

## REFLECTIONS ON NIGERIA'S DEVELOPMENT JOURNEY: HOW PAST CHALLENGES ECHO TODAY

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper reflected on Nigeria's development journey, drawing parallels between past challenges and current realities. Despite numerous national development plans and visions since independence, Nigeria has continued to grapple with achieving sustainable progress and prosperity. The failure of these strategies could be attributed to discontinuity between administrations, overly ambitious targets without clear roadmaps, weak institutional capacity, and inadequate funding. Moreover, issues such as corruption, social-economic inequality, and poor infrastructure persisted, hindering effective implementation. The analysis focused on the First National Development Plan (1962-1968), highlighting its achievements, shortcomings, and relevance to present-day challenges. Despite its emphasis on diversification, infrastructure development, and governance improvement, the plan faced implementation hurdles and urban bias, mirroring current issues. The paper underscored the importance of learning from past experiences to address entrenched structural problems and foster inclusive, sustainable development. By enhancing accountability, diversifying the economy, prioritizing social welfare, and improving implementation strategies, Nigeria could overcome historical challenges and realize its development aspirations.*

**Keywords:** *Reflections on Nigeria's Development Journey, Past Nigeria Challenges, Echo Today, National development*

## **Introduction**

Indeed, it is quite worrisome that despite launching numerous national development plans and visions over the past 63 years since independence, Nigeria is still struggling to achieve its desired goals of sustainable progress and prosperity (Kalu, 2023).

One of the major reasons for the failure of these strategies to deliver tangible results can be attributed to the lack of continuity between administrations (Adebanwi and Obadare, 2021). As the quote correctly pointed out, development plans are often abandoned as soon as the ruling party changes power (Ibeanu and Luckham, 2017). This discontinuity disrupts the implementation progress that has been made so far and wastes resources that have already been invested into initiating the plans (Nwagbara and Brown, 2014). Without consistency in pursuing the set objectives over multiple electoral cycles, it becomes very difficult for any meaningful impact to be achieved (Adejumobi, 2015).

Another challenge is that many of Nigeria's development plans tend to set overly ambitious targets and goals without providing clear roadmaps or metrics to achieve them within specified timeframes (Ogunlana, 2022). This makes it near impossible to effectively monitor the progress, evaluate what is working and what needs improvement (Adesopo and Obi, 2020). It also does not allow for timely course corrections if the strategies deployed are found to be lacking (Ojo, 2022). Weak institutional capacity and lack of coordination among various agencies also undermine the robust execution of these plans (Adesina, 2022). Nigeria continues to face issues of ineffective governance systems, lack of requisite technical expertise, as well as poor inter-agency collaboration which hampers unified implementation (Omotola, 2010).

Resource allocation and funding has also been a major stumbling block. Despite having huge oil wealth reserves over the decades, limited budgets are often released and not properly tracked according to priority sectors identified in the plans (Suberu et al., 2006). This is further exacerbated by broader economic management problems and budgeting issues (Ajayi and Oke, 2022). In addition, Nigeria's development efforts are also constrained by the unpredictable environment brought upon by security and socio-economic instability issues (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005). Threats like insurgency, ethnic conflicts and macroeconomic downturns do not create the needed stable conditions which are so important for long-term planning and attracting sustained investments (Akinboade and Kinfack, 2021).

To address these gaps and ensure development plans and visions finally translate into tangible results on the ground, Nigeria must foster greater political will and consensus among all stakeholders (Ake, 1996). There is an urgent need to pursue objectives steadily over multiple electoral terms (Omotola, 2010). Experts must also be more closely engaged during the formulation of evidence-based strategies (Adesina, 2022). Strengthening governance, accountability and macroeconomic management frameworks is equally critical to promote a stable environment that can attract the public and private investments required as per the targets and visions (Suberu et al., 2006). With resolute action in these areas, it is hoped that the country's aspirations of achieving sustainable development for its people can finally be realized (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005).

At the moment, corruption has shown no signs of abating as it seems to rear its ugly head at the inauguration of any administration, and the nation is currently beset by widespread poverty, crumbling infrastructure, widespread

unemployment, high incidences of diseases, an excessive external debt burden, and most recently, massive insecurity in all regions of the nation.

Nigeria's successive governments have effectively used development plans in the past as a way to deal with the nation's difficulties (Tordoff 1993 cited in Adegoke, 2018). As (Tordoff 1993 cited in Adegoke, 2018) posited, development plans serve as both "a diagnostic and curative tool for development". In a similar view, (Adedeji, 2015) asserts that Nigeria's different development plans finest represent her economic objectives since independence.

