

## Review

# Theoretical framework towards understanding the economic development and underdevelopment of Nigeria

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**The work focused on the theoretical understanding of the dynamics of Third World development and underdevelopment from the past. The desk study (DS) method of data gathering was used to gather data for this study. In the process, it was discovered that the present level of development and underdevelopment will not be clearly understood without actually taking a critical look at the past of the Third World countries. This is because; this has a lot to do with dynamics of the developmental level. In line with this, we therefore recommend, amongst others, that a thorough look at the past must be taken into consideration when formulating development policies in the present dispensation.**

**Key words:** Theoretical, understanding, dynamics, third world, development and underdevelopment.

## INTRODUCTION

Because of the critical nature of the issue of economic development and underdevelopment in Nigeria, a lot of scholars have been motivated to carry out studies in this area. That is to bring to light whether Nigeria economy is developing, developed or underdeveloped; factors that are responsible for these stages or types of development. This is because, inspite of the "Godless" locating of Nigeria, her mineral wealth, good climatic weather that is favourable for virtually the planting of most agricultural crops-cash and food, the country is yet to develop, but still "developing". To this end, one can see that the country is still compounded with a lot of problems that is causing some sort of obstacles to the rate of development, like natural, human, institutional, statistical, financial and its other affiliates. But to a large extent, the greatest contribution to the underdeveloped nature today can be traced to the imperialist and capitalist tendencies brought about by the colonial masters.

**Abbreviations:** **DS**, Desk study; **LDC**, least developed countries; **LET**, low equilibrium trap; **NEEDS**, national economic empowerment and development strategy.

## UNDERSTANDING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Unlike undevelopment, underdevelopment is not lack of development, because development of some sort and degree thus exists in the state of underdevelopment. That is, it does not mean zero-level development, it is greater than zero. In the light of the above, underdevelopment therefore can be seen from the comparative perspective. Taken from the economic angle, the term underdevelopment only makes sense when we compare two societies, and we observe that one of the two has accumulated more wealth than the other, as a result of which the quality of life of individuals of that society is really higher than that of the individual member of the other society. Today whenever we compare the quality of life in Europe and North America with those of Africa, a great part of Asia and Latin America excluding Japan, we often conclude that while Europe and North America are developed, Africa, Asia and Latin America excluding Japan are underdeveloped.

The two categories or steps of developing underdeveloped countries are not equally developed, or equally underdeveloped, therefore at the UNCTAD of the

United Nation 5<sup>th</sup> session, held in May 1979, the world committee with their systems of United Nations experts came out with their system of states in the underdeveloped nations of the world.

This has become necessary because the two terms, development and underdevelopment have become very crucial as a tool for analysis. Taking into consideration that, just as gap develop between developed and underdeveloped countries, so also the gap developed among developing countries. The poorest nations of the world are now designated as least developed Countries (LDC). According to United Nations publication of 1978, they are defined as "countries whose per capita gross domestic product amount to about \$140 (American Dollar by 1977, with the manufacturing industries share of not more than 10%. By 1978, the LDC's included the following countries, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Republic of Benin, Burundi, Cape Verde Island, Central African Republic, Comoro Island, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Haiti, Laos Democratic Republic, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Niger, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and so on. As at then they all share population of 257.7 million people, which is equivalent of 12% of the population of developed countries. But it should be noted, that because of the global recession, coupled with mismanagement of the abundant resources of Nigeria by the government, because of their orientation by the colonial masters, the country now finds herself in the bracket of LDC in the world.

This can clearly be understood if one looks critically at one of the two major approaches to the issue of development in Nigeria, that is, the Orthodox Approach, which is mainly used by the Western/imperialist scholars and economists to explain the underdevelopment of Africa. Most orthodox economists will want us to believe, that most of the underdevelopment crisis that we now face are being caused by Nigerians.

