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The Nigerian State and the Development Question: A Brief Interpretation of selected Policies

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Abstract

It is common knowledge that the Nigerian State like in most of Africa is trapped in the "development dilemma" which is a catch phrase denoting a state of underdevelopment with all its concomitants. The paper examines the character of the Nigerian State and how that affects the development question. It poses the following questions: what is character of the Nigerian State and how does that affect its efforts in addressing the country's development question? What type of development is the State pursuing? And what are its implications on people-oriented development that is endogenous? The central argument or thrust of the paper is that the Nigerian State is an instrument that serves the interests of the class that controls it and therefore it is a capitalist State and pursues the interests of capital even in its development policies. It focuses albeit in brief on the Nigerian State's policies of OFN, Green Revolution, import-substitution industrialization, and the neoliberal economic reforms of privatization and deregulation. It concludes that overall these policies do not promote people-oriented and endogenous development which invariably has not answered the development question of Nigeria and the majority of Nigerians. The paper recommends among others the transformation of the Nigerian State and the redefinition of development to give it an endogenous meaning which aligns with the people's genuine needs, interests and aspirations. Data was generated mainly from secondary sources.

Key words: Nigerian State, Development, Operation Feed the Nation, Green Revolution, Import-substitution industrialization.

Introduction

The development question remains central to the activities of the State qua State. It is the driving force and ideological framework of most public policies of the State regardless of whether it is in a developed or developing society. It is common knowledge that the Nigerian State like in most of Africa is trapped in the "development dilemma" (Dibua. 2006) which is a catch phrase denoting a state of underdevelopment with all its concomitants (Tijani, 2008, p. 137). Indeed, it is argued that 1950s "witnessed the ascendancy of the state in theoretical and policy considerations of the African predicament, with a lot of effort being sunk into attempts to strengthen further relevant institutions as a way out of the legacy of underdevelopment" (Agbaje, 1991, p. 723). Again, the post-colonial state in Africa has continued to occupy the centre stage in African political space (Animashaun, 2009, p. 48). At the heart of this occupation is how the State can promote development and liquidate underdevelopment. And the Nigerian State since inception has been involved in several attempts at engendering development to make life more meaningful for the teeming population of Nigerians who are suffering under the heavy weight of poverty, unemployment, insecurity, lack of basic infrastructure etc.

It goes without saying that given the subsisting state of the Nigerian economy the development question remains unresolved despite several efforts and policies of the Nigerian State in tackling the issue. The pertinent questions to ask are: what is character of the Nigerian State and how does that affect its efforts in addressing the country's development question?

What type of development is the State pursuing? And what are its implications on people-oriented development that is endogenous? These are some the questions this paper will attempt to answer. The central argument or thrust of the paper is that the Nigerian State following the Marxian interpretation of the State is an instrument that serves the interests of the class that controls it and therefore it is a capitalist State and pursues the interests of the capitalist even in its development policies. This pursuit does not promote people-oriented and self-reliant development which invariably has not answered the development question of Nigeria and the majority of Nigerians. Narrowing on a few economic policies of the Nigerian State we see the perpetuation and continuation of the capitalist/modernist ideology of development.

The paper is divided into the following five sections: firstly is the introduction above; section two addresses conceptual clarifications of the Nigerian State and development; section three is an examination of the Nigerian State and some selected development policies; the fourth section is the conclusion; and the final section is recommendations. The paper relies solely on secondary sources for the generation of data.

Conceptual Clarifications

The Nigerian State

In the lexicon of political science there is no consensus on the definition of the 'state'. In fact, there are various definitions of the state as there are scholars who have contributed to understanding it (Keller, 1991, p. 134). Consequently, Keller hints that despite the variegated meanings of the state, scholars agree that the state is more than just government; it exists at two fundamental levels namely; concrete and abstract levels. He explains:

> At the concrete level, it is represented in a juridical defined, sovereign territory, in governmental institutions, and in political organizations used by those who govern to achieve the goals of the regime. At the abstract level the state is represented in its ideology. That ideology is articulated in a regime's political rhetoric, in the language of the rules governing relations between state and society, and among citizens (p. 136).

