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Review

Towards a harmonious view of money: The Nigerian experience

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This paper approaches the topic of money from a Nigerian perspective. A proper understanding of money and its role in an economy and society as a whole would require a more rounded view of money and its meaning than what has been provided by the field of Economics. This harmonious view will analyze money through the lenses of different disciplines in social science. The aim is to show that money is a social construct that is embedded in culture and society. Thus, a better understanding of money should reflect this attribute. Beginning with the Nigerian experience, this paper demonstrates the benefit of an interdisciplinary approach to money and finance.

Key words: Money, development, job creation, culture, Nigerian society.

INTRODUCTION

Global crises, whether financial and/or biological, as we have recently seen with Covid-19, brings to light the importance of monetary issues and policies around the world. In order to understand these policies and how they benefit individuals, one has to understand money and how it operates. Though widely covered in economics, other social science interpretations of money are equally important.

The views, theories, interpretations, uses and meanings of money are multi-faceted and diverse (Ingham, 2004). Most of these are built upon the three functions of money provided by the field of economics. These include money as a: (1) medium of exchange – here, money is a means of purchasing goods and services and also a means of settling debt, (2) unit of account - here, money is a means of measuring the comparable worth of goods and services, and (3) store of value - here, money is a means of accumulating wealth, that is, money is an end in itself not just a means to an end (McConnell et al., 2016). Popular theories of money include money as credit (Innes, 1913, 1914; Wray, 1990), and commodity-backed money versus non-commodity backed money (Skaggs, 1999; Goodhart, 1998; Menger, 1892).

However, the social reality or what Simiand (1934) called, the *réalité sociale* of money is as important because it is an institution that unites people. The widely publicized economic characteristics of money show its durability, divisibility and acceptability. Collins (1979) points out that money is sociological enough and should not be ignored in other fields. Zelizer (1989) also points out the need for more non-economics views on money when she wrote that, “the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* devotes over 30 pages to money but not one to its social characteristics” (Zelizer, 1989: p. 343). There are many views and characteristics of

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money, which are equally as important as the many economic views of money. Importance should be given to all of them in order to fully understand money and thus its effects on society. Some of these other views categorize money using social dichotomies such as cultural versus structural perspectives of money, micro level versus macro level perspectives of money and domestic versus market money. Another approach of money includes distinctions such as gender and class (Einzig, 1966).

All these theories and distinctions have to be put into consideration in policy making and reviewing the effects of money – influx or outflow – in an economy or society as it ensures efficiency in the implementation of the monetary part of policies. This holistic interdisciplinary approach to money will help in analyzing different stances of policy on development and stability. This is then used in determining what policy a country should adopt. It could be exogenous money transfers through helicopter drops, that is, large cash transfers to the people (Friedman, 1948), tax cuts for different income brackets or endogenous money transfers through the creation of demand (Keynes, 1936). The latter in modern terms includes the government acting as an employer of last resort for anyone willing and able to work (Forstater 1999; Tcherneva, 2012).

This paper will discuss the basic themes in various disciplines of thought using the Nigerian economy as a case study. To achieve this, we will begin with a section that provides a historical and anthropological background into things that have been used as money in the Nigerian society over the years. We especially focus on the pre-colonial instruments of money in Nigeria in order to understand the theory of money across different time periods: pre-, during- and post-colonialism. Section three will analyze some of the other disciplines' approach to money and their implications in society. Afterwards, we will analyze recent crisis and reactions in line with these views of money. Then, we will provide a conclusion to our posited ideas.

HISTORICAL TRENDS ON MONEY THINGS

The historical trends on money are important because they help us answer questions such as, “where are we coming from?” and “where are we going to?” A proper understanding of the past will help one understand the present and future better. A lot of policies are always tied to questions such as “how would we pay for this?” and “would our children have to suffer our debt?” Basically, the issue of money and finance always comes up. So, a proper understanding of money and its history is needed to comprehend its impact in policies.

A lot of understanding of ‘money’ actually focuses on it as a money thing. Here, money is seen as that thing which is used to purchase goods and services. In present times, that will be the dollars, yuans, nairas and currencies that we can convert to paper or coin form.

Historically, money things have varied in different parts of the world. In Nigeria, like a lot of other countries, things like salt, iron rods, brass rods, manilla, copper wires, cloth, ackies, gold and cowries have been used historically as money things. One of the most common money things among these is the cowry.