In order words, they will want us to believe that because Africans, in this case Nigerian, are beset with superstitions, so much so, that some Africans will not build, let alone live in wood houses because of the belief that ancestral spirits live in trees from which the timber may have been cut. Furthermore, that the Africans enter the "money Sector" that is, industrial employment, only to earn adequate income to pay for dowry, to meet special needs, such as bicycle purchase or to pay taxes, and then leave to go back to the farm. The hot tropical climate is not left out of this consideration, as well as a factor that induces some kind of lassitude in the African, so much so, that he is not given to mental or physical exertion for any length of time. Then of course agricultural land is badly used, especially the practice of "slash and burn" farming, to the imperialist, there is nothing that would induce the African to exert himself and the extended family. This is seen as retardation to economic development. These among other things, European detractors will want us to believe, lead to the

underdevelopment of Nigeria. (Abique, 1972). It is pertinent to quickly and briefly point out at this point, that Nigeria has lived with these factors in progressive manner before the coming of Europeans. For example, money in the form of salt, hoes, axes and so on, were used as means of exchanging trade interactions between and within states. Successful and progressive trade was going on between Nigerians and the Arabs; and of course, with other parts of the outside world before the coming of Europeans. According to Chinweizu (1978), because of the Europeans humorous notion of the "whiteman being a less savage than other savages", they feel that development wave cannot be made in other lands.

In line with the above, Labenstein (1969), gave a kind of technical analysis to substantiate this point. In this, he came out with an analogy where a set of economies or countries in which each acquires an equal low standard of living at the onset over a relatively long period of time, say a century or two. Some of these countries will increase their heads considerably, whereas some do not. The question is that, how do some countries escape the low level equilibrium trap and others got caught in it. Did they lose their dynamic elements? To this, Labenstein (1969), went further to attempt an answer and says that the historical research has made it abundantly clear that the history of the underdeveloped nations of the world in the last century can be attributed to the history of the consequence of European expansion and the functioning of international sciences, which continue to be dominated by Europe and North America. This to a large extent, created underdevelopment and sap the nation of the energy to escape low equilibrium trap (LET) which is called underdevelopment. This outlook falls in line with the second approach, which is the Radical Approach, devoid of the manner of approach by the bourgeois who tend to examine the existing structures, attitudes, functions and inter-relationship in society in isolation from their past that is, the present and future is explained with little reference to the past.

When a western imperialist for instance, that is, an imperialist economics, tries to explain the issue of underdevelopment of Nigeria, he does not give a historical explanation, neither does he consider that there is a relationship of explanation which allowed capitalist parasites to grow fat and impoverished the dependences. Instead, in some situations, he puts forward a biblical explanation, and says that it is all stated in the Holy Bible, Matthew, 25:29. For to everyone who has will more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. Like Nnoli (1981) mentioned, proponents of the western model of development merely extract the various characteristics of western societies and ignored the historical contexts within which these traits has developed, and counter pose them to the pre-colonial, colonial and neo-colonial societies of Nigeria, irrespective of differences in their

levels of production, productive forces, relations of production, type and quality of leadership, the form and content of the government, and their values, norms, symbolic attributes and ethical standards and how these had developed historically. This type of comparison, the western imperialist tend to do without taking into consideration the dependential aspects of the underdevelopment of Africa, that is, the relationship between developed and the developing countries, with special reference to Nigeria.

The relationship is that between the centre/periphery countries type of relationship between both parties, mainly leaning towards the centre nations, especially the western capitalist countries. This is because in their relationship, the western capitalist countries do not aspire for equality but for domination. And this is simply because they are in control of the means of production and pricing system in their relationship with the developing periphery countries. And with this, the western capitalist countries are able to turn Nigeria once again to a country of serfs, agricultural labourers, or industrial workers. It was not actually a question of eliminating the inequalities among men, but that of widening them and making them into a law. In other words, the infiltration of the European imperialist led to the transformation of the system of living of Nigerians and made them subservient to the imperialist masters; the imperialist caused the destruction of the rich and varied political systems of Nigeria and created new social structures and productive economic activities based on the needs of foreign capitalist economy. According to Nnoli (1981), the imperialist, diverted the attention of Nigerians away from local creative potentials and resources by focusing on the procurement of slaves on the productions of primary resources needed by Europeans. More so, the slave-trade caused the loss of many able-bodied men from the local economies, who are supposed to hold the different economic activities, thereby leading to lowering of economic activities in the area, since the co-operation and peace required by the indigenes for development in the area have been chartered by the Europeans. Furthermore, because of the new productive economic system introduced by the Europeans for the production of primary goods for the European economy, lesser attention started being concentrated on the production of subsistence products, required for food by Nigerians.

