

## Constraints and Challenges of Development Planning in Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

Successive regimes and administrations in Nigeria, both military and civilian, have engaged in one form of development planning or the other. Given that poverty reduction and job creation has been the central theme of most of the development plans within the period under study, after several decades of planning, if the rate of poverty and unemployment has increased, then it means either minimal success or outright failure of development plans. This study therefore investigated the major reasons that have made development plans unsuccessful in Nigeria. The study adopted a desk research method, thus data were sourced exclusively from secondary sources. A search through the major literatures on development planning in Nigeria revealed that eleven thematic issues constitute the constraints and challenges of development planning in Nigeria. This study found that of all the constraints and challenges to planning in Nigeria, 'Dictatorship of Planning' is the most serious challenge to planning, which previous studies are yet to identify as a challenge. The study thus recommended the 'Decentralization and Democratization of Planning' in Nigeria, among other recommendations.

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### INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a federal republic made up of 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. She is located in the West Africa region and shares land borders with Benin Republic in the west, Cameroon and Chad in the east, and Niger Republic in the north. Its coast in the south lies on the Gulf of Guinea by the Atlantic Ocean. There are over 200 ethnic groups in Nigeria of which the three largest ethnic groups are the Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba (National Institute for Legislative Studies [NILS], 2015). It is an oil rich country, ranked as seventh in terms of proven oil and natural gas reserve with an estimated reserve of 5.246 trillion cubic meters as at 1 January 2010 (CIA, 2015). She is blessed with both natural and human resources in abundance, including fertile soil and favorable climate suitable for agricultural purposes. Indeed, Nigeria was self-sufficient in food production until the civil war in the late 1960s.

Nigeria's natural endowment extends to its geography and climate. She occupies a land area of 923, 768 sq. km (356, 669 sq. mi), thus she is the world's 32<sup>nd</sup> largest country after Tanzania. She is about twice the size of California and comparable in size to Venezuela. In terms of climate, Nigeria has a varying climate; it is equatorial in the south, tropical in the center and arid in the north with an average rainfall of 198cm throughout the country. Rainfall varies throughout the country, though with some parts experiencing lows of 50cm and some parts experiencing highs of 430cm (NILS, 2015). All these combined make it suitable for sustainable economic development, job creation and poverty reduction, under a well-coordinated National Development Plan.

Thus, because of these vast natural endowments, coupled with the enormous revenue generated therefrom, there was great expectation that Nigeria's independence (in 1960) will lead to her development. She (Nigeria) was expected to move from her underdeveloped state to a developed prosperous country, where poverty, unemployment and low standard of living have no place. There was great hope that in few decades after independence, Nigeria will rank high in the comity of nations standing at par with other developed countries of the world. However, having the resources (potentials) is one thing and using or being able to harness the potentials to develop or lay a foundation for prosperity is another thing. Planning therefore becomes not only critical, but also imperative.

Planning seeks to induce a desirable state of being. It involves assessment of one's resources at present and allocation of same among different uses so as to meet some specific goals now or in the future. Management

scholars and practitioners perceive planning as a basic management function that involves formulation of one or more detailed plans in order to achieve optimum balance of needs or demands with the available resources. “The planning process sought to identify the goals or objectives to be achieved, formulates strategies to achieve them, arranges or creates the means required, and implements, directs, and monitors all steps in their proper sequence” (Anyebe, 2001).

Unfortunately, the case of Nigeria’s development planning efforts, from first republic to the current democratic dispensation, seems to be minimal performance. While one would have expected that because of her potentials as highlighted in the preceding section of this study and decades of successive planning efforts, there would have been aggressive, rapid and all round development in Nigeria. Reverse seems to regrettably be the case, going by disturbing level of poverty, unemployment and infrastructural decay therein. Among others, the plans have entailed budgetary/financial provision; enabling legal/regulatory framework; establishment of enabling institution, such as the National Planning Commission, National Bureau of Statistics, and schools, among others and training of personnel thereof.