Cowries

Obtained from the shells of small sea snails, cowries are considered the most common pre-colonial currency. They are indigenous to the warm waters of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. Cowries were used as trade currency in different parts of the world like Africa, South Asia and East Asia. They were used for internal trade and overseas exchange (Hopkins, 1966).[1] Reports show that cowries have been used in some regions in Africa, like Nigeria, as far back as years before the Portuguese invasion in the fifteenth century (Akinjogbin and Osoba, 1980; Basden, 1921; Egharevba, 1968). Cowries were also the currency used during the African slave trade era (Hogendorn and Johnson, 1986). In some parts of China, they have been used as money since around 2000 BC (Peng and Zhu, 1995; Yang, 2011; Yung-Ti, 2003). This monetary usage of cowries continued in some parts of the world until the early 20th century. This is partly due to the properties that cowries had over other money things that had been used.

The properties of cowries that made them suitable to be used as money include longevity, the small shape and size that made them very easy to carry, durability and some unique qualities that made counterfeiting impossible. For the cowries to be used as money in Nigeria, they had to be strung or packed to represent different denominations. This made it easier for traders to use in their accounting system. Payne (1875) shows how cowries were specially strung and used as money. As a cowry by itself, it could not be considered or used as money. There were specific guidelines and signatures used for these cowries to be used as money. A string was made up of 40 cowries while 50 strings made up one head. A bag of cowries comprised of 10 heads and this bag weighed 100 pounds (Aghalino, 2002).[2]

However, cowries were not without some problems in their usage. Since only 10 heads of cowries weighed 100 pounds and a lot of these were needed in transactions, the problem of transportation costs and weightiness in large quantities arose. Another problem associated with the cowry currency was the lack of government control in supply as there was no major monetary unit that controlled the cowry currency. Despite other non-cowry money things being used over time, the cowry has been the longest money thing used in a lot of regions. It has since been replaced by gold and then different

[1] Hopkins 1966, p. 472
[2] Aghalino 2002, p.88

government-backed state currencies.

Non-cowry pre-colonial currencies

Manillas came in the form of metal bracelets or armlets. They also came in the form of copper, bronze and brass. It is popularly believed that copper rods were originally a trade currency between Europe and Africa before being adopted as a local currency (Jones, 1958).[3] Latham (1971) points out an opposing view though. He opines that copper rods existed in Calabar before the European invasion of the early nineteenth century (Latham, 1971).[4] Copper wires were indigenous currencies used in Nigeria. Copper rods, manillas and brass rods were widely used in trade especially in the Oil Rivers, Niger Delta and Old Calabar regions (Basden, 1921).[5] Copper rods were also used in Borno before the eighteenth century. Like the cowries, these currencies were cumbersome and difficult to transport and count as well.

The use of these currencies created an avenue for a capital market where people could borrow money and help each other within groups. This market led to the provision of internal capital and credit giving to encourage development. Some of these capital markets operated in the form of savings and credit “banking.” Members contributed money and the total contribution would be lent to any member who needs. Another system of internal credit that was prevalent in this time was a system of rotating credit called the *ajo* and *isusu/esusu* system of the Yorubas, Igbos and Ibibios (Ardner, 1964).[6] The idea here is that a group of people come together to save copper rods for different individual projects for a period of time. During this period, contributions are made at specific intervals and a different member receives the group’s pool of funds at each interval till everyone has gotten their turn for receipt. These *ajo* contributions have continued through different money things till this present time of fiat money.

Fiat money and coinage

There is a metallist’s theory of money that hinges on money being some form of metal, for instance, gold. The belief is that currencies either have gold backing or are metal currencies with intrinsic value (Bell, 2001). Thus, people accepted these currencies because of their intrinsic value or because they could convert it into metal whenever they needed. However, commodity money such as gold and cowries eventually gave way to what is now known as fiat money as a result of colonialism.

The advent of British colonialism in West Africa was accompanied with a deliberate attempt to demonetize existing currencies so exploitation of the natives was made easier. As Fuller (2008) said, the introduction of British currency in West Africa forced Africans into colonial enterprises like producing cash crops, as they needed most of the proceeds to pay taxes and other expenses that were only accepted in colonial currency. This led to the creation of the West African Currency Board (WACB).