The state is the basic modern organizational condition for existence, which influences all actions within its jurisdictional competence (Olaitan, 2006, p. 62). It "is seen as the binding, organizing principle of the political order- the arena within which processes for authoritative allocation of social values takes place. Individuals, groups and organizations are seen as part of the political order when they participate in these processes" (Lewis, 2002, p. 575).

Nothing has been more central to the political economy of Nigeria and indeed the development question than issues concerning the nature and powers of the state. The nature and character of the state and its operators, actors and agencies determine the trajectory and quality of development. The Nigerian state is a product of British imperialism and colonialism (Ekekwe, 1986). Indeed, what we call the modern Nigerian state originated when capitalism established colonialism in many parts of Africa. Thus, the Nigerian state was a colonial creation. It was established to monitor and supervise capitalist penetration into pre-capitalist Nigerian societies. There is a consensus among most scholars and students of African state (from where the Nigerian state can be located) that the post-colonial state has woefully failed in achieving people-oriented development in the continent while those who manage the state and their cronies continue to enjoy unfettered access to state resources through a well-oiled patron-client system. This has earned the state in Africa such adjectives as 'the rentier state', 'the prebendal state', 'the kleptocratic state', 'the predatory state', 'the failed state', 'the neo-patrimonial state', and 'the over-bloated state' (Animashaun, 2009; Olayode, 2005).

To understand the Nigerian state, one needs to start by looking at the state and its relations to the social formation. The point of immediate interest here is that the state in virtually every social formation of post-colonial Africa is institutionally constituted in such a way that it enjoys highly limited autonomy from the social classes particularly the hegemonic/ruling class and so is immersed in the class struggle being an instrument of class domination. This we must say is contrary to the pluralist view of the State held mostly by Western liberal scholars which suggests that the state is a 'neutral arbiter' and operates in the public interest or 'national good' (Thomson, 2010, p. 6). To this end, Aaron aptly argues that the State as a neutral arena for competing interests is "Essentially seen as an the unbiased umpire without a particular interest, the State is interpreted as an arena for smooth interplay of various groups, and public policy as a product of recurrent bargaining by these contending groups" (Aaron, 2006, p. 36). Again, Ekekwe (1986) notes that the neutrality of the State is a liberal view which postulates that it merely balances things out between competing elite groups. According to this view, there is no ruling class as such in society; therefore, state power is not exercised in favour of any such class. However, the Nigerian State from its colonial progenitor was/is not a "neutral arena or arbiter' but was/is unequivocally the instrument of the colonizing power in its struggle against the colonized. It mobilized force to impose an administration and to structure the colonial economy in such a way that the balance of rewards was overwhelmingly in favour of the metro-pole and its internal collaborators (Ake, 1988). Furthermore, Ake (1988) argues to underline the interventionist and instrumentalist nature of the African state that:

> Contrary to the usual requirements of capitalism, the colonial state was firmly committed to the intervention of force into the labour process. Force was used to break up pre-capitalist social relations of production, to force peasants into the labour market and to the monetary economy (p. 19).

Against the above, Ake provides us with an understanding of the specificity of the state in Africa nay Nigeria when he avers that the state, "Is a specific modality of class domination mediated by commodity exchange so that the system of institutional mechanism of domination is differentiated and dissociated from the ruling class and even the society and appears as an objective force standing alongside society (Ake, 1984; Ihonvbere, 1989).
In other words:

> The state form of domination is the modality in which the system of mechanism of class domination is autonomised, that is, the institutional apparatus of class domination is largely independent of social classes, including the hegemonic social class (Ake, 1984).

While agreeing with the characterization of the state as a system of domination, albeit in "principle", Anikpo (1991) however, notes that, this definition has an inherent problem of "over-abstraction", which portrays the state as "something hanging above society". Nonetheless, he subscribes to the notion that the state is an instrument of class domination and exploitation. Viewed in this light, the state is referred to:

> ….the existence within any society of this type of coercive apparatus with hegemonic authority capable of stratifying the population into identifiable social classes having differential access to the means of production or the means of accumulating surplus with the attendant hegemonic domination of one class by another (Anikpo, 1991, p. 30).