Nigeria has implemented development plans for 63 years in an effort to boost economic growth and raise living standards (Alfred, 2018). Historically, Nigeria underwent four national development plans - the First National Development Plan (1962), Second National Development Plan (1970–1974), Third National Development Plan (1975–1980), and Fourth National Development Plan (1981–1985) (Alfred, 2018). The fifth National Development Plan did not materialize (Alfred, 2018).

In its perpetual pursuit of an effective strategy, the Federal Government also initiated three-year rolling plans between 1990 and 1998 and long-term perspective planning (Kalu, 2016). Between 2003 and 2007, the government launched the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), another ambitious plan prioritizing values, wealth creation, employment, and poverty alleviation (Kalu, 2016).

While plans were undoubtedly well-intentioned, implementation has been inconsistent as new governments often abandoned ongoing initiatives

(Adesopo and Obi, 2020). Weak institutional capacity, lack of coordination, and failure to attract sustained investments also undermined targets (Omotola, 2010; Suberu et al., 2006). To realize development visions, Nigeria must foster political consensus and expertise while strengthening accountability and macroeconomic management over multiple electoral terms (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005; Adesina, 2022).

In September 2009, Vision 20:2020 was also set up by late President Umaru Yar'Adua's administration amidst fanfare. The goal of the perspective planned Vision 20:2020 was to have a fully developed economy in Nigeria by 2020 (Adegoke, 2018). Despite the fact that Nigeria's administrative system has consistently employed development planning, it is concerning that these plans have not produced the anticipated outcomes.

Recently, President Bola Tinubu's administration has been urged to reconsider and implement the National Development Plan (NDP) launched in 2021 during President Muhammadu Buhari's tenure. The NDP, succeeding both the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan and Vision 20:2020, holds significant importance for Nigeria's future trajectory. President Tinubu's administration has demonstrated a commitment to fostering a favorable business environment, enhancing revenue generation, and implementing monetary policy reforms. However, the NDP remains a pivotal document deserving of national attention and should not be overlooked for any reason. Former Minister of Finance, Budget, and National Planning, Zainab Ahmed, emphasized the NDP's significance in charting Nigeria's economic course, prioritizing robust infrastructure, economic stability, and improving social indicators and living standards. Infrastructure plays a crucial role in fostering development and supporting economic productivity. Investments in infrastructure address

challenges such as power outages and traffic congestion, thereby minimizing economic losses. Closing the infrastructure gap relative to global benchmarks could significantly boost GDP growth per capita, as highlighted by the World Bank.

Ordinarily, this is a welcomed step in the right direction. However, the vision seems blurry when one makes reference to the past experiences Nigerian have had to undergo with successive governments. Today, the nation still ranks number one as the poverty capital of the world (World Bank, 2016).

Therefore, the basic thrust of this work is to examine critically the First National Development Plan of 1962, determine the extent to which these development plans and vision were achieved and related it to the current state of affairs in Nigeria.

### **First National Development Plan Period (1962-1968): An Overview**

The post-independence plan phase in Nigeria was sometimes referred to as the First National Development Plan covering 1962-1968 (Alfred, 2018). The key elements of Nigeria's 1962-1968 Plan included outlining "how the government intends to raise the funds as well as recruit the personnel needed to carry out its objectives" (Alfred, 2018). According to Olayiwola & Adeleye, (2005) cited in Abdulaziz (2019), the plan received a budget allocation of N1,353 million, representing 3.7% of the entire budget. Regarding rural infrastructure development, the strategy remained silent (Abdulaziz, 2019). However, 50% of expenses were expected to be generated from external sources through direct foreign aid to the government or private firm investment (Abdulaziz, 2019). Transportation received €143.317 (approximately 21% of total capital expenditure), electricity €101.74 (around 15%), primary production €91.760

(about 14%), and education €69.763 (approximately 10%) (Alfred, 2018). Other industries obtained comparatively smaller budget allocations (Alfred, 2018). While ambitious, implementation of the First Plan was inconsistent due to issues such as unstable macroeconomic conditions, lack of coordination, and over-reliance on foreign financing (Omotola, 2010). Subsequent plans also faced challenges attracting sustained public and private investments to fully achieve targets (Suberu et al., 2006). For Nigeria's development visions to succeed going forward, stronger political commitment, local expertise and accountable institutions are needed (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005).

The initial First National Development Plan's contribution to policymaking was not very robust. The plan set macro-objectives such as ensuring an annual economic growth rate of at least 4.0%, achieving take-off by 1980, generating opportunities in key sectors like health, education, and jobs, expanding access to these opportunities, fostering balanced regional development, promoting income equality, and establishing macroeconomic stability (Welsh, 2019). Additionally, the plan made a clear commitment to support private businesses, particularly indigenous enterprises (Welsh, 2019). However, implementation of these lofty goals proved challenging due to macroeconomic instability, a lack of coordination among government agencies, and over-reliance on foreign financing (Omotola, 2010). The plan also faced criticism for being too vague and lacking concrete strategies or funding to realize its objectives - especially promoting rural development and infrastructure (Abdulaziz, 2019). While well-meaning, subsequent plans encountered similar hurdles in attracting sustained domestic and international investments to fully achieve targets (Suberu et al., 2006). For Nigeria to strengthen policy planning and implementation going forward, greater political commitment, local

technical capacity development, and accountable institutions are needed over multiple electoral terms (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005).