The WACB was responsible for issuing currency notes in Nigeria from 1912 to 1959. The main responsibility was to manage the production and design of a common currency in the British West African Colonies, Protectorates and Trust Territories. It was responsible for the supply of currency and ensuring price stability in these colonies. This was ensured by first demonetizing the prior money things in circulation through formal legislation.

Fiat money does not focus on the intrinsic value; rather, the value of the currency is derived from government regulation or law. The 1880 formal legislation issued to British colonies, protectorates and trust territories, Nigeria inclusive, recognized only British coins and a few gold coins as legal tender. This means that people accepted these currencies because of its characteristic as a creature of the state (Lerner, 1947). Like the Carolingian era of medieval France (Innes, 2006), coins were not marked at face value. The nominal value of coins exceeded their intrinsic value. Sole importation rights of these coins into the colonies were given to the African Banking Corporation, which had a headquarters in London. Token currencies were fixed to British sterling and the Nigerian economy did not have autonomy of currency. The British colonialists required these coins as payment for taxes/levies/tithes in public offices and places. Thus they spent the money into existence and created acceptance through demand {Wray, 1990, 2012).

The British colonial state played an important role in the history of money in Nigeria. It achieved this by defining the unit of account, imposing tax liabilities on individuals, and passing a law on the acceptable currency to be used in paying these taxes (Forstater, 2005; Peacock, 2006). Unlike the cowry or gold, fiat money has individual governments controlling each currency along with individual central banks for each currency. In the Nigerian colonial era, the central bank was the WACB. However, the reign of the WACB came to an end on July 1, 1959, a little over a year before Nigerian gained her independence from British colonial rule. This was established through the CBN Act of 1958. The establishment of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) led to the creation of the domestic fiat currencies; naira and kobo.

The credit theory of money in Nigerian history

Regardless of the stance a person may choose, the

[3] Jones 1958, p. 48
[4] Latham 1971, p. 599
[5] Basden 1921, p. 198
[6] Ardner 1964, p. 210-212

system of governance in place or the money thing being used, one fact remains, as long as contractual obligations exist, money will exist. This is because money is used to settle contractual obligations (Davidson, 1972). That is, money is used to settle debt.

Since the correlative of debt is credit, money is thus credit (Innes, 1913, 1914). Credit and debt express a legal relationship between two opposing sides of exchange. In the Nigerian historical economy, money things like brass rods, cowries and gold were used to designate credit and debt. As instruments on their own, they were not money. This explains why people use cowry shells for ornaments, jewellery and hair accessories, and people melted the British coins to make jewellery. The contractual obligations these money instruments could fulfill were what made them demanded as money and not the money things. Therefore, money has always been credit in the Nigerian economy. However, with the different kinds of money things in place over the years, money has meant different things to different people based on various factors such as culture, experiences, the society, and the sources of the money. As a result, we have to review different approaches of money in order to understand the effects of income targeted policies and other kinds of monetary policies in the Nigerian society.

MONEY: MORE MEANINGS AND PERSPECTIVES

Zelizer (1989) provides a reductive definition of money as "the ultimate objectifier, homogenizing all qualitative distinctions into an abstract quantity."[7] Another definition of money is gotten from Simmel (1978 [1900]). He defined it as "the reduction of quality to quantity".[8] These definitions view money as an object that puts a numerical value to quality. More definitions of money can be seen in Parsons (1967) where it is as a "symbolically generalized media of communication associated with the economic subsystem of society." This means that outside this system, money does not have any meaning. In the case of colonial Nigeria, outside the colonial economic systems, these coins were just things that could be converted to jewellery to show a person's social class.

Over the years, the Nigeria economy, just like the global economy, has experienced various types of crises that have affected people, institutions and the aggregate economy. The COVID-19 pandemic is the most recent crisis to rock the Nigerian economy. This has heightened the role of money and the Central Bank of Nigeria in alleviating the effects of these crises. However, an interdisciplinary understanding of money is needed in order to analyze the effects central bank policies adopted and their efficiency.

In sociology

The purpose of sociology is to provide scientific training to those who will *manage* society. Managing a complex interwoven society would lead to multiple contractual obligations that need to be met. Hence, money is important in this discipline. So, it provides different meanings, types and uses of money. In sociology, money is defined based on how it is gotten and how it is used. A child's allowance is different from money worked for and received as a wage, and lottery earnings are different from salaries. The value of money is dependent on how it is gotten (Zelizer, 1994). To the sociologist, not all forms of a particular currency such as dollars, pounds or naira are equal. A naira in the hands of the rich is different from a naira in the hands of the poor. This is very similar to a bonus point to a student who has 89% versus a student who has 91%. The level of need varies and as a result, it influences the value placed on money. Understanding this is necessary for understanding policy issues and the target recipients of the policies. This includes issues such as the debates on bailouts during a crisis such as the kind of response a government should take, how much of bailouts is enough and who should get the bailouts (Schwarcz, 2017; Wray, 2012).

Then, Zelizer (1989) makes a distinction between domestic money and market money. Domestic money refers to money in a home or family setting such as allowances for wives and children, while market money is used to represent wages and salary determined from exchange, value and account keeping. Domestic money can be akin to the household money that is not needed to pay taxes (Bell, 2001). Therefore, the difference between domestic money and market money is that the latter is taxable. Money is much more than the dollar bills in circulation hence non-market money exists. It allows for the existence of money outside the market system, and cultural and social factors (Zelizer, 1989).

Also, money is viewed as power and thus a symbolism for attitudes (Parsons and Smelser, 1956). Here, the more money a person has, the more power they wield or the more confidence it gives such a person in society. A person's income level puts that person in a particular social class. In a Nigerian context, having a lot of money makes a person to become a "big man/woman", which means there are certain doors that are closed to the average citizen that he or she can enter. It also affords them the opportunity to pass through so many societal hoops and red tapes. Money therefore interacts with power and bureaucracy (Mandel, 1992). This in turn influences a person's role and stance in society. Furthermore, sociologists believe that money goes beyond coins and bank notes and that there are substitutes to money. This can be seen in the view of social status as a substitute to money (Coleman, 1990). In this case, a person's social status can be used as a means of payment. A country club may accept a member

[7] Zelizer 1989, p. 342.
[8] Simmel 1978, p. 280

without payment based on the prestige the said person brings with membership and the potential members that will join just to be associated with this member. In the Nigerian setting, this is called “exposure”. A musician can perform at the event of a popular person because he/she knows there would be other successful potential clients. In fact, it is not uncommon to see celebrities offer “social media exposure” as a sort of payment for services in Nigeria. Social status can also be used as a collateral for bank loans so much so that in the cases of a default, the bank has no collateral to seize and has to find more creative loans for loan repayment such as bank employees going to protest non-payments of loans in the houses of a Nigerian senator.[9]

More so, money is important to society in that it acts as a medium in the creation of social ties between people. Money is a structure of social and personal relations (Ingham, 1996, 2004). It is a source of creating relationships and as such goes beyond the impersonal function of quantification. Some of these relationships include relationships between people of the same social class, and individuals within a capital and credit group like the *ajo* and *isusu*/*esusu* group. The Yoruba (a Nigerian language) saying, “olowo l’on se ore olowo”, directly translated as “the wealthy are friends with other wealthy people” comes to play here. A person’s financial level determines the kind of friends they have and as a result, the kind of connections and opportunities available to them. It determines the societal clubs people belong to and to a large extent, sets an economic and class trajectory for their lives. Since societies are made up of a group of inter-connected people with different levels and experiences, the perspectives of money in the society differs based on these.

Cultural versus structural perspectives of money

A cultural perspective of money lies on the premise that culture determines what money is, how money is used and what is used as money. Culture is the way of life of a people that is usually passed down from generation to generation. Hofstede (1984) defines culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or society from those of another.”[10] Money as an institution is an accepted way of life of people that is dependent on culture in society. It is a socially inherited habit and thing that people are programmed to accept. Children learn about money by seeing their parents and families use it. Another aspect of the culture of money has to do with the pricing of goods and services in different cultures. While some countries, like Nigeria and the United Kingdom, have a culture of including taxes in the prices of goods before telling customers the final prices, Canada and the United States have a culture of including the taxes after the price has been given. So, anyone coming from any of the former countries into the latter would experience a culture shock in the pricing and would have to go through an adjustment period in understanding the culture of money in the new country.

