
THE CRITICAL ROLE OF CITIZENS IN NIGERIA'S FAILED DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This paper revisited the developmental problems in Nigeria by examining the role of citizens in the country's failed development. Relying on secondary data, the paper embarked on extensive and in-depth review of relevant literatures on Nigeria's developmental problems. It adopted the modernization theory and observed that the major cause of Nigeria's underdevelopment is poor leadership and governance which has resulted in weak economy, poor institutions, dilapidated infrastructural facilities and low quality education. However, unlike previous researches on Nigeria's underdevelopment, the paper argues that bad leadership is not the only obstacle to Nigeria's development that Nigeria's citizens have, in one way or the other, also contributed to the country's developmental failures. It concludes that without the citizens being patriotic to the country; without the citizens holding the leaders accountable for their stewardship and, without the citizens showing genuine interest in the country's development, Nigeria may remain underdeveloped. Accordingly, it identified, among other things, the need for a change in citizens' orientation and the need for citizens to participate in policymaking, both at the input and output stages.

Keywords: *Citizenship, Leadership, Development, Failed Development, Third World Countries.*

Introduction

Although Nigeria is naturally endowed, both in human and natural resources, the country has failed in achieving meaningful development as it is unable to provide qualitative living standard for its citizens, following its several years of independence. Like many Third World Countries, Nigeria faces lots of challenges in its development efforts. The country has been hit by the problems of inequality, poverty and development, and these have deprived lots of Nigerians the benefits of citizenship (Okon and Thompson, 2020).

To the average Nigerian, Nigeria has not fundamentally changed. The economy has doubled in size, mobile phones are common, yet Nigeria remains poor, poorly governed and underdeveloped (Rufai, 2019). As observed by Eneh (2011), Nigeria had been overtaken in development by the middle 1990s by some other countries that were worse than the country in the 1960s. These countries include Malaysia, Indonesia and Venezuela. This is an indication that Nigeria's development attempts have not yielded significant impacts. Consequently, Nigeria still falls among the undeveloped countries, as indicated by a weak industrial sector, low per capita income, high levels of illiteracy, poverty, inequality and low life expectancy in the country, among other things.

The differing opinions on the issues of development and underdevelopment in Nigeria are not new. Some scholars have blamed Nigeria's developmental challenges on the capitalist world economic system. Others, however, choose to look inward in their quest to explain Nigeria's underdevelopment situation. In this regard, special attention has been placed on leadership. For instance, Achebe (1983), observed that the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. Also, Rufai (2019) opined that the easiest lens to view Nigeria's stagnation is through its leadership. He further stated that one constant since Nigeria's Independence Day has been the absence of good leaders. Okon and Thompson (2020) averred

that Nigeria's developmental problems are internally generated and perpetuated by the country's political elites who are seen to be highly selfish, corrupt and inefficient.

While Nigerian leaders have been blamed for the country's misfortunes, the role of citizens in Nigeria's failed development has rarely been considered. This paper enters into the debate to expose the fact that Nigerian citizens are also to be blamed for Nigeria's failed development, and is not a counter to previous studies which indicted Nigerian leaders for the country's underdevelopment. To guide the study, therefore, the following questions were raised:

- a) Is bad leadership the only obstacle to Nigeria's development?
- b) Are the citizens blameless for Nigeria's failed development?

Objective/Organization of the Study

This paper attempts to revisit the developmental problems in Nigeria as it is intended to examine the role of citizens in the country's failed development. In order to achieve this objective, the paper has been segmented into four main sections. The first section embodies the background to the study and objectives of the study. The second section focuses on conceptual clarifications and theoretical framework, while the third section looks at the methodology. The last section examines the critical role of citizens in Nigeria's failed development, proffers some solutions to the problem and concludes the paper.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Concept of Citizen and Citizenship in Nigeria

As conceptualized by Tilly (1996), citizenship is a continuing series of transactions between persons and agents of a particular state in which each has enforceable rights and obligations uniquely by virtue of: the person's membership in an exclusive category, the native born plus the naturalized; and the agent's relation to the state rather than any other natural authority the agent may enjoy. According to Baubock (2002), citizenship is a status of full and equal membership in a self-governing political community, which entails rights and obligations and supported by certain virtues; meaning that citizenship signifies nationality – a formal affiliation to a state.