This was subsequently followed by the mining of minerals like tin, columbite, gold and so on. With the introduction of this new productive economic order, and for most Nigerians to meet their needs, they resulted to large drift to urban areas, and in some cases, to plantation settlements, to seek for wage employment that was introduced by the Europeans; where they were used for unskilled and semi-skilled labour, and finally followed by meager pay for their long hours of services. Like Offiong (1980), argued, Nigerian political economy of self-sufficiency became transferred to that of dependency

under the colonial era, to the extent that more than half the population were thought to be living on an everyday level of a very low order, with wide-spread hunger and disease. Though it could be said that the imperialist built roads, railways and communication systems, these roads and railways network when looked at critically, it will be seen that they were primary meant to serve the export and import trade, that is, to enable them to transport down their goods from the northern part of the country to the coast with ease; for shipment for onward transportation to the imperialist countries, and not necessarily to encourage internal trade and communication, as it were. Even the telecommunication system was meant to facilitate communication between the imperialists and Nigeria, in order to protect and facilitate their ideals in Nigeria.

The Europeans also introduction western education into Nigeria, to also facilitate their exploitative moves, especially in the areas where they feel that they are capable of being useful, like the area of interpreters to the missionaries, and this enabled the Nigerians to provide cheap and semi-skilled labour, like clerks and otherwise, for the imperialist various projects of exploitation. In this respect; it should be noted, that the imperialist took care in carrying out this educational programme in their various colonized area, with special reference to Nigeria. Like Offiong (1980) put it: African education consists of reading the Bible, how to read and write and calculate in English. In addition health science, British Empire history, European geography, Shakespearean and Chanceryan works were taught, Empire Day. The day African's slavery was consummated, was always meticulously observed. All this was designed to impose upon Africans the Whiteman's mythical racial superiority and the African inferiority. Whatever Africans were taught about themselves was designed to enable them to internalize their inferiority and to recognize the Whiteman as their saviour. This is to perpetuate their exploitative moves. They did not encourage Nigerians to have advanced education, especially the kind of education that would liberate them mentally and otherwise. As indicated in Table 1, only a very small proportion of the population of Nigerians were opportune or selected to be give western education at all levels of educational training, that is, with reference to University Education (0.014%), Post-Primary Education (1.2%), and Primary Education (3.6%). And as common characteristics of colonial activities, most of these educational programmes were concentrated in the urban areas, where most of their economic activities are centered. For instance, about 8% of those in Kano province who completed six or more years of colonial educational lived in Kano City, while in Ibadan province we had about 61% in Ibadan town, the same thing applies to Enugu, Onitsha and Port Harcourt as well.

To a large extent, the same system of exploitation continued, through a different dimension, after the colonial masters legalistically and formally transferring

**Table 1.** Estimates of western educated Africans in Nigeria, 1920's and 1950's.

Category	Early 1920's	Early 1950's	% of total population
	Number	Number	
University education completed In progress	30,920	1,000	0.14
Post-primary education completed in progress	200	31,000	1.2
Primary education in progress	100	143,459	3.6

Exact figures for 1926. Source: Coleman, J (1986). Nigeria: background to Nationalism. Benin, Broburg and Wistrom.

political power to Nigeria in 1960. This is done without the real exercise of power that affects the direction and character of economic development residing in the normal institutions of the supposedly sovereign country. Furthermore, it can also be seen that even where the nationals that control the apparatus of government do so without overt or subtle pressure from outside sources; they still tend to protect the exploitative economic structure which the country inherited. This the colonial masters achieve through the placement in power of those who continue to promote their various interests after they had gone. The formal ending of colonial imperialism therefore brought in neo-colonialism. The system whereby the exploitation and control of Nigeria economic activities by imperialist through the local bourgeoisie, who act as their agents of exploitation, came into operation. With the result that mis-appropriation and mis-management of government funds for selfish interest, corruptive acts and some other effects now became the order of the day. Thereby leading to the underdevelopment of Nigeria, as it is today. Nigeria being a state dominated economy, the colonial masters tried as much as possible to gain control of those who are in-charge of the economic resources of the state, right from the colonial era to the present day. And through this the colonial masters tried to perpetrate their exploitative motives right from their intervention into Nigerian society. With this exploitative motive behind all the activities of the imperialist in Nigeria, they readily found Nigerian leaders as more conducive avenue of achieving this.