For the culture of money to occur, it has to be accepted by all. The acceptability factor is dependent on it being a debt that other people are willing to accept, whether a large number of people in society or even a small number within a family. In the cowry currency era of Nigeria, people accepted these cowries because others were willing to accept it. Acceptance started within regions at different times and culturally spread around the area that geographically became Nigeria. The first region to use cowries was the eastern region. Here, cowries were used before the advent of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century (Basden 1921). The culture of cowry usage gradually spread to other regions. It spread through the Benin Empire in the sixteenth century (Egharevba, 1968) till it got to the western region in the seventeenth century (Akinjogbin and Osoba, 1980).

Also, culture has a large influence on money through social constructs such as gender and race (Acker, 2006). Since institutions in society are intertwined, we see a situation where cultural influences on gender, and race, influence cultural influences and stances on money. This explains the differences between domestic and market money based on cultural gender roles. The idea is gotten from and also explains the different views of money that lead to the disparity between what men and women who work outside the home earn. In the patriarchal Nigerian system, the gender power structure culturally views the married woman’s wages as domestic and is used to settle domestic needs in the family such as food. On the other hand, the man’s salary is used as market money for things like rents and mortgages (Zelizer, 1989). This actually fuels gender wage discrimination, as women are paid less because the cultural belief is that their needs are lesser and minor. So, women earn lower wages even though they work in comparable positions with the men and they have the same level of human capital as the men (Baker and Jimerson, 1992).

From a structural perspective, money is seen as a tracer of social relationships (Baker and Jimerson, 1992). Relationships such as those between traders and customers, institutions like banks and clients, and employers and employees are formed through money. So, money like many other societal institutions, constructs interactions. Ganssmann (1988) talks about money being used as a weapon of social oppression to produce and reproduce relations of social and economic domination. One of the first steps of domination through colonialism was the introduction of British currency. This led to domination of Nigerians. The Nigerian economy went from being a majorly food crop economy in the pre-

[9] https://www.withinnigeria.com/news/2021/06/21/bank-workers-storm-senator-andy-ubas-house-in-abuja-over-his-unpaid-loan/
[10] Hofstede 1984, p. 82

colonial era to a cash crop economy for the colonialists (Shokpeka and Nwaokocha, 2009). The capitalist system introduced made farmers value money over production for feeding, thereby empowering the colonialist the more since it was their currency being used in the colonies.

In a similar manner, one of the early steps processes of breaking free from colonialism was the creation of the Nigerian Central Bank (CBN). This was done in 1959 before independence in 1960. With the CBN in place, Nigeria was able to create her own money, the naira and kobo, and then pursue economic independence from colonial rule. Therefore, owning her own credit unit allowed Nigeria to have an avenue for creating a new structure in her independence.

Micro level versus macro level perspectives of money

The macro level perspective of money is built upon the beliefs and attitude towards money from an aggregated point of view. It has to do with the government determining the regulatory context of exchange through legal and political mechanisms. In studying the rise and fall of the British pound from A.D. 760 to 1970, Wisher (1970) makes a macro level money argument that the value of a nation's currency depicts the collective views of the nation's capabilities. It goes to show that a country's monetary value also depends on people's beliefs, attitudes and perspectives on the *power* and capability of that country. This view explains the reluctance of the Nigerian economy in letting go of the British sterling till 1973. It took thirteen years post-independence for the people to finally gain confidence in the nation's capabilities and embrace the naira and kobo.

On the other hand, the micro level perspective of money is based on the interpersonal level. It views money as an "object of interpersonal relationships, such as communication and exchange."[11] This has to do with the influence of individuals on the value of money. It is based on individuals' values, attitudes and beliefs and how these influence their behavior with respect to money (Coleman, 1990; Baker and Jimmerson, 1992). Here, the individual, isolated situation and context determined the value of money. The value of money is not the same for every individual. A $100 bill in the hands of a poor person who lacks basic needs such as food and clothing is different from the same bill in the hands of a wealthy person who has luxury goods.

However, whether based on cultural acceptance or individual needs, money, though perceived in different ways, has still been used as credit. It may be used to meet immediate needs, signify social status, create social ties, dominate a group of people or change the structure of society and the economy. In all the scenarios, regardless of the money thing in use, money signifies the ability to pay debt and is therefore credit.