The First National Development Plan can be credited with tangible achievements such as the construction of the landmark Kainji Dam and establishment of the Nigerian Industrial Development Bank to support infrastructure development (Welsh, 2019). This demonstrates the institution was able to foster some progress. However, the plan was not without its shortcomings. Specifically, it failed to address issues like marketing boards continuing to impose tariffs on agricultural exports, which formed an obvious hindrance to the advancement of peasant farmers who were the primary producers and drivers of agricultural growth (Welsh, 2019). By stifling smallholder incomes, the tariffs undermined the plan's broader objectives of rural development, poverty reduction and balanced economic expansion (Adesina, 2022). Weak rural infrastructure and the strategy's silence on this area also limited agricultural potential (Abdulaziz, 2019). While accomplishments in energy and industry were laudable, a more holistic approach addressing constraints across sectors may have enabled greater welfare impacts (Akinboade & Kinfack, 2021). Going forward, development blueprints must take a multi-dimensional view and conduct rigorous stakeholder consultations to design inclusive policies alleviating structural impediments.

The issue was made even worse by the over-valuation of the pound, which led to increased taxation on these exports and had the unintended consequence of drastically reducing the prices of domestic food goods as a result of the entry of relatively cheaper international food items. Due in part to agriculture's high priority status during the relevant time, this scenario was particularly

problematic. In reality, the circumstance amounted to nothing less than milking a useful cow to death.

The first development plan was plainly urban-focused in terms of the balance between rural and urban areas (George, 2018). When one considers the fact that the percentage of the expenditure had no appreciable impact, it is clear how true this statement is. (Lipton, 1977 cited in Ndubuisi, 2017) lamented the situation when he noted that the main current challenge in the underdevelopment of the third world is not between foreign exploiters and the indigenous population or between capital and labour, but rather between rural poverty and powerlessness and urban affluence and power. In keeping with the colonial pattern, this plan substantially rewarded the urban sector at the expense of the rural sector.

As a matter of fact, it is estimated that only about six percent of the first development plan's intended investment in infrastructural facilities went to the rural sector and that nearly 90% went to the urban sector. Even within the field of industrial growth, the initial strategy prioritized giant corporations above small business owners. For instance, the 1964-established Nigerian Industrial Development Bank was restricted from financing unregistered businesses, effectively cutting off most small-scale enterprises from the bank's operations (Okowa, 1982 cited in Mamso, 2019).

The first development plan had some glaring effects on plan implementation, especially with regard to some important projects such as the Kainji Dam, the nation's first oil refinery, and the Nigerian Industrial Development Bank, but the actual plan that was put into action differed greatly from the original programme. For example, actual allocations for agriculture and industry were

9.8 and 8.9 percent, respectively, compared to anticipated allocations of 13.6 and 13.4 (Polask, 2016).

Since agriculture was the main stay of the economy of the nation and still the important driver of foreign exchange at that time, one of the goals of the strategy was to promote the gathering of agricultural products for export (Denis, 2019). However, the major drawbacks of the overall strategy included deficient feasibility studies, poor project evaluation, scant public input, and excessive political interference with economic decisions. Additionally, the small local content sector received lacklustre attention, and the apparatus for implementing changes in the public sector was poor.

In conclusion, the first development plan failed to carry along the masses. The idea was created by technocrats who were themselves foreigners. In reality, W.F. Stopler and L.M. Hansan, two very skilled planners from the first design, are Americans (Clement, 2018). Even while it is abundantly obvious from the plan itself that the government was aware of the necessity of widespread engagement for plan implementation accomplishment, it took no action to promote Nigerians' involvement in both the development and execution of the plan.

