

## **Nigerian Economy, Leadership Factor and National Development: A Study in Hermeneutics**

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### **Abstract**

*Ordinarily, the economy of a nation should function as the backbone of its development in different ways – educationally, scientifically, technologically, morally, agriculturally, socio-politically and infrastructurally. However, this does not seem to be the case with Nigeria. Using the hermeneutics method, this work discusses how Nigerian economy has not really helped to advance national development. The work opines that the mismanagement of the Nigerian economy over the years has had calamitous results. The paper blames the problem basically on bad leadership. It makes recommendations and concludes that for Nigerian economy to engender national development, the leadership must address the issues of unemployment, nepotism, corruption and insecurity.*

**Keywords:** Economy, Development, Hermeneutical and Leadership.

### **Introduction**

We can define economy as the organization of resources. By extension, therefore, Nigerian economy is the organization of Nigerian resources. Since Nigeria is a nation, by Nigerian resources, we mean Nigerian national resources. By National resources is meant the financial and material wealth of a nation or the supply of the materials with which this wealth is produced. In other words, Nigerian national resources refers to the financial and material wealth of Nigeria or the supply of the materials with which Nigerian wealth is produced. Most of the constitution of Nigerian national resources are natural. They are generally fixed in supply. Nigeria is blessed with abundant natural resources but the predominant one is Petroleum. Petroleum is oil in its raw unrefined form, which is found in natural wells below the earth's surface and from which petrol, paraffin, gas, diesel oil and some other kinds of refined oil are obtained.

On the other hand, development is the noun form of the verb 'to develop', which is variously defined as "to grow bigger 'to grow larger', 'to become fuller', 'to become more mature" or "to become more advanced". The word 'development' is a multidimensional concept, because it can be used to refer to many different things. However, there are two basic senses in which the definition of 'development' can be viewed: one is as a process of growth or increase in size; the other is as a process of increase in advancement or civilization. The word 'development' is often used from the point of view of the former definition when reference is being made to plants and animals as biological beings. Thus

we speak of the development of a plant or an animal. But the word is often used from the point of view of the latter definition when reference is being made to the human society. It is in this case that we often talk about economic development, social development, infrastructural development, political development, moral development, scientific development, technological development and so on.

It is pertinent to note that the kind of human society with reference to which we talk about these forms of development determines the actual form of development concerned. Thus, the form of development concerned can be local, state, national, regional or global when the human society referred to is local, state, national, regional or global respectively. In this study, we are predominantly concerned with national development. And for the purpose of this study, we shall define national development as the process by which a nation becomes more advanced or civilized technologically, morally, scientifically and so on.

The word, 'hermeneutical' is the adjective for 'hermeneutics', a noun which means "the branch of knowledge that deals with interpretation, especially of the Bible or Literary texts" (Google). In this case, the word is being used as a way of introducing the idea that this work will involve much of literary interpretation. The word, 'Leadership' refers to the action of leading a group of people or an organization. 'Leadership is also used to refer to the leaders of an organization, country, etc. (Google). In this work, the word, 'leadership' is used to refer to the leaders of Nigeria or the action of leading the country, Nigeria.

### **The Relationship between Nigerian Economy and National Development.**

Having defined Nigerian economy as the organization of Nigerian resources, and national development as the process by which a nation becomes more advanced or civilized, it becomes obvious that there is a relationship between them. The link is that Nigerian national development depends on the Nigerian economy. Nigerian economy should be used to achieve progressive national development. National development involves technological development, political development, scientific development, economic development, social development, infrastructural development, moral development, and so on. With progressive national development, the living standard of Nigerian citizens is supposed to be continuously increased, social welfare duly provided them, and the security of their lives and properties assured.

Unfortunately, Nigerian economy has been very badly operated. The socio-economic situation in the country has been very disappointing. How come that a country which is one of the world's greatest oil producers and operates four oil refineries which gulp huge amounts of money annually for maintenance, depends on imported petroleum? Nigeria has got very large and rich agricultural land masses, yet she rests her survival on foreign rice and frozen foods (some of which are contaminated). Thus, the great opportunity to improve the lives of Nigerians, naturally provided through the availability of natural resources, is consistently trampled by some rapacious and profligate individuals who have operated the nation's economy over the years. In his article, "Environmental Issues in Human Development", Nelson Ositadima Oranye describes this phenomenon as

contradictory to the earlier Malthusian assumption - the assumption that human ability to create wealth is circumscribed by the availability of natural resources. (Oranye, 2003:125).

### **Leadership as the Link between Nigerian Economy and National Development.**

The leadership of every nation is the link between the nation's economy and its development. The implication is that the efficiency or the effectiveness of a nation's leadership naturally determines the rate of the nation's development. In Nigeria, since the nation's independence in 1960, the country's leadership has mainly been in the hands of the military. In the relatively few years of civil rule in the country, power has, more often than not been in the hands of retired army generals who could hardly see the distinction between military rule and democratic governance. It is such that the nation's democracy which has gone through four republics is still referred to as a nascent democracy.