From the definitions above, a citizen is, therefore, an individual who has formerly acquired or is accorded the status of full and equal membership of a state or political community. Citizenship connotes an agreement between the state and citizens for a reciprocal relationship. While the state offers privileges and rights to citizens; citizens owe the state certain obligations and commitments. It is important to note that the implementation of the pact between the state and citizens does not presuppose class, but civic equality: equality of access and opportunities in state institutions and structures, and fairness and justice in the interactions between the state and individuals, amongst individuals and in a political community (Adejumobi, 2001).

In Nigeria, the constitution confers citizenship on every Nigerian, on equal basis. Accordingly, Nigeria's citizenship can be acquired by birth, registration and naturalization. Chapter 3 (Section 25) of the 1999 Constitution states that the following persons are citizens of Nigeria by birth, namely:

- a) Any person born in Nigeria before the date of independence, either of whose parents or any of whose grandparents belong or belonged to a community indigenous to Nigeria;
- b) Every person born in Nigeria after the date of independence either of whose parents or any of whose grandparents is a citizen of Nigeria;
- c) Every person born outside Nigeria either of whose parents is a citizen of Nigeria.

The constitution in section 26 (1-2) also states that a person may be registered as a citizen of Nigeria, if the president is satisfied that:

- a) He is a person of good character;
- b) He has shown clear intention of his desire to be domiciled in Nigeria; and
- c) He has taken the Oath of Allegiance prescribed in the Seventh Schedule to the constitution.

The provisions of this section also apply to:

- a) Any woman who is or has been married to a citizen of Nigeria; or
- b) Every person of full age and capacity born outside Nigeria any of whose grandparents is a citizen of Nigeria.

Furthermore, any person who is qualified in accordance with the provisions of section 27 of the constitution may apply to the president for citizenship by naturalization. The provisions hold that an applicant must prove that:

- a) He is a person of full age and capacity;
- b) He is a person of good character;
- c) He has shown a clear intention of his desire to be domiciled in Nigeria;
- d) He is, in the opinion of Governor of the State where he is or he proposes to be resident, acceptable to the local community in which he is to live permanently, and has been assimilated into the way of life of Nigerians in that part of the Federation;
- e) He is a person who has made or is capable of making useful contribution to the advancement; progress and well-being of Nigeria;
- f) He has taken the Oath of Allegiance prescribed in the Seventh Schedule to the constitution; and
- g) He has, immediately preceding the date of his application, either –
 - i) Resided in Nigeria for a continuous period of fifteen years; or
 - ii) Resided in Nigeria continuously for a period of twelve months, and during the period of twenty years immediately preceding that period of twelve months has resided in Nigeria for periods amounting in the aggregate to not less than fifteen years.

The above definition of citizenship in chapter three, together with the provision of fundamental rights in chapter four of the 1999 Constitution; which includes the right to life, dignity of the human person, personal liberty, fair hearing, freedom of movement, from discrimination, etc., is initiated with the aim of promoting the national political objectives of building a united and free society for all Nigerians, and to, as much as possible, promote reciprocal obligations between state and citizens (CFCR, 2002). However, the implementation and application of citizenship has become problematic in Nigeria. It could be likened to a mere nominal phenomenon, as Nigerians are largely denied citizenship rights; and such experience has made people to make sub-national identities the basis of support and real identification (Afolabi, 2016).

Conceptualizing Development and Nigeria's Failed Development

The concept of development, like many other concepts in social sciences, has no universally acceptable definition. Definitions of development often point to an improvement in the quality of human life. According to Naomi (1995), development is usually taken to involve not only economic growth but also some notion of equitable distribution, provision of health care, education, housing and other essential services, all with a view to improving the individual and collective quality of life. Gboyega (2003) sees development as an idea that embodies all attempts to improve the conditions of human existence in all ramifications. It entails transformation or advancement to a better and desired state (Chukwuemeka, Ugwuanyi and Amobi, 2013).

If development is considered in terms of improvement in the quality of human life, it therefore implies that a country can be regarded as being developed only when it is able to provide qualitative living standard for its citizens. Regrettably, Nigeria has not been able to provide such living standard for its citizens. There have been numerous policies, plans and programmes aimed at achieving development in Nigeria, but these have not brought the required change in the country. The country still remains grossly underdeveloped and largely characterized by poverty, inequality and lack of basic infrastructure. Thus, Nigeria has failed in its development efforts, as observed by Okon and Thompson (2020).