Considering the Nigerian state from this perspective, it must not be suggested or imagined that the state or the ruling class that controls it is monolithic. The State in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular has very limited autonomy and therefore is immersed in the class struggle. This fact is rooted in the historical emergence of the state. This has had a peculiar impact on the Nigerian state particularly in the post-colonial era. A unique feature of the post-colonial socio-economic formation as Ake (1985, p. 3) aptly puts it is that, the state is non-autonomised and unhegemonic, especially in relation to both foreign and local capital, and to its other constitutive social forces. The non-autonomization of the Nigerian state largely reflects the nature of the country's socio-economic formation. Therefore, unlike the socio-economic formations of capitalist countries like United States, Britain, France, etc., the Nigerian socio-economic formation according to Eteng (1998) manifests the following structural conditions among others; externalization and peripheralisation of the national economy; rudimentary development of production forces as well as commodity production and exchange; inequitable distribution, intense class and communal competition inducing frequent and violent conflicts; and constant political instability. While agreeing with Ake's conceptualization of the Nigerian state, Eteng outlines some of the major implications of the limited autonomy of the Nigerian state. These include; political struggles have generally been utterly Hobbesian, where right is highly co-extensive with might; power is everything, since state power yields wealth, status, privilege, protection and social unaccountability; legitimacy of power and political processes becomes extremely problematic. Consequently, crisis of authority and nation building becomes endemic; the state and its managers and cohorts inevitably become immersed in the prevailing capitalist production and exchange relations and their inherent class contradictions and conflicts, etc (Eteng, 1998). Structurally, the Nigerian state is a tributary and rentier-state. Thus:

> The class position and interests of the state managers and the ruling class it serves, however, impel the state to underwrite its existence through mechanisms of primitive accumulation; excessive taxation, oil royalties, land rents and taxes from oil companies and other industries, and expropriation of the peasants in general, and oil bearing communities, in particular (Eteng, 1998, p. 5).

In so far as the Nigerian state remains peripheral, it will continue to reinforce the idea that the state is an instrument of domination, perpetrating in the process structural and institutional inequalities and inequities. In this sense, the character and the role the Nigerian state is a reflection of its historical origin rooted in capitalist development in the country. The Nigerian state is a neo-colonial, dependent, peripheral capitalist state. Therefore, rather than operating as an organ of society for the protection of public interests and promotion of people-oriented development, the state acts as an organ for the promotion of the interests of its controllers (Olaitan, 2006; Olayode, 2005/6).

Concept of Development

The term development has attracted many and varying definitions. Consequently, there are as many definitions as there are scholars who have made contributions on the concept. However, our aim is not to survey the many definitions of development, but to give insight to what is people-oriented development which the Nigerian State has failed to achieve in its development efforts and policies. For Rogers (1969), development is a type of social change in which ideas are introduced into a social system in order to produce higher per capita incomes and levels of living through more modern production methods and improved social organization. This underscores the growth as development concept which Western liberal scholarship promotes under the broad concept of modernization. Modernization suggests the diffusion of modern ideas and values from capitalist and industrialized societies to non-capitalist and unindustrialized societies for the purposes of social change (Naanem, 2015). According to Inglehart and Welzel:

> Modernization is a syndrome of social changes... Once set in motion, it tends to penetrate all aspects of life, bringing occupational specialization, urbanization, rising educational levels, rising life expectancy, and rapid economic growth. These create a self-reinforcing process that transforms social life and institutions, bringing mass participation in politics (Inglehart and Welzel, 2009, pp. 1-2).

In this context, it is assumed that a society which is experiencing rapid growth is also developing. Economic growth in a country is associated with high Gross National Product (GNP), high Gross Domestic Product (GDP), high per capita income, etc (Efemini, 2004, pp. 34-48). However, this view has been seriously challenged by a number of scholars especially in Africa. These scholars have argued that GNP, GDP and per capital income are not authentic indices of development. That development in its genuine and authentic sense must focus on the people. Development is a human centered concept. Development really has little or no meaning when situated outside the context of human beings (Efemini, 2004). To this end, Ake notes that:

> Growth, essentially as it is for creating the resources that can provide with a better life, is not an assurance by itself of people-centered development. The process of growth has to be oriented so as to raise the income and productivity of the poor and their natural resources and the environment (Ake, 1992, p. 9).