This of course, can be related to the orientation and indoctrination that is that of oppression and dictatorial role in Nigerian society; coupled with the control over weaponry, which they use in alliance with the colonial power/imperialist to exploit the society. As is usually noted, Nigeria has more resources for the creation of plenty than most countries. However, because the ruling class, since her independence, has been a slave to neo-colonial ideology; it has ignored the basic industries which constitute the real engine of modernization. Besides, the capitalist character of the economy

guarantees that whether the source of plenty is mineral oil export or modernization of productive forces, the comforts of plenty will go largely to parasites, leaving the people in various degrees of poverty and backwardness (Toyo, 1994). As stated by Nwabueze (1992), the verdict of Nigeria leader on their performance as a government acknowledges and confirms this record of failure. The Ironsi administration has been described by Jemibewon (1978), as a colossal failure unmitigated by a "single redeeming feature". The nine year General Yakubu Gowon Regime was denounced by General Murtala Mohammed after the overthrow of General Gowon Regime in 1975, as characterized by "Indecision, indiscipline, neglect, inaccessibility, autocracy, drift, mismanagement and insensitivity to the true feelings and yearnings of the people". The same verdict of failure was passed on the General Buhari administration by Major-General Abacha and, then Brigadier Dogonyaro in statement issued on behalf of the armed forces on the overthrow of the administration on August 27, 1985. According to General Abacha.

It is now abundantly clear, after precisely 20 months, that the present leadership lacks the capacity and capability to lead this nation out of its social and economic predicament. The state of the nation's economy is getting more and more deplorable. The life of the ordinary citizen of this nation is becoming increasingly unbearable. The ever-increasing scarcity and high price of essential commodities have brought them beyond the reach of the ordinary person. The unemployment of our citizens, especially university graduates, has reached alarming level. The fraud associated with the issue of import license is much in the system and in some cases done with impunity. The deplorable state of our hospitals and the health care delivery system; the increasing wave of armed robbery and other crimes, all these are some of the major factors that provoke insecurity and endanger the life and property of the ordinary citizen of the nation (The Guardian, 1985). In his own statement earlier in the day, Brigadier Dogonyaro had accused the General Buhari Regime of failure to fulfill the expectations of the

people, lack of direction, drift, waste, uncertainty, stagnation and regression, betrayal of initial objectives and programmes of the military intervention, and of distancing itself from the people and their yearnings and aspirations. The same thing can be said of the General Babangida and Abacha's Regimes 1985 to 1993, who kept themselves busy acquiring public fund for themselves and close associates, to the detriment of the majority of the people of Nigeria, thereby leading to serious underdevelopment of the economic sectors of the country.

## CONCLUSION

Ekpo (2011) stated, economic development has never been a linear process unfolding placidly over time and space. Economic development has always been propelled by classes and groups interested in a new economic and social order, and has always been opposed and obstructed by those interested in the preservation of the status quo, rooted in and deriving innumerable benefits and habits of thought from the existing fabric of society, the prevailing mores, customs and institutions. In line with the above, we therefore recommend that thorough look at the past by the leaders of the Third World countries, when formulating policies, must be taken into consideration, to enable them come out with good and progressive policies that will make for development. Especially as regards policies that will enable the Third World countries break away from the old order of retrogressive policies. This can clearly be seen from the various development plans across time in Nigeria. Nigeria's national planning experience dates back to the colonial era when the Ten year welfare and development plan was instituted. But indigenous national planning started in 1962 and between that time and 1985; the country experienced five development plans all of which could, from our classification of types of planning, be described as long term plans.

Nigeria decided to experiment with shorter plans from 1986, starting with the Structural Adjustment Programme of the same year. And finally introduced perspective planning in 1990, starting with the 3 year Rolling plan of 1990, what have been tagged the rolling plans. This stretch on through the Vision 1997 to 2010, National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) Reform 2003 to 2007 and presently Vision 20,2020 (Imhanlahimhin, 2000). Though, these development plans were put in place for the development of the country, the assessment of the impact of the plans showed that they achieved very little. This is because right from the colonial time, taking into consideration the main objective of the colonial masters coming to Nigeria,

which is economic, they planned their development plan towards this objective. While the British government tagged it development and welfare plan, it was really a facilitative plan for further exploitation of Nigeria without adverse reaction from the people. In line with this, subsequent Nigeria leaders that took over the mantle of the leadership from the colonial masters tilted their development in the same direction. That is trying to protect their interest and their institutional building. That is to say, that all subsequent development plans to the present day can be seen from the same perspective, with slight variation. In addition to the above, enough resources were not made available for the implementation of most of these development plans. Coupled with this, the plans were not properly coordinated to make for development, but more of list of projects to be implemented. Thereby making it difficult to achieve the much needed development in the country.

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