Theoretical Framework

There have been various attempts by scholars to explain why some countries are developed while others are underdeveloped. These scholars, in their attempt, often queue behind two popular paradigms of development/underdevelopment. One of such paradigm is the modernization school. According to Okereke and Ekpe (2002), the central thesis of the Modernization School is that the underdevelopment of Third World countries is internally generated and perpetuated due to the traditional or primitive character of these societies. Consequently, modernization theorists advocate for the adoption of western economic paradigms as key to the development of the Third World whose underdevelopment results from internal contradictions within their territories. As explained by Igwe (2010), such internal contradictions are evident from the way and manner resources are allocated in these societies, as well as the parochial beliefs, attitudes and values of the people which together with the character of the policies of governance are incongruent to development.

Within the Modernization School, there are several theories that seek to explain development and underdevelopment among countries of the world. One of such theories is the Socio-Cultural Theory which is based on the premise that what creates the necessary conditions for economic development in any society are the changes in social, cultural and institutional orders of society. One of the socio-cultural theorists, Manning Nash cited in Okereke and Ekpe (2002), explained that since economic development is a process of social change, it must be seen to involve three related kinds of social action, namely:

- a. The choice to institute changes
- b. The bringing together of the means and facilities to implement the choice, and
- c. The organization of social and cultural life so that growth becomes a built-in feature of the social system.

Nash stated further that lack of capital for productive investment is among the many problems facing Third World countries. He added that his study of Burma and Cambodia has, however, shown that the social structures and cultural patterns which enhance savings and investments vary from one country to another.

In line with the views of modernization theorists, Dike (2015) argued that Nigeria lacks the critical institutions and infrastructure capable of transforming the society into the 21st century system. For Dike (2015), the Nigerian system is colored by unbridled corruption, non-functional health care and education systems, and institutions and infrastructure that are antithetical to capacity development; and these forces have resulted in a weak economy, rising youth unemployment, and poverty as well as insecurity in the society. In their assessment, Okon and Thompson (2020) agreed, on one hand, with modernization theorists that the underdevelopment of Third World countries is mostly internally generated and perpetuated. According to them, there is evidence to prove that most of Nigeria's problems are internally generated and perpetuated by Nigerian political elites - who seem to be comfortable with the country's underdevelopment situation; notwithstanding the fact that the many years of colonialism and neocolonialism have, in one way or the other, also affected the pursuit of development in Nigeria. In another breath, Okon and Thompson (2020) frown at the attempt by modernization theorists to demote the

cultures of Third World countries. Citing Smock and Smock (1975), they submitted that empirical evidence suggests that it is not all aspects of Third World cultures that are anti-development.

From the empirical study of former Eastern Region of Nigeria carried out by Smock and Smock (1972), it was revealed that, contrary to popular opinion, peasant farmers in Africa, particularly the Igbos of Nigeria, are not tradition-bound in all cases; they can, and in fact, they do respond to incentives. Smock and Smock (1972) argued that culture per se cannot stop a peasant or an investor from taking advantage of a prominent situation that can promote his welfare. They further observed that wealth and achievement are valued among the Igbos. Therefore, given the right incentive, that progressive culture of hard-work and achievement can be stimulated to achieve the goals of agrarian modernization and industrialization. In this regard, Idachaba (1975), is of the opinion that if developing countries are interested in planned change in their peasant economies, they need to identify the positive elements which promote change within their societies, while at the same time identifying those elements that can possibly impede progress.

Methodology

This paper relied on secondary sources of data. Data were gathered by the researcher through an extensive and in-depth review of relevant literatures on Nigeria's developmental problems. The sources of these literatures were thoroughly evaluated and analyzed.

Critical Role of Citizens in Nigeria's Failed Development

Overview of Failed Development in Nigeria

Nigeria has failed in its development efforts, in spite of her huge resources. As Dike (2015) has aptly noted, Nigeria's system is colored by unbridled corruption, non-functional health care and education systems, and institutions and infrastructure that are antithetical to capacity development. According to him, these forces have resulted in weak economy, rising youth unemployment, and poverty as well as insecurity in the society. The Nigerian economy has over the decades been characterized by galloping inflation, unequal foreign exchange rate exasperated by devalued currency and persistent dependence on importation (Eme, 2013), and despite the country's increase in oil wealth, majority of its citizens wallow in poverty (Okon and Thompson, 2020).