Owing to the foregoing, Nigeria has not, for much of the time, had leaders who could properly drive the nation's economy, in order to achieve significant national development. No wonder, Chinua Achebe, in the opening page of his small but mighty book, *The Problem with Nigeria*, categorically states that the problem with Nigeria is that of leadership. There are many factors responsible for the situation in question. The nation's failure to adopt and practice the ideals of true democracy has been a major setback. These include the independence of the judiciary, separation of powers among the major arms of government, the devolution of authority among the tiers of government, the independence and freedom of the press. The irony is that most often, the nation's leadership makes claims to these ideals; but experience so often shows that they are false claims.

Just to give one instance, recently in Nigeria, there has been an attempt to amend the electoral laws as part of the processes of constitution review. It started with the 8<sup>th</sup> National Assembly which raised the electoral bill, seeking to amend certain aspects of our election laws for the enhancement of our democracy. After the required number of readings of the bill, it was eventually passed, and then sent for the signature of the President. At the Presidency, the signing was delayed until the excuse was given that the 2019 elections were already too close. Consequently, the bill was eventually returned to the 9<sup>th</sup> National Assembly to, perhaps, review and send back to the President.

In the course of the review, a controversy arose. The Federal House of Representatives committee on elections had retained the provision for the electronic transmission of votes as contained in the bill. The Senate Committee did same after its own review. But when the bill returned to the Senate some members tried to add a clause to the bill, to the effect that the use of the electronic transmission of votes' provision would have to be authorized by the National Communications Commission (NCC), which only plays a supporting role to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

This is even as the INEC has said emphatically that it can effectively handle electronic transmission of votes in the forthcoming National elections, having done so previously in some recent elections. This moved faced stiff opposition from some other members of the Senate. As a result, a great controversy has arisen in the Senate as there is a polarization. While some members of the Senate want to introduce the NCC twist, thereby not out

rightly accepting the electronic transmission of vote's clause; the other group insists that the NCC twist is a trick, and that the electronic transmission of vote's clause must remain sacrosanct. The later position seems to represent the view of many Nigerians who want all elections in the country to be transparent.

By and large, the failure of democracy in the country, coupled with a high rate of nepotism and tribalism; has made it difficult, if not impossible for Nigerian leadership to properly play out its expected role as the link between the Nigerian economy and national development. Without good leadership, a nation's economy cannot be transformed into a veritable tool for national development.

### **The Result of the Mismanagement of Nigerian Economy**

The mismanagement of the Nigerian economy by successive leaderships in the country has had far reaching implications on the citizens of the country. The immediate result of this great economic blunder is that a much greater majority of the Nigerian people were thrown into abject poverty. In this situation, some people felt that the only option of survival left for them was that of corruption. It is not normal to subject a man to a great economic need and yet expect of him the best of his moral self. Only very few people will stick to their good moral principles in times of great need. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels express the view that all human thoughts and activities are motivated by "productive forces" or economic factors. When man is denied access to food, he may be tempted to do anything in order to have food. Thus, the Nigerian society began to breed and bear armed-robbers, professional prostitutes, dupes, assassins, trouble-shooting idlers, and so on. In this way, corruption and its multifarious effects kept escalating in Nigeria.

Today, there is high-level corruption in virtually all sectors of the nation's socio-economic life. In fact, there is now an interplay between corruption and poverty, a sort of symbiotic association, where each aids the perpetuation of the other. No wonder Nigeria has, until recently, almost always maintained the position of the most corrupt country in the world. Thus, the economic problem of the mismanagement of Nigerian Economy led to the socio-moral problem of corruption, which in turn permeated all other areas of the nation's life. This phenomenon dwindled political, scientific, infrastructural and technological development of the country. Ultimately, the pace of Nigerian national development shifts along the lines of retrogression, stagnation and minimal progression. As a result, the living standard of the greater majority of Nigerians has been low and the security of their lives and properties not duly ensured. This can be attested to by the geometrical increase in insecurity in Nigeria, showing in different forms: armed robbery, kidnapping, banditry and killings. The recent activities of killer-herdsmen and the so-called 'unknown gun men' have compounded security issues in Nigeria society, making it akin to the Hobbesian state of nature where the life of man is 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'.

### **Factors Responsible For the Slow - Pace of National Development in Nigeria.**

In comparison with Nigeria's great economic potentiality, national development in the country is slow. There are many factors responsible for this phenomenon, but we shall discuss only few of them. The first is that true democracy is yet to exist in Nigeria. What exists now in the country is pseudo-democracy as it is fraught with undemocratic practices. Without democracy, national development will be extremely difficult. Andrew Efemini, in his article, "Ake's philosophy of development for Africa", puts it succinctly: "Genuine democracy will enable the people to repossess their development" (Efemini, 2002: 37). But instead, what we have been having in Nigeria since the nation's independence in 1960 has been more of dictatorship than Democracy. After the collapse of the first republic in 1966 *via* the civil war, much of the nation's leadership has been in the hands of the military. Even in the few cases of intermittent interruption by civil government, high level of dictatorial inclination has been intelligible. For instance, under President Obasanjo's civil government which is supposed to be democratic, many accusations of undemocratic acts were leveled against the federal government. Same as in the current dispensation.