At a more general and practical level, development can be conceived as a continuous process of sustainable and positive changes in people's social, economic, political and environmental life. Development should be an integrated and holistic process that meets people's economic, political, social, cultural and environmental needs and improves the quality of their life. Development is people-centered, participatory and environmentally sound. It involves not just economic growth, but equitable distribution, enhancement of people capabilities and widening of choices (Onokerhoraye, 2006). This much is buttressed by Adedeji (1982) when he incisively asserts that:

> … we need to set in motion a development progress that puts the individual effort: a development process that is both human and humane without necessarily softening the disciple that goes with development but which enhances man's personality; a development process that does not alienate man from his society and culture but rather develops his self-confidence in himself and identifies his interest with those of his society and thereby develops his ability and willingness for self-reliance (p. 209).

Development therefore should center on the needs of the people and guarantee their participation. Development should be seen as:

> … a process of self-reliant growth achieved through the participation of people acting in their own interest as they see them and under their own control. Its objective must be to end poverty, provide production, employment and satisfy the basic needs of all the people, any surplus being fairly shared (South Commission Report, 1990, p. 13).

Development requires the full participation of people in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of the decisions determining the functioning and well-being of the community or society. Thus strengthening the capacities and opportunities of the people, especially those who are disadvantaged or vulnerable, to enhance their own economic and social capacity, to establish and maintain organizations representing their interests and to be involved in the planning and implementation of government policies and programmes by which they will be directly affected. This idea of development is premised on the realization that people do not fully commit themselves to a development undertaking unless that undertaking corresponds to their deeply felt needs. For the "ultimate purpose of development must be the development of people" (Asante, 1995, p. 6). Therefore, Ake (1996) elucidates:

> Development is not economic growth even though economic growth in large measure determines its possibilities… Development is not a project but a process. Development is a process by which people create and recreate themselves and their life circumstances to realize higher levels of civilization in accordance with their own choices and values. Development is something that people must do for themselves (p. 125).

To this end, development requires the total involvement of the people who are in the first instance the defining object of the development process. Development is not an exogenous process but an endogenous process. This should be the driving ideology and motive of the Nigerian State. The paper now examines selected development policies of the Nigerian State and their implications on people-centred and oriented development.

The Nigerian State and selected development policies:

As noted earlier, the Nigerian State has always pursued and implemented development policies based on the interests of the ruling class (controllers of the State). This class is divided into two broad groups, namely, the traditional and the modern. This will detain us here. Suffice it to say that this class is a direct product of British colonialism- those who took over the realms of political and economic leadership from the colonialists and started administering the country under the post-colonial capitalist order. And it is committed to promoting the attitudes and ideology of capitalism and maintaining the peripheral status of the country in the global capitalist system (Orugbani, 2002, pp. 108-109).

The first development policy to be briefly examined here is the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) programme of the military government of Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo. This programme was launched on 21st May 1975. It was designed to drive home a sense of urgency into our national lives especially in establishing the need for the nation to develop the capacity to produce food for the teeming population (Okodudu, 1998, p. 180). The objectives behind the capitalist ideology of OFN include: to increase food (agricultural) production given the decline in food production; reduce food importation and foreign exchange flight; improve youth employment and halt the drift of young and able bodied youth migration from the rural to urban areas etc. It was reasoned that that OFN was to be Nigeria's launching pad to self-sufficiency in food production and foreign exchange earnings via massive food export (see Nsimiro, 1985). However, despite the laudable objectives of OFN, it is generally observed that the programme recorded massive failure. According to Okodudu (1998), this was fundamentally due to the "Faulty conception of the nature or character of the agrarian crisis… This reflects from the government resort to massive importation of farm inputs, ostensibly in response to reversing the nagging problem of massive importation of food" (p. 181). Beyond that, it is observed that the failure of such capitalist-oriented development policies is not unconnected to the character of the Nigerian state whose penchant is to impose laws on local farmers on what to produce, how to produce, and the use of modern technology, techniques and inputs like fertilizers (Ake, 1981).