As noted by the World Bank and Department for International Development (2005), nearly 70 million Nigerians live on less than \$1 per day, 54 percent of Nigerians live below the poverty line (UNDP, 2006a) and over one-third live in extreme poverty (UNDP, 2006b). Nigeria's poverty rate is hovering around 43.3 percent of the estimated population of 170 million (Emejo, 2014). Dike (2015) stated that:

"..Many Nigerians appear to have entrepreneurial skills; they are very creative and innovative. But the unpredictable and un-conducive, extractive political institutions and unfriendly business environment have stunted their zeal. ...It takes a lot of passion and determination to keep your business running and to market your products or services under the poor business environment in Nigeria".

There is also stagnation in Nigeria's educational sector. Singapore in the early 1960s had educational statistics similar to that of many African countries, including Nigeria; but as at 2019, the nation's literacy rate stood at 97 percent while Nigeria, on the other hand, was only able to improve the literacy rate to 60 percent (Rufai, 2019). The standard of education in Nigeria has been falling; teaching and learning are based on theory with little or no practical application of what the students learned in the classroom (Dike, 2015). According to Afolayan (2014), this falling standard of education in Nigeria is due to lack of proper funding and planning. In Nigeria, students are taught under un-conducive learning environments and teachers are not adequately motivated. While Secondary School (High School) graduates in educational

institutions in Nigeria churned out yearly are ill-prepared to face the rigours of university education, the age-long disagreement between the Federal Government and the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has disrupted the academic calendar of higher institutions. These pose serious problems for the development of creative, innovative and productive citizens (Dike, 2015).

Nigeria's health care system is plague with problems. Apart from lack of cordial relationship between health care providers and patients, poorly equipped health centres and hospitals are spread all over the country (The Health Workers Strike, 2014; Dantiye, 2015) and these have prevented the health care providers from providing quality services to Nigerians. As opined by Musawa (2014), lots of Nigerians die from preventable diseases such as high blood pressure, hypertension, prostate cancer, diabetes, breast cancer, maternal child birth issues and malnutrition due to the country's poor health care system. Consequently, the political elites and those who can afford the cost, often travel abroad to receive high-quality health care services at the expense of the masses (Dantiye, 2015). Thus, ordinary citizens often rely on the assistance of private individuals in order to resolve their basic health problems (The Health Workers Strike, 2014). As observed by Dike (2015), the medical doctors and other health care workers are often on strike to press home their demands over diverse issues, including non-payment of salaries and allowances, which often lead to unnecessary loss of lives. However, some people are of the opinion that the health care professionals in Nigeria care only about their remuneration than provision of health services to the needy (News Agency of Nigeria, 2014). Worse still, Nigerians have lost faith in the country's health care system as their perception of Nigeria's health care workers is that of uneducated, unskilled, unreliable and hardhearted care providers (Dantiye, 2015).

Given the above background, Nigeria has presented itself as a country that is characterized by failed development. Accordingly, Okon and Thompson (2020) identify Nigeria as a country which, in spite of her huge resources, has failed in its development efforts, while Rufai (2019) described the country as one that is stuck in perpetual underdevelopment because, according to him, the more things change the more they remain the same.

Citizens and Failed Development in Nigeria

There are differing opinions on why Nigeria, with its human and natural resources, has failed to achieve development and this debate has been on for several decades. Some have noted that Nigeria's developmental challenges are due to the capitalist world economic system. Yet others (Achebe, 1983; Dike, 2015; Rufai, 2019; Okon and Thompson, 2020) have observed that Nigeria has failed in its development efforts because of the absence of good leadership. According to Achebe (1983), the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. Dike (2015) sees Nigerian political leaders as those who seem to have a "fixed mind-set", which has prevented them from adopting and implementing effective socio-political and economic policies to transform the society. Rather than chart a path towards national development, Nigerian leaders engage in pervasive distribution struggles which often result in political instability and the erosion of good governance (Rufai, 2019). Leadership is of utmost importance in the development of any nation - and given the caliber of leaders that have ruled Nigeria since its independence; the country seems not to be ambitious enough for development (Okon and Thompson, 2020). Although there are enough resources to achieve the much needed development in Nigeria, the looting and mismanagement of the resources by political elites have perpetually prevented the country from achieving development.

As has been rightly noted by Dike (2015), the root cause of the present social, political and economic predicaments in Nigeria is not the making of leaders alone but collective selfishness. For instance, corruption has often been identified as being a bane of Nigeria's socio-economic development, but it is not

only the political elites that are responsible for the endemic corruption in the country. There is no doubt that most of Nigeria's leaders are notoriously corrupt; however, some citizens are as corrupt, if not more, as the leaders in Nigeria. In reality, the only reason why some of these Nigerians remain incorruptible is that they lack the opportunity to be corrupt. It is on record that some Nigerians give bribes in order to gain admission into higher institutions of learning or get employment in the civil service or other organizations, regardless of qualifications and merit. Amid corruption in Nigeria, vision, policy, plan, politics, principle, conscience, wealth, commerce, pleasure sports, knowledge, science, worship and morality are all corrupt (Eneh, 2011). This means that corruption is not only in political offices; it is also present in markets, schools, churches, stadia and in the minds of most Nigerians.