In anthropology

The field of anthropology provides symbolic meanings of money with regard to primitive money (Dalton, 1967; Hogendorn and Johnson, 1986). It goes into the history of money and defines it based on its purchasing power and forms a perspective of money that is in between the sociological and economical views. In this field, money is not just from the state but also from people and their accumulated customs (Miller, 1931 {1816}). It addresses money from the purchasing power angle; thus, showing that primitive valuables such as cowries, brass rods and manillas are also money. This is because they could be exchanged for goods and services (Mauss, 1990 {1925}; Egharevba, 1968; Latham 1971). Anthropology approaches money first from a medium of exchange point of view before a unit of account and store of value point of view.

From the angle of customs, communities over the years operate through shared implicit rules that have been passed down from generation to generation (Hart, 2005). As the years go by, what money is to a person is based on the customs that have been passed down. Unless a sharp exogenous change occurs, such as a government issuing fiat money or the colonialist insisting on the use of British sterling through law, the money passed down through customs is used. This in turn explains why it took fourteen years post-independence for the British money to stop being used in the Nigerian economy. People accepted the sterling because they were accustomed to it and knew others would accept it from them for exchange.

Regardless of the customary approach to money, it is still credit used to settle debt. Also, what drives the demand for money is its general acceptance, which in anthropology is passed down through customs. Even though the quality of the debt may change overtime, based on the value placed on it, what actually changes the money thing are exogenous shocks such the introduction of trading partners like the Portuguese traders in Nigeria, colonialism or governmental decrees. An example is the introduction of the naira and kobo into the Nigerian economy on the 1st of January, 1973, which replaced the pound. This exogenous decree happened in the military rule of General Yakubu Gowon and this ushered in a new kind of custom of money away from the pounds.[12]

In philosophy and psychology

Psychologically and philosophically, money is defined based on people's mental view of money. Here, people

[11] Baker and Jimmerson 1992, p. 681

[12] https://www.cbn.gov.ng/Currency/historycur.asp

view money based on how they receive it or perceive it. A bribe is different from a donation and a bonus is different from a wage even if it is in the same amount and as thus viewed as different kinds of money (Thaler, 1985; Kahneman and Tversky, 1982; Lea et al., 1987). In this view, the subject of the value of money is raised as our perceived notion of money determines how much we value it. Simmel, in his 1900 book *The Philosophy of Money,* attaches sacrifice to his theory of monetary value. To him, whatever we get without painstaking is worthless. This means that in order to place value on money, we have to suffer pain in getting it. Thus, this distinguishes monies based on gifts like donations and lotteries and those gotten through hard work like wages.

Overall, we can define money harmoniously as a demand-induced tracer of relationships used in exchange, which receives its value from sacrifice and labour (Baker and Jimerson, 1992, Bitrus, 2011; Simmel, 1900; Lerner, 1947; Wray, 1990). This means that money is dependent on acceptability, how it is gotten and the relationships surrounding it. Thus, its effectiveness in development will be dependent on its role in policies and its application.

THE TWIN CRASH AND MONEY IN NIGERIA

The Federal Republic of Nigeria is located in West Africa. According to the 2019 World Bank Database, she has an estimated population size of 201 million and she is the most populous country in Africa and the seventh most populous country in the world. The major contributors to the Nigerian economy are the oil and agriculture sector. For a country so rich in natural and human resources, Nigeria provides a paradox because the people are poor (Nwaobi, 2003). According to the 2019 "Poverty and Inequality in Nigeria" report by the National Bureau of Statistics states that about 40 percent of the total population in Nigeria, which is about 83 million people, live below the country's poverty line of 137,430 naira (333.45USD) per year. Many of these people depend on working every day for their daily bread (Parkinson and Faucon, 2020; Soludo, 2020). As people value money received from labour, it is not uncommon to see people work every day to survive.