The fact is that when planning commenced after independence in the 1960s, poverty, unemployment and inequality were not as alarming as obtained today. Although, there were inadequate statistics on poverty and unemployment rate prior to 1980, available statistics on poverty in the 1980s-90s reveal that the proportion of Nigeria population living below the poverty line is as follows: 28.1 percent in 1980, 46.3 percent in 1985, 49.1 percent in 1990 and 42.7 percent in 1992 (NILS, 2015). As for unemployment, the statistics are 7.4 percent of total labor force (1991-94) and 7.5 percent of total labor force (1995-99). However, by 2010 poverty incidence has jumped to 70 percent before dropping to 69 percent in 2019, while unemployment increased to 23.1 percent as at third quarter of 2019 (NBS, 2016, 2019). Thus, given that poverty reduction and job creation has been the central theme of most of the plans within the period under study, after several decades of development planning, if the rate of poverty and unemployment has increased, then it means either minimal success or outright failure of development planning.

This study therefore seeks to identify the major reasons that have made development plans unsuccessful in Nigeria. Specifically, this study attempts to answer the research question: “What are the reasons that have made development plans unsuccessful in Nigeria?”

#### Literature Review

Development plans fail for various reasons. The reasons for the minimal performance of development plans in Nigeria have been well researched and debated by academics and researchers. However, each researcher tends to differ from the others on factors accounting for plan failure in post-colonial Nigeria.

Aboyade (1983) posits that planning in Nigeria is characterized by overly ambitious plans, which seek to achieve too many objectives with unrealistic targets, not mindful of the weak nature of the country’s economy; this accounts for plan failures. Notable also is the issue of conflicts in objectives occasioned by western planning theories. In fact, Aboyade (1983:12) notes that:

*On the relatively poor results of planning in Nigeria and many other developing countries, the crisis is a direct consequence of the crisis of planners, resulting from a crisis of (Western) planning theories. Compounding all these are inherent weaknesses in third world economies themselves, both in their market mechanism and in their public administration.*

In concurrence, Fajingbesi (2011) argues that many of the plans have been unrealistic in terms of their scope, resource availability and output, which has been responsible for the non-realization of the targets. Thus, the difficulty of planning in an environment of volatile and unpredictable revenues was, therefore, the major reason for the abandonment of the fixed medium-term planning model. He further posits that the review of the development planning effort in Nigeria suggests that for the most part, there has been an implicit assumption that the implementation of the plan will be sufficient to achieve its objective. The reality of underdevelopment in spite of successive plans however belies such an assumption.

This study notes that, although it is true that western planning theories have not been successful in most African countries, the issue of weaknesses in third world economies, poor market mechanism and public administration, as noted by Aboyade (1983) can be linked to endemic corruption in Nigeria’s public administration; which is

consequent upon the get-rich-quick syndrome. Bureaucratic elites corruptly manipulate the economy and market, on behalf of the political class, to create opportunities that favor only the dominant economic classes; this is in spite of the unpredictable revenues as noted by Fajingbesi (2011).

Obadan (2003) asserted that large-scale corruption has emerged especially since the oil boom era, and is still a major problem affecting planning, particularly, at the implementation stage. The net effect is that costs of the projects are inflated, resources are diverted into private pockets, project execution is delayed, and fewer projects are fully executed while many are abandoned. While Ejumudo (2013) concludes that corruption has been institutionalized and raised to the level of a structural parameter, thus it has become part of the value-system of Nigeria. As a remedy, Bamiduro and Babatunde (2006) recommended that the war against corruption must be total and comprehensive, to ensure discipline, which is the root of economic development and empowerment.

Obadan (2003) and Ejumudo (2013) rightly observe that corruption is a major threat to Nigeria planning efforts; however, one needs to view the issue in relation to indiscipline that has become a culture in Nigeria. This culture of indiscipline has taken the form of financial indiscipline and plan indiscipline. While financial indiscipline can be linked to corruption, scholars give a comprehensive view of plan indiscipline. When scholars use the word 'indiscipline' in the context of planning, it means introducing new projects and programs not designed for execution within a plan period. This has been viewed as a major factor responsible for distortions in Nigeria's planning efforts (Obadan, 2003; Ukah 2007; Adeyemo, *et al.*, 2008; Marcellus, 2009; Bambale, 2011; Ojo, 2012; Ejumudo, 2013; Akims and Kromtit 2013; Anyanwu, 2015; Fajingbesi, 2015).

Ojo (2012) particularly links plan indiscipline to budget indiscipline in form of financial recklessness. He argues that such financial recklessness has contributed in no small measure to the present economic predicament of the country. Also commenting on plan indiscipline, Marcellus (2009) posits that when government draws a plan and the actual programs and policies pursued differ from the plan projection, we have a situation where plans do not guide government actions. However, for Ejumudo (2013), Nigerians seem to lack plan discipline and the political will to keep to development plans.

To argue that development plan fails in Nigeria due to indiscipline is over simplifying the issue. The question is who is undisciplined? Is it the policy makers or the bureaucratic elites (who are the engine room of plan implementation) or the masses (who are denied the opportunity to participate in the plan process)? The answer will definitely lead us to examine the role of leadership in the plan process. Unfortunately, Nigeria has not been that lucky in this regard.

Ayodele, *et al.* (2013) argue that it is easily discernible that Nigeria has capable people and immense natural and human resources, but the political system does not generate the kind of leadership that Nigeria needs to propel itself forward. Nigerian leadership seems to be trapped in tribal politics and electoral fraud, in which the best people mostly are not elected into offices. Obadan (2003) thus concludes that the observed mixed performance of Nigeria planning efforts is not due to inherent weaknesses of planning as a development strategy, but to the inherent weaknesses in the economy, the crisis of the planners and political leadership and their inability to formulate realistic plans and implement them in a disciplined manner. He thus infers that plans failure is due to incompetent leaders presiding over the planning process.

Other scholars who argue along a similar line of thought include Saliu (2007), Marcellus (2009), Lawal and Oluwatoyin (2011), and Obisanya (2014). Saliu (2007) in his article titled '*Facing the Challenges of Reforms*', attempts to answer the research question "what are the reform implementation challenges that face the country in giving a new focus and direction to the political economy?" One of his key findings is that Nigeria has not been fortunate to have nationalistic and patriotic political class/elite. Reform is a disciplined approach to re-ordering of priorities. It takes a disciplined mind to bring about a disciplinary measure, unfortunately, "most Nigerian politicians are rapacious, greedy, self-centered and undisciplined." How to transform the Nigerian political class to be reform-conscious is therefore a challenge that faces the reform program.

However, some scholars will rather hold the institutions of planning responsible for plan failures. These scholars opine that with a strong institution the strength of the individual actors in the plan process becomes insignificant. The main submission of Osabuohien, *et al* (2012), for instance, is that the reason for low economic outcomes in Nigeria is understood by weak institutional framework, as most of the development plans were not backed up with institutional transformation. The study concludes by suggesting the need for systematic technical assistance by development partners, to achieve institutional transformation. This includes the role of the regional communities,

such as African Union, and ECOWAS, among others, to enforce institutional development of member countries. Saliu (2007) on his part thus suggests the need to perfect the relevant structures/institutions, which implement reform programs, and bring new ones into being through appropriate legislations. The author believes that if the institutions of reform are strong, they can stand on their own, either with the initiators still in power or not.

Although, it can be argued that planning institutions in Nigeria need to be reformed to make them stronger, this study disagrees with Osabuohien, *et al.* (2012) suggestion. The authors' recommendation for systematic technical assistance by development partners will further deepen the cord of dependency and exploitation by foreign capitalist interest. It may create a situation whereby Nigeria's planning effort is doctored by external forces. A better option would have been such that rely on internal arrangement, as the country is not lacking in development experts. The only recurring challenge faced by most of these indigenous development experts is the paucity of data. Nigeria is lacking in accurate and up to date data, which is a *sine qua non* for good planning.