Secondly, is the Green Revolution programme of 1980 of the civilian administration of Shehu Shagari. The main motive or objective of the Green Revolution was to tackle the crisis of hunger that plagued the country at the time. This crisis stemmed from the problem of 'food inadequacy'. The policy was to be actualized through different strategies including: establishment of agro industries, construction of feeder roads; the provision of housing, educational facilities, water, and electricity in the rural areas. The overall aims were to boost export of agricultural products and to increase food production (Okodudu, 1998, p. 182). However, like its predecessor (the OFN), the Green Revolution recorded monumental failure due to faulty conception and the proclivity of the Nigerian State to continue along the capitalist trajectory and ideology of development which does not prioritize the people and their needs but capitalist interests. Much of those who benefitted from the policy that promoted the 'modernization of hunger' as Nsimiro (1985) aptly put it were members of the ruling class and their cronies or 'political clients'.

What is more, the Nigerian State in an attempt to answer the 'development question' also implemented the policy of 'import-substitution industrialization'. This policy it was argued would intensify Nigeria's economic base, transfer technology to Nigeria, create employment opportunities and reduce dependence on foreign imports, *ipso facto* foreign debts (see Orugbani, 2002, p. 115). Again, this policy was a disaster and never fulfilled its stated or conceptualized objectives. Rather, "It only provided subsidiaries of multi-national corporations the opportunity to beat local customs barriers by having their products 'manufactured' locally. 'Made in Nigeria' in the context of import-substitution industrialization simply means the local assembly of well-established products of the transnational corporations" (Orugbani, 2002, pp.

115-116). This policy was simply and fundamentally not a genuine policy of industrialization through technology transfer. It only led to phoney-industrialization. And this is another typical example of the failure of the controllers of the Nigerian State to engage in real or genuine innovation and constructive thinking. Indeed, import-substitution industrialization was simply a sham and it ended up perpetuating neocolonialism and dependency. Nkrumah explains decades ago but one that resonates even in contemporary Nigeria that, "The neo-colonialism of today represents imperialism in its final and perhaps its most dangerous stage… The essence of neocolonialism is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside" (p.ix). Providing further insight on neo-colonialism, Altbach (1995) avers that:

> Modern neo-colonialism differs from traditional colonialism in that it does not involve direct political control, leaving substantial leeway to the developing country. It is similar, nevertheless, in that some aspects of domination by the advanced nation over the developing country remain. Neo-colonialism is partly a planned policy of advanced nations to maintain their influence in developing countries, but it is also simply a continuation of past practices (p. 452).

Thus, import-substitution industrialization is simply neocolonial entrapment- 'a continuation of past practices". Again, under the current democratic dispensation which began from May 29th 1999, the Nigerian State in line with contemporary global economic order characterized by globalization and in continuation of its 'development partnership' with global capital started implementing neoliberal economic reform/policies of privatization and deregulation (removal of subsidy from petrol). The reform fundamentally aimed among others, "To stem the tide of the malaise in state-owned enterprises and transfer of the ownership of public enterprises to private hands" (Obasanjo, 2014, p. 381). It was a development strategy aimed ostensibly at 'integrating the economy into the mainstream of global economic order' (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2001, p. 4-5), and opening it to private investments required for economic growth (Obasanjo, 2014; Okonjo-Iweala, 2012). The reform was embodied in the World Bank and IMF inspired Structural Adjustment Programmes (Dibua, 2006; Haynes, 2012).

Both privatization and deregulation have led to far-reaching effects on Nigeria's economy. Since the current privatization exercise began more than 100 state-owned enterprises have been privatized including aluminum, telecommunication, petrochemical, insurance, hotels, energy etc (Obasanjo, 2014; Okonjo-Iweala, 2012). Also, the Nigerian State has had to remove fuel subsidy for unaccountable times, the last was at the inauguration of the Tinubu APC-led government on May 29th 2023. The Nigerian State against the harsh economic realities of its own development policies has remained committed to the neoliberal economic ideology, refusing to change course with grievous implications on development and majority of Nigerians. That these neoliberal economic policies are carried out by the Nigerian State at a period of the 'third wave of democracy' (Huntington, 1991), raises another challenge and/or contradiction. This is what Mkandawire (1999a) aptly described as "choiceless democracy". That is, a condition in which the exigencies of the neoliberal order limit policy choices of new democracies like Nigeria to market-oriented policies. Following this, it is further argued that the economic reform in contemporary Nigeria effectively ensured disconnect or de-linkage between public policy and social needs and welfare of poor and vulnerable people (Lewis, 2003; Obi, 2004; Obianyo, 2008). It has to be stated that neoliberal economic reform/policies of the Nigerian State are mainly defined in light of economic and financial aims and analyses so that they ignore social aspects of society. This oversight creates and poses two fundamental challenges namely: by having growth as the central aim neoliberal economic policies are overlooking the aim of equity and run the danger of unacceptable social costs; and by overstressing economic reforms they neglect social imbalances and social content of reforms. We see manifests in the increasing levels of inequality, poverty and unemployment in the country.