For Eneh (2011), patriotism is a stranger to an average Nigerian's lexicon, the federal character and Nigerian factor having replaced merits and rights. Today, anyone in Nigeria could be extremely rich and famous without any known source of income and nobody questions such wealth and fame (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012). Dike 2015 states that in Nigeria:

...Public servants do not show up for work on time and do not take their work seriously, and they expect to get paid every month without being productive. The mentality that hard work and honesty does not pay (or is not properly rewarded) has found its way into the school system as students do not take their studies seriously any longer. The "I don't care attitude" and the mentality to get rich through fraud often discourage the spirit of competition and hard work, and thus, inhibit national development.

In addition, it is the responsibility of the people to monitor the activities of the political leaders with a view to reviewing their mandate for good performance or using constitutional provisions to fire them for non-performance (Eneh, 2011). Every Nigerian is a stakeholder in the affairs of the nation (Dike, 2015). However, some Nigerians do not care about what happens in the country and have failed in ensuring that the leaders honour the social contract they entered into with the citizens. Instead of Nigerian leaders to redesign the system to make it function effectively, they engage in patching problems and the citizens allow them to continue in doing so (Dike, 2015). It is important to note that developed and progressive countries became what they are today because their people fought and overthrew the powerful political elites who dominated political power, and thus, create a society where political rights were properly shared and the government was responsive to the needs of the people (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012). But the citizens have been unable to do so in Nigeria. Thus, Nigerian leaders have been taking the citizens for a ride because the citizens seem to be enjoying the ride.

Majority of Nigerians are traumatized and dying of extreme poverty and hunger, while a privileged few have, by fair or foul means, cornered and monopolized Nigeria's economic, political, health and sociocultural commonwealth (Eneh, 2011). This situation is disheartening, but it does not justify why some citizens develop attitudes that are inimical to development. Rather than hold the leaders accountable for mismanagement and injustice in the country, some citizens have resorted to wrong reactions. One of such reactions has been the insecurity situation in the country which has driven away potential investors, especially from the northern part of the country. Also, issues of indiscriminate disposal of waste, open defecation, vandalism of public facilities and disobedience to law and order by citizens remain detrimental to Nigeria's development. Another wrong reaction or responses to Nigeria's ugly situation by citizens is brain drain (Eneh, 2008). Evidently, Nigeria's date with destiny has been put on hold because of the citizen's attitude towards the political system and the leadership behavior towards what they should be doing for the citizens, for overall development of the country (Anazodo, Uchenna and Uche, n.d).

Therefore, some citizens are to blame for Nigeria's failed development, together with the leaders.

The Way Forward

- a. Primarily, the solution to Nigeria's failed development lies in good governance. Political elites must endeavor to fulfill their promises of bringing development to the country and must pay adequate attention to uplifting the impoverished and dehumanized Nigerian citizenry.
- b. There should be a change of the citizens' orientation. Nigerians must realize that they have a great role to play in the country's development and the need to participate in policy making, both at the input and output stages.
- c. Citizens must equally learn to hold leaders accountable for their stewardship and must be willing to co-operate with government in all its efforts toward the development of Nigeria.
- d. Lastly, the burden of Nigeria's development does not fall solely at the feet of political elites; when faced with opportunities to contribute to the country's development, each Nigerian must remember to bear his/her own moral burden.

Conclusion

Without doubt, the fundamental cause of Nigeria's failed development is poor leadership and governance which has resulted in weak economy, poor institutions, dilapidated infrastructural facilities and low quality education, etc. But beyond the country's bad leadership, citizens do also contribute to the failed development in Nigeria. Without the citizens being patriotic to the country; without the citizens holding the leaders accountable for their stewardship; and without the citizens showing genuine interest in the country's development, Nigeria may continue to remain underdeveloped.

It seems difficult for ordinary Nigerians alone, without political power, to bring the needed change in the country; however, each time the citizens are faced with an opportunity to contribute to Nigeria's development, they should do so with sincerity and patriotism.

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