According to Obadan (2003), paucity and poor quality of information and data led Stopler (1966), a major architect of the 1962-68 plan, to title his book on Nigeria's development planning experience as '*Planning Without Facts*'. Ojo (2012) posits that weak database is a major hindrance to Nigeria planning efforts. In most cases, forecasts are done based on grossly inadequate information, thereby, resulting in distorted growth. Perhaps, this is what led Ukertor (2012) to recommend the need to strengthen the data capacity base through strengthening the human and institutional capacity of statistical services especially at the state and local government levels, while instituting a robust monitoring and evaluation system for development plans. Indeed, Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) needs to put in more efforts in generating accurate and up to date data, as most researchers can confirm that it is not easy gathering data for a study in which Nigeria is a case study. Accurate data will facilitate accurate planning, reliable forecasting, empirical based research, and people oriented policies.

Federalism is also a problem of planning in Nigeria. This is the position of scholars like Akpobasah (2004), Fajingbesi (2011), Ukertor (2012), Ojo (2012) and Ayodele *et al.* (2013) who are all of the view that the federalist nature of Nigeria is a major challenge that impedes plans' success. Akpobasah (2004) particularly submits that one of the challenges of National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) is that the states and local governments may not have the will and capacity to prepare their State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (SEEDS) and Local Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (LEEDS) that are compatible with the thrust of NEEDS. Fajingbesi (2011:28) was more precise in putting forward the challenges of planning in a federal system of government. According to him:

*Fiscal decentralization in Nigeria implies that state and local governments are responsible for nearly half of consolidated government expenditures. They also possess significant independence in their expenditure decisions, which are supposed to be targeted at the delivery of social services (such as health and education). There is lack of commitment at the lower tiers of government, which represents a major challenge for the implementation of development plans in Nigeria.*

Ayodele, *et al.* (2013) argues that plan failure in Nigeria can be traced to the federal character policy, which creates a situation where appointments are not based on merit. The authors thus conclude that this policy is unnecessary at this stage of national development.

This study, however, disagrees with the position of Ayodele, *et al.* (2013) which concludes that the federal character policy is unnecessary at this stage of national development. It is this researcher's submission that factors, which necessitated the introduction of the federal character policy, are still alive in the Nigerian polity today; so much that federal character in form of Zoning of political offices has found acceptance among the political elites and electorates. In fact, the crisis which engulfed the 8<sup>th</sup> National Assembly principal officers' selection process could be seen as a case of the need to stick to zoning arrangement (i.e. federal character) in the selection process. The Members of Parliament were careful to ensure that the principal officers elected reflect the federal character of Nigeria so as not to lose the support of the electorates of any geo-political zone.

Another major factor accounting for plan failure in Nigeria is insecurity. Gyong (2012) posits that the upsurge of insecurity of lives and properties across the country is a major challenge to the success of the Transformation Agenda. While Ayodele, *et al.* (2013) conclude that poor security threatens the stability of the polity and safety in the economic and social sectors of society, thus greatly discouraging foreign direct investment and undermine

economic growth. Akims and Kromtit (2013) thus recommended that the government should direct its efforts towards winning the confidence of the private sector. This can be done through the provision of infrastructural facilities as well as combating insecurity in the country by embarking on the training and re-training of security agencies in handling modern crime in the country which has taken an advanced direction in the form of kidnapping and insurgency. This they argued would enable development planning to deliver the expected development outcomes in the country.

This study is however of the opinion that even if Nigeria embarks on the training and re-training of security agencies in handling modern crime in the country, without inclusiveness in the affairs of the country, insecurity will persist. There is a need for inclusiveness in terms of plan formulation, plan implementation and plan benefits. A situation where a negligible few control the planning process, including the accruing benefits, will not go down well with the downtrodden. This deprivation thus makes them prone to crime in form of militancy, kidnapping, armed robbery and even insurgency, among other forms of crime.

Another bane of development plans in Nigeria is policy instability. Ukah (2007) argues that political instability in Nigeria results in frequent changes of government and policy priorities. This has ended up in projects and programs being abandoned after colossal amounts of scarce resources have been invested. Obadan (2003) concludes that political and policy instability as well as frequent changes of government and key personnel contributes significantly to the abandonment of projects all over the country. Saliu (2007) on his path argues that reform programs in Nigeria do not outlive the regime that initiated them, that is why reforms are not sustainable.