The second reason is the misconception that technological advancement and economic development are the most important aspects of national development. Thinking in this line, therefore, successive Nigerian governments have concentrated on achieving technological and economic sophistication, and neglected the area of moral development, which is actually the most important aspect of national development. It is a wrong approach when we try to achieve technological, economic or even political development in a country where most people - both among the leaders and the led - are morally bankrupt. It is only when we have achieved personal or moral development of the people of a nation that this development will manifest in all other spheres of the nation's life. This will in turn hasten national development. This view is corroborated by Albert Schweitzer where, in his book, *Civilization and Ethics*, he writes that "the prosperity of a society depends on the moral disposition of its members" (Schweitzer, 1961: 76) Also, Joseph Omoregbe, in his book, *Knowing Philosophy*, reasons along this line:

Indeed, moral development is the most important aspect of national development, for there can be no development of a country if its citizens are morally undeveloped ... Neither science nor technology can develop a country if its citizens are not morally developed. (Omoregbe, 1990: 197)

The third factor responsible for the retardation of the Nigerian national development has been the negligence of education as a strong tool for national development. Education is yet to enjoy a pride of place in the Nigerian national development programme. It could be recalled that Japanese economy was in shambles immediately after the Second World War. What did the Japanese government do to change things in the right direction? The government voted about 30% of the country's annual budget to education and research. Today, Japanese economy is not only resuscitated but is also one of the strongest in the world. No wonder Leo Stan states: 'Let us give our youths knowledge for a better future'.

### Recommendations and Conclusion

From the foregoing discussions, it is clear that the crux of the problem of national development in Nigeria has been that of leadership. In other words, lack of foresight and sincerity of purpose of Nigerian leaders has been the predominant factor which hindered national development in the country, as is the case with most other African nations. This was why Claude Ake, while expressing his frustration with the quality of leadership in Africa and the need for a change, writes:

Throughout Africa ordinary people are demanding a second independence, this time from the indigenous leadership whose economic mismanagement, together with brutal repression, have made mere survival all but impossible. (Efemini, 2002: 37)

Therefore, our leaders in Nigeria must imbibe the spirit of genuine democracy. They should also begin to reflect, in the Nigerian economic programme, policies that will address moral development in Nigeria as paramount to any other aspect of development. This has to be done, bearing in mind that once moral development is achieved every other aspect of development, including technological, political and economic, will follow. This will culminate in an enhanced and ever-progressive national development. Part of this new national economic programme should have moral instruction as part of the academic curriculum. This will provide the opportunity for political office-holders to undergo a good training in moral instruction. The great Philosopher, Plato, had anticipated the hopelessness of a society whose leaders are not men of integrity or philosophers when he declared:

Until philosophers are kings, or the kings and princes of this world have the spirit and power of philosophy, and political greatness and wisdom meet in one ... then only will this our state have a possibility of life and behold the light of day. (Popkin, 1973: 178)

Another important step is that education has to be given its pride of place in the process of Nigerian national development. Nigeria can emulate the Japanese example and vote much more of her annual budget to education. As education is indispensable in development, any country that neglects the education of her citizens denies herself *ipso facto* the opportunity to achieve national development. If all these recommendations are adhered to, with time Nigeria will begin to adequately utilize the great opportunity she has by the availability of abundant natural resources. The proper management of her economy will certainly lead to an enhanced and progressive national development, which will, in turn, immensely improve the living standard of the generality of the people. When that happens, it will be easier to handle the problem of corruption. In fact, corruption will be drastically reduced.

While condemning all forms of corruption, it must be stated that there is a strong affinity between poverty and crime or corruption. In other words, people who are economically balanced are more disposed to resist corruption than those who are not. However, it is of common knowledge that some people are in such deplorable and ceaseless quest for wealth after wealth that even in plenty, they still indulge in corruption. But then, in that case, they will be deservingly punished for corruption, unlike is the case today, where, strictly speaking, government indirectly shares in the blame for some acts of corruption for which people are punished. This is the case when government does not do enough to provide jobs for the ever-increasing number of graduates in our society. Experience has shown that the bad economic condition associated with joblessness has compelled many people to indulge in one social vice or the other.

Finally, Nigeria's leadership must turn a new leaf, in order to be in the proper position to drive the national economy to achieve national development. The nation's leadership must take its democratic practice seriously, and then eschew the practice of nepotism, tribalism and political witch-hunting. The wealth of the nation and positions must be shared in the spirit of fairness and equity. The nation's leadership must also address the problem of insecurity which is gradually eating up the nation. Breaking news, which is more often bad news, has become the order of the day. This must be done for the nation's leadership to effectively achieve national development with the nation's economy.

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