2010) described the poor level of government services: thus:-

I have four refineries, but prefer to import fuel,
so I waste billions to import petrol I have
hundreds of dams, but no water. So I drink
“pure” water that rolls my innards I have no
power, but choose to flare gas. So my people
have learnt to see in the dark, and stare at the
glare of naked flares. I am shrouded by darkness.
For my golden Jubilee, I shall spend 16 billion
Naira to bash around the bonfires of the banal.
So what if the majority gaze at my possessed,
frenzied dance, Drenched in silent tears, as
probity is enslaved in democracy’s empty
Cellars p.8.

The Nigerian government is insensitive to the plight of Nigerians; if not how could one explain the moral justification behind the N16 billion spend on Independence celebration when millions Nigerian do not have shelter, good water to drink and good education.

Lastly is high rate of pollution and environmental degradation. Environmental pollution has degraded our environment. Oil exploration and exploitation with its attendant consequences have polluted our land and sea, thereby destroying crops, aquatic lives etc.

4. Who is to be Blame: Failure of Leadership or the Political Economy System?

A good number of people in our country hold the view that the problems (underdevelopment) facing us today is due to the “failure of our leadership. They argue that our development efforts have failed because, we have not had the right men and women in charge of the affairs of our nation. They buttress their view with the many specific instances of failures and the generally wasteful attitude that have characterized leadership in our country since independence.

Of a truth, we cannot point to an administration in our 50 years of existence 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

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leaders about whom there are stories of unprecedented, brazen and unimaginable corruption and other forms of abuse of office.

The position of this paper is that our leadership problem and the many other social, economic and political problems (underdevelopment) that face us have their root in our type of politico-economic system we have chosen and the rules and convention it has necessitated. The position of the paper is supported by Udenwa (2002). 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 ... only a reversion to moral rectitude and self-discipline would spare the nation from total collapse p.2..

There are two basic reasons for this. First is that in our system what determines a person's status in the society is the amount of wealth he is able to accumulate. His moral uprightness, his intellectual capacity and his dedication to duty call count for little.

The second reason is that in our system it is possible and indeed easy for people to cheat the entire society and get away with it. This is because we do not ask questions about people's wealth. Rather than asking question we revere him/her even were it is not clear how he/she came by it. In the given circumstance, other people generally feel pressurized to acquire wealth since it is what matters, and they often respond, sometimes at all cost because they want to be revere.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The paper concludes that the underdevelopment of Nigeria emanates from the politico-economic system we have chosen. Hence the failure of leadership is not to be blame but rather the politico-economic system is to be blame, crude yes.

To salvage the situation, the paper recommends a new politico-economic system (mixed economy). This new system is presented here as a bundle of characteristics. These characteristics are as follows:

- i. A people oriented government
- ii. A well-spelt out and religiously pursued national objectives of self reliance
- iii. An entrenched dignity of labour
- iv. Respect for the rule of law
- v. A production structure characterized by:
 - a. reliance on local inputs,

- b. an extensive network of industrial democracy
- c. a predominately public ownership
- vi. A social security scheme
- vii. A device for regulating and monitoring private accumulation and consumption.

For the sake of cynics we are not recommending a non-existing system, it is mixed system (mixed economy) embedded with the above state characteristics.

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