One may argue that the blame of policy instability rest squarely on the political class who sometimes choose project sites based on political and selfish interest and not rational economic calculation and national interest. Most important, is the fact that the dominant economic class use state power and apparatus to consolidate their economic base. Most of them come to power with weak economic base. They thus use the pretext of planning for development to engage in white elephant projects that will afford them the opportunity to award dubious contracts to their cronies and allies. Sometimes the political class is more interested in the kickbacks from the awarded projects, never minding whether the projects are viable, necessary or even completed. The political class also refuses to acknowledge the financial constraints, which the country some time finds itself in and thus has the tendency of affecting performance of development plans.

Financial constraint is also an important factor accounting for plan failures. According to Obadan (2003) plans have been affected by financial strangulations which were due to declines in projected revenue, cost escalation due to factors such as inflation, underestimation of project costs, increases in scope, delays in design and completion of projects. Unexpected and random economic disturbances also contribute significantly to fiscal crisis, an example is the oil market shocks. In concurrence, Ukah (2007) argues that shortage of funds and delays in capital release to finance projects have serious cost implications for projects completion. This has resulted in unplanned increase on initial estimates of project cost.

Ukertor (2012) on his path looks at the issue from the oil boom angle. To him, this has affected the mentality of policy makers as they felt money was not a problem but how to spend it. This has also influenced the penchant for white elephant projects that have no direct impact on the lives of the ordinary citizenry. Fajingbesi (2015) thus concludes that the danger is that Nigeria depends largely on crude oil earnings for the financing of her development plans. However, because of the vagaries of the international oil market, Nigeria has more than twice (especially as it happened during the third and fourth National Development Plans) reviewed the plans downward.

It is the position of this study that financial constraint is not really a constraint per se since Nigeria is rich enough and has earned enough over the years to move from its current stage of developing country to the status of a developed country, if she has serious leaders who are determined to achieve such goal. The problem seems to be the Nigeria's dominant economic class who corner the common wealth for personal use. There are so many leakages in the economy, which bleed the common treasury dry, leaving little or nothing for plan implementation. This has further worsened and deepened the rate of poverty, unemployment and inequality in the country.

There are other challenges impeding Nigeria's planning efforts but the above listed areas seems to be the thematic areas that run through major literatures on development planning in Nigeria. Moreover, most of the other challenges affecting planning in Nigeria were addressed in successive planning efforts. These include absence of perspective plan as basis for medium-term plans (Obadan, 2003), public sector reform (Akpobasah, 2004; Ejumudo, 2013;

Anyanwu, 2015), low level of human development and low utilization of the enormous human potentials in Nigeria for development (Obadan, 2003; Bamiduro and Babatunde, 2006; Lawal and Oluwatoyin, 2011; Ukertor, 2012; Ojo, 2012; Ayodele, *et al.*, 2013; Ejumudo, 2013; Akim and Kromtit, 2013; Obisanya, 2014; Anyanwu, 2015) among others.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted the desk research methodology, thus data were collected from secondary sources. This methodology enabled the researcher to review findings of existing literature to gain broader understanding of the issues being investigated.

#### **Result and Discussion**

A search through existing literatures on development planning in Nigeria revealed that some of the thematic issues identified as the constraints and challenges of development planning in Nigeria include the following:

- i. Overly ambitious plans that seek to achieve too many objectives with unrealistic targets, guided by western theories;
- ii. Volatile and unpredictable nature of crude oil revenues which Nigeria depends on to finance her development plans;
- iii. Large-scale corruption in Nigeria's public administration which result in cost of projects being inflated, resources diverted into private pockets, project execution delayed and fewer projects being fully executed;
- iv. Financial and plan indiscipline, which manifest in form of budget indiscipline such as financial recklessness and introducing new projects not designed for execution within a plan period;
- v. Institutions responsible for plan implementation are weak and sometimes lacks the understanding of the plans they are charged with implementing;
- vi. Incompetent leaders and leaders that lack the vision and political will to implement plans;
- vii. Paucity and poor quality of data, which leads to development planning in conjecture;
- viii. Federalism, fiscal decentralization and federal character, which is meant to create a favorable atmosphere of planning but have been bastardized;
- ix. Insecurity of life and properties, which manifest in form of kidnapping and insurgency among others, thus threatening the stability of the country and safety in the economic and social sector of the country;
- x. Policy instability, which is occasioned by frequent changes of government and key personnel that contribute significantly to the abandonment of projects all over the country; and
- xi. Shortage of funds and delays in capital budget release to finance projects.