The year 2020 ushered in a twin crash that affected the oil-producing Nigerian economy – oil crash and COVID-19. Due to influences on both demand and supply, the global oil market experienced a surplus supply of oil, which led to a fall in oil prices in March 2020 just before the WHO announced the COVID-19 global pandemic (Apergis and Apergis, 2020). This was followed by a fall in demand due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic ushered in an economic crisis that is not unlike other crises like the 2007/8 Global Financial Crisis. Crises like these lead to higher poverty levels for households and a downward spiral for the aggregate economy (Skoufias, 2003). In an economy where about 40 percent live below the country's poverty line, which is an already low bar of less than a dollar a day, a twin-crises such as this pose disastrous effects on the lives of millions of people in a vulnerable society. The COVID-19 global preventive measures of border closures and 'stay at home' orders proved rather difficult for a "daily bread" hand-to-mouth member of the economy. It became a choice between corona virus and hunger virus, which has been termed "suicidal" (Soludo 2020). Then, with a population of about 201 million people in a land area of 923,773 square kilometers, the social distancing measures become impractical in a lot of parts in Nigeria.

In response, the Nigerian government and private organizations provided "palliatives" that included food stuffs for citizens in order to encourage the lockdown measures. However, without credible demographic data and proper national identifications numbers, the palliatives are only cosmetic. They did not get to the vulnerable part of the economy that needed them and a lot of the palliatives were hijacked by people of influence (Eranga, 2020). This is not surprising as research has shown that aid has made no significant change in poverty reduction in Nigeria because of issues of corruption, poor policy implementation, poor governance and the risk of dependence on aid (Ugwuanyi et al., 2017; Ibietan et al., 2014). Poor people want pay and not handouts so there has to be more effective means of poverty alleviation.

Employer of last resort (ELR) as an alternative to aid

The Yoruba people of South-western Nigeria have a saying, "ma fun mi n'isu, fun mi l'oko ki o ko mi lati gbin isu". This literally translates to "do not give me yams, give me a farm and teach me how to plant yams". What this proverb means is that once a person puts in the work, they will get the result and hardwork is more reliable than aid. The Yoruba people have been historically known to be farmers and over the years, have placed more value on the proceeds from their individual farms (Akintoye, 2010). The Nigerian culture values labour and training over aid and palliatives. Money gotten from hard work is more valuable than money gotten through aid. There is a general belief that nothing goes for nothings and so aid leads to mismanagement and a societal fear of what a person has to give in return. As a result, policy responses for development in Nigeria should be centered around employment.

The problem in Nigeria is not a lack of human and natural resources but a lack of effective mobilization of these resources. Since money makes a difference between when it is gotten through paid labour and when it is freely received, investment strategies for development should encourage real capital investment and employment creation as wages gotten through work are valued, for the dignity in labor. The demand for money in Nigeria has been primarily determined by income (Bitrus, 2011) because value is placed on money that was gotten through hard work based on interpersonal relationships tied to the exchange of goods and services. This means that policies designed for the people in developing Nigeria have to primarily target income levels. After years of unsuccessful international and domestic aid systems in Nigeria (Eranga, 2020; Ugwuanyi et al., 2017), an employment-oriented system is ideal for a developing country like Nigeria. A development strategy for Nigeria would require a proper mobilization of unemployed labour resources through an employer of last resort program (Kregel, 2009). The Employer of Last Resort program is a program where the government employs those willing and able to work (Tcherneva, 2012). The goal is to encourage aggregate demand in the economy (Keynes, 1936). Monetary and fiscal policies would be geared towards expansionary programs that will encourage job creation, not just palliatives and short term donations. These programs will intersect with other programs such as environmental sustainability (Murray and Forstater, 2013). Overall, it creates employment in a society that values money gotten through employment.

CONCLUSION

As earlier stated, the definitions, views, meanings and approaches to money are diverse and multi-faceted. The Nigerian economy provides an understanding of these because of the different socio-political economic systems it has experienced. The country has gone from being a subsistence economy where exchanges were done on a smaller scale, to being a trade economy of many money things, then a colonial economy of British sterling to the currency post-colonial economy.

The Nigerian economy has experienced money as a cultural phenomenon, as a social construct and as a creator of social ties. It shows the willingness of people to accept a particular money thing either through habit or law. The Nigerian economy has also experienced the acceptance of money as a weapon of domination and eventually as a tool towards gaining independence. As a result, this economy provides a lot of lessons on different approaches, perspectives and meanings of money.

In this economy, money has been significant long before international trade and colonialism. However, regardless of the system in place, money has always been a social construct used to form relationships and credit used to settle debt. Understanding all these helps in policymaking as it ensures that the right policy is taken for a particular set of people with a particular type of political structure, behavior and custom.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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