### **First National Development Plan and How it Relates it to Current Happenings in the Nigeria Today**

Examining Nigeria's current situation, individuals who experienced the period of the First National Development Plan from 1962 to the present would likely feel nostalgic (Adebanwi and Obadare, 2021). These is because many similar challenge facing the nation then continue today, capturing the true meaning of *deja vu* (Ibeanu and Luckham, 2017). While circumstances have certainly

changed over six decades, the feeling of *deja vu* stems from confronting parallel issues that offers poignant lessons (Nwagbara and Brown, 2014). One such parallel is Nigeria's continued overdependence on oil exports, which leaves the economy vulnerable to global commodity price swings, as was the case in the past during the First Plan period (Ajayi and Oke, 2022). Rural farmers also still battle inadequate infrastructure and policies that do not adequately address their needs, similar to the tariffs issue under the initial plan (Adesina, 2022). Insecurity and violence also pose ongoing threats to Nigeria's stability and ability to attract investment, mirroring the volatility experienced in the early post-independence period (Akinboade and Kinfack, 2021). Institutional weaknesses reflecting past hurdles, such as poor coordination among government agencies and lack of technical capacity, continue to impede robust policy implementation (Omotola, 2010). Discontinuity between successive governments and administrations further undermines continuity and effective long-term planning (Ojo, 2022). While Nigeria has undoubtedly achieved progress in some areas since 1962, prosperity will depend on addressing deeply entrenched structural issues that have spanned generations. These issues still reflect those faced during the First National Development Plan (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005). By learning from both successes and failures of the past, and tailoring solutions to modern realities, Nigeria can hopefully overcome this recurring cycle of *deja vu* and the challenges that have plagued its development journey for decades (Adesina, 2022).

First, the First NDP stressed on the need to diversify the economy beyond the reliance on agriculture (Anthony, 2019). In a similar manner, Nigeria today is seeking ways to diversify the nation from reliance on oil generated revenue back to other areas like technology, services, manufacturing and even agriculture as the major mainstay of the nation's economy but just like the

First NDP, the national has not been able to find its way out of the oil dependence (Ajayi and Oke, 2022). In fact, there have been investors in the private sector building oil refineries to further drive the oil sector (Akinboade and Kinfack, 2021).

Infrastructural development was also a key focal point in the First NDP. The plan emphasized the need for the development of infrastructure like roads, hospital, power supply, amongst others (Abdulaziz, 2019). Today, Nigeria is still plagued with the same issues. From old pothole-filled roads, to dilapidated hospitals, to poor education, to erratic power supply, the story remains unchanged (Omotola, 2010). These poor infrastructures stands as the major drawbacks most small businesses failed before their fifth anniversary after establishment and also the high mortality rate faced by the nation (Suberu et al., 2006).

Another issue that is reminiscent of the First NDP is governance and corruption. The First NDP had the problem of getting the right personnel to man the affairs of the nation in terms of resource management and project execution (Adebanwi and Obadare, 2021). Nigeria still face the same issues today in terms of finding technocrats that understand the visions of the nation and are ready to implement them (Adesina, 2022). Rather, most people (appointed or elected) see governance as a means of enriching themselves hence the high corruption issues that have grounded the nation (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005).

Social-economic inequality is also an issue that both eras can relate with. The First NDP then sought to close the gap of social inequality (Ojo, 2022). However, it failed in that regards as the government was focused in developing

the urban centres, ignoring the rural people, leading to large-scale rural-urban migration (Akinboade and Kinfack, 2021). This is replica of what plays out in Nigeria currently. Most projects embarked on by government are mainly elitists project that has nothing to do with the poor masses. Also, the policies made by government are fashioned in a way it will make the rich richer and the poor poorer (Adesina, 2022).

Finally, like the case of subsequent NDPs that followed the First NDP, the issue of implementation and execution has remained (Nwagbara and Brown, 2014). The First NDP was plagued with the challenge of executing most of its planned measures. The same can be said of present day Nigeria where government have a line up of beautiful plans and policies that never see the light of the day. This is mostly quelled by official bottlenecks, poor coordination, and other bureaucratic issues that subsists between different levels of government (Omotola, 2010).

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, translating development initiatives into tangible outcomes meeting global standards requires a focus on implementation. The process must ensure national strategies and plans align across all governance tiers to achieve overarching goals. While Nigeria's development blueprints lay out lofty visions, administrations often struggle with challenges like corruption, inadequate funding due to economic headwinds, and lack of political willpower. Addressing these entrenched issues is key to unlocking our potential. Corruption siphons away scarce resources better spent transforming lives. It breeds distrust in leadership and stifles private sector investment. Tackling this scourge through strengthened accountability and rule of law is paramount. Economic uncertainties leave budgets vulnerable to commodity

price swings, undermining stability and long-term planning. Further diversifying revenue streams through sectors like technology and manufacturing would boost resilience against external shocks. Political will signifies the commitment to prioritize people over partisan interests. It is the driving force that pushes ambitious plans from documents into reality despite obstacles. Leaders must find innovative ways to rally citizens around a shared prosperity agenda. Nigeria has come far, yet still grapples with developmental challenges with deep historical roots. Overcoming them requires fresh approaches and persistence and learning from missteps. It demands coordinated efforts across all governance levels focused on inclusion and sustainability. If we can address these pressing issues through reformed, participatory and accountable governance, it may mark the beginning of a new era. One where Nigerians see real results from initiatives and feel optimism for the future.

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