To begin with, The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), a Federal Government agency responsible for collating statistical data on Nigeria's economy has consistently reported negative outcomes to date. In 2011 it reported that 72% of Nigerians live on less than $1 a day. The 2011 poverty level is higher than that of 2010 and 2004 put at 69% and 54% respectively (NBS, 2011a). Similarly, the Federal Government admits that "despite GDP growth, unemployment rate in Nigeria increased from 19.7 in 2009 to 21.1% and 23.9% in 2010 and 2011 respectively" (Federal Government, 2014:5). Furthermore, in 2023 nearly 12% of the world population in extreme poverty live in Nigeria. NBS 2022 report shows that 63% of Nigerians (133 million) are multi-dimensionally poor. In fact, the World Bank has noted that with the removal of fuel subsidy more Nigerians would further slip into poverty at the end of 2023 and if the right measures or incentives are not put in place to help and protect poor Nigerians the situation will be worse. Also, in a study carried out by the Manufacturing Association of Nigeria (MAN) it was discovered that at least 800 companies closed shop between 2009 and 2015, due to the harsh operation business environment related to poor infrastructure and epileptic power supply occasioned by the general abysmal state of the Nigerian economy and wrong policies of the political elites. The study further notes that whilst the cost of production in the sector has risen exponentially, the government has failed to provide the right economic policies to incentivize the manufacturing sector which is a veritable source of revenue, employment generation, and rapid industrialization. A situation that partly accounts for the worsening economic indices (Premium Times, 11 September, 2016). The grim verdict is that "Sadly, it would seem, Nigeria's leadership (that is, the Nigerian State) has not learnt any lesson" (Aaron, 2006). It has rather taken the path of failure in the attempt to answer the "development question".

Conclusion

Without doubt the Nigerian State has failed to address the country's "development question" being committed to pursuing and promoting the interests of its controllers. It is our conclusion that the character of the Nigerian State affects the type and direction of its development policies. As long as the State continues to maintain its current character the development question will remain unanswered. This inevitably underscores the need to both transform the State and redefine its development ideology.

Recommendations

Following the above analysis and conclusion, the paper recommends as follows:

1. There is the imperative of changing or transforming the State by making it more democratic and accountable to the people. This should be done in line with demands by majority of Nigerians for a more democratic Nigerians State where votes count and the voice of the people matters. We must have a people's State and not the State of the political elites and their cronies.
2. The Nigerian State should redefine the whole concept of development to align with the needs, aspirations and interests of majority of Nigerians. Development should and must be endogenous and people-centred or oriented. Some of the elements of endogenous development include: the need to ensure that development programmes and policies of the State are designed by and for the people concerned so as to put an end to the growing erosion of sovereignty or independence; ensuring the popularization of development programmes and policies so that the population or people can fully identify the objectives and intentions of the programmes and policies; and promote greater partnership and cooperation between the local people or population and 'development agents' (Asante, 1991, p. 178).
3. Civil society and community-based organizations should be empowered and integrated into the whole development process. Attention should be paid to organizations and institutions that are directly and genuinely connected or related to the people especially in local or rural communities. Whatever development efforts by and opportunities from the Nigerian State and foreign development agents should focus on those organization that are community-based. This is one way to promote endogenous and self-reliant development- a development process that draws from local experience and needs.
4. Foreign development agencies should also prioritize local content in their development partnership and promotion. No effort should be spared in integrating local knowledge, experience and need in the conception and implementation of development policies.

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