On the issue of federalism being a challenge to development planning in Nigeria, one may stretch the issue further by pointing to the dictatorial attitude of the federal government and state governments in Nigeria. Instead of each tier of government having the autonomy to engage in development planning based on their peculiar needs, the federal government dictate plans to the state government while the state government on her path dictate to the local government. This has created a situation of 'Dictatorship of Planning' in Nigeria. Thus, the position of this study is that one of the major challenge of development planning in Nigeria is '*Dictatorship of Planning*'. Dictatorship of planning is a situation where few people dominate and dictate what development is and what type of development the majority need; it is a situation where the executive arm of government dominate and dictate to the other arms of government what development is and what type of development they need; the federal government dominate and dictate to the state government what development is and what type of development they need; while the state governments dominate and dictate to the local governments what development is and what type of development the locals need. This dictatorship of planning is a carryover from the long military rule, which the country experienced. Although Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999, planning up to date seems to be dictatorial which explains the lack of mass participation in the planning efforts; from conception to implementation.

#### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In spite of the many potentials of Nigeria, which if well harness will have ranked the country among the top economies of the world where poverty and unemployment is at it barest minimum, the country ranks poorly in most indices of a developed country. Thus, successive regimes and administration, both military and civilian, from 1960s up to date have sought to address Nigeria's development challenges through comprehensive development plans. Unfortunately, after several decades of development planning in Nigeria, and best efforts to realize planned targets, these plans have performed below expectation of the planners. This study therefore investigated the reasons that have made development plans unsuccessful in Nigeria.

In light of the major constraints and challenges of development planning in Nigeria as highlighted in the preceding section, the following recommendations are made to set the country on the path of sustainable national development:

- i. Development plans in Nigeria should have realistic and limited number of objectives, preferably maximum of three objectives;
- ii. Development plans or reforms should be guided by home-grown or domesticated theories, as all theories are born out of the ecology in which they were produced. While it is true that theories can be transferred to other societies outside their original ecology to solve similar problems, it is important to note that the ecology of administration sometimes makes it difficult to implement Western theories in African countries.
- iii. Nigerian government should sustain and intensify her efforts of diversifying her sources of revenues for financing development plans. The gains recorded in the agricultural sector of recent is encouraging, however the contribution of the agricultural sector to the country's revenue need to be strengthened;
- iv. There should be inclusiveness in the development planning process and benefits, without which insecurity will persist. It is lack of inclusiveness in the planning process and the accruing benefits that drives aggrieved citizens into crime in form of armed robbery, kidnapping and even insurgency, among other crimes;
- v. The National and State Assemblies should legislate and make it mandatory for government to complete any project or program that has exceeded 50 percent implementation stage to save public fund. The Assemblies should also ensure that capital funds are released promptly so that projects will be completed within timeframe. In addition, the Assemblies should not approve budget for new projects introduced by government ministries, department and agencies (MDAs) until projects on ground are implemented to their logical conclusion; and
- vi. There should be decentralization and democratization of development planning in Nigeria. The federal government should desist from dictating plans to other arms or tiers of government, while the state government should in turn also desist from dictating to the local governments. In fact, what is happening in most of the Nigerian states is a practical manifestation of 'Dictatorship of Planning', that is the state government constitute herself into a 'Dictatorship' when it comes to planning at the local government level. The situation is so bad that local government must submit her annual budget and plans to the State Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs for scrutiny and approval. While it could be argued that this is necessary to ensure uniform development across the state, it however creates the unfortunate situation where local governments are run as a 'Department' under the state. There is therefore the need to extend the local government autonomy beyond finance, which empower them to draw their subvention directly from the federation account, to include autonomy in how, what, when and where they can spend the resources accruing to the local governments, under the supervision of the Local Government Councilors.

#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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