

REASSESSING NIGERIA'S DEVELOPMENTAL CHALLENGES: THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIO-CULTURAL INDICATORS

Chikaodiri Nwachukwu Okoro

Department of Sociology, Federal University, Wukari, Taraba State-Nigeria

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Abstract

The general objective of this study was to use the socio-cultural indicators of development in interrogating Nigeria's developmental challenges. The Nigerian nation is the seventh most populated country on earth. The development of such a location consequently continues to attract research attention. The paper's theoretical framework is combinatory, embedding the modernization and elite theories. The documentary method of research was adopted for the work involving the reexamination and amplification of secondary sources of information, on the bases of which the paper's findings were made. The paper found that on the grounds of the considered socio-cultural indicators, Nigeria remains underdeveloped. It is concluded and recommended in the paper that to defeat the existing developmental challenges in the country, the national political elite must follow the lines of leadership dependability in governance.

Keywords: National development, socio-cultural development, political corruption, modernization theory, elite theory, the political elite

INTRODUCTION

Defining development is a challenging engagement. Invariably, in theoretical and empirical trajectories, development is a complicated matter. Yinusa & Adeoye (2008, p.298) accordingly argue that —the exact meaning of development remains a subject of vehement debate. And according to Adama et al. (2019, p.93), development became —a controversial issue, since the 18th century when it was transformed from a scientific to an ideological matter. This was in defense of the inequalities within and among nations. Furthermore, development is multifaceted and closely related to the ideas of progress and growth. Omotola (2021, p.17) also adds that development —is a multi-dimensional process involving major changes in social structures, political attitudes and national institutions, as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and the eradication of absolute poverty. According to Omotola (2021, p.17), development is fundamentally concerned with —people reaching an acceptable standard of living, a condition possible only when they have the basic things on which they need to live decently. Such things include shelter, clothing, food (nutritionally balanced diet), portable water, clean environment, etc. In other words —the overall goal of development is the totality of welfare and enhancement of the qualitative existence of the populace,

through increasing economic, political, social and civil rights of the people without discriminations (Omotola, 2021, pp.17-18)

Further to the above suppositions, Nwodin (2020, pp.27-28) sees development from its man-centered perspectives and accordingly argues that —the concept of development is a man centered phenomenon and it is also about improvements in living standards of the citizenry. This —implies that programmes and policies initiated by government are geared towards enhancing the welfare of the individuals through the provision of such necessities of life that would make them lead meaningful lives. Hence, development could be described as the conscious effort applied through strategies and mechanisms to create an environment in which the individual in the society could lead a meaningful life. According to Ibani & Angalapu (2021, p.34) —development is a multidimensional and multi-faceted process that focuses on the improvement of the well-being of man. In other words, the end product of development is the wellbeing of people.

The Nigerian state is among the most populous countries in the world, with a current population in excess of 218 million, making the Nigerian nation-state the seventh most populated country on earth (Worldometer, 2022; World Population Review, 2022). The wellbeing of people in such a location consequently continues to attract research attention, even as development remains a many-sided matter. From personal to group development, the germane issues extend to national, regional to worldwide development. However, the focus of the current contribution is national development. Still within nations, the manifold trajectories of development may extend it to political, economic, industrial, educational, scientific, and technological development. Still these conceptual possibilities are enlargeable to cover sociocultural development upon which this research is further centered.

In any case, the problem of the study emanated from the bafflements surrounding the status of the Nigerian nation among the international list of developed and developing countries. This is weighed against the backdrop of the enormous level of material and human resources available to the country. Boyle & Velasquez (2022, p.40) thus posit that —the Federal Republic of Nigeria's GDP is far too low, as are the country's living standards, for it to be considered a developed nation and despite having the largest economy in Africa, industrialization in Nigeria lags behind most other major economies. The country also suffers from a low literacy rate—at roughly 62% as of 2018—and an overburdened healthcare system. Poverty is widespread, at a rate of 40.1% in 2018, and large swaths of the country lack access to clean water. In 2020, the infant mortality rate in Nigeria was an extremely high 72 per 1,000 live births, while the life expectancy rate was a low 55 years since birth. On the bases of such statistics, Nigeria is called a developing country.

However, the developing country classification is immensely disputed. Consequently, Tella (2022, p. 1) highlights the viewpoints that Nigeria is more appropriately classifiable as an underdeveloped country. A respondent in Tella's contribution opined that —she had seen enough pictures of young Nigerians like herself in

Internally Displaced Persons' camp, who were not looking different from those in some war-ravaged areas around the world. She had seen children in some parts of the North and South of Nigeria suffering from kwashiorkor like those found in drought-infested areas in sub-Saharan Africa. According to this contributor, in Nigeria, —she had seen adults, even in cities, fetching water into buckets from public places and carrying same on their heads for domestic use at home, and students studying under trees or on bare floors in city schools just as she had seen passengers dangling dangerously on moving buses and trains to get to their destination. She then asked, —do those things happen in countries that are developing or underdeveloped? ||

Continuing from such disturbing dimensions, Tella (2022, p. 4) adds that —the features of underdevelopment include low per capita income, high population growth, low literacy level, technical backwardness, capital deficiency, high cost of living or low standard of living, high level of unemployment, high dependence on extractive industry and particularly agriculture and weak institutions, wondering which of these is alien to Africa and Nigeria?|| Tella (2022, p. 4) further highlights that —according to the IMF's World Economic Outlook published in October 2021, the number one or largest economy in Africa is Nigeria, with a nominal Gross Domestic Product valued at \$441.5||. Still the thesis of Tella (2022) is that Nigeria is typically underdeveloped||.

Therefore, devoid of rigmarole, pretentiousness or technicalities, the central research question of this paper borders on if Nigeria is an underdeveloped or developing country? The precise meaning of development remains an issue of fervent disputes while its multidimensionality remains uncontestable. Development certainly possesses socio-cultural dimensions measurable by socio-cultural indicators. Okereke & Ekpe (2002, p.28) agrees, arguing that —development is not exclusively related to the economic and political terrains, but is also intertwined with socio-cultural factors as well||. In addressing the embedded issues in the research question therefore, the general objective of the work is to use the socio-cultural indicators of development to interrogate Nigeria 's developmental challenges. The paper 's theoretical framework is combinatory, embedding the modernization and elite theories.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The work adopts the modernization and elite theories as analytical framework. Modernization theory is adopted in explaining the processes of modernization within nations. In the 1950s and 1960s, the "classical" theorists of modernization extracted from the sociological analyses of Karl Marx and Emile Durkheim, including a preferential reading of Max Weber, to state their positions on developmental imperatives for nations. These pioneer theorists were intensely influenced by the writings of Talcott Parsons. Modernization theory was thus a dominant paradigm of that era in the social sciences but later went into obscurity. It made a return in 1991 after Francis Fukuyama wrote about the end of the Cold War as confirmation of modernization theory and more widely of universal history. However, the theory remains controversial (Eisenstadt, 2010; Fukuyama, 1992; Knöbl, 2003).

The Encyclopedia of Sociology (2022, pp.1-3) highlight that —modernization theory is a description and explanation of the processes of transformation from traditional or underdeveloped societies to modern societies. In the words of one of the major proponents (Eisenstadt 1966, p. 1) historically, modernization is the process of change towards those types of social, economic, and political systems that have developed in Western Europe and North America from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth and have then spread to other European countries and in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to the South American, Asian, and African continents". In general, continues the Encyclopedia of Sociology (2022, pp.1-3) —modernization theorists are concerned with economic growth within societies as indicated, for example, by measures of gross national product. Modernization theorists study the social, political, and cultural consequences of economic growth and the conditions that are important for industrialization and economic growth to occur. The sociological concept of modernization does not refer simply to becoming current or "up to date" but rather specifies particular contents and processes of societal changes in the course of national development.

It is acknowledged in this contribution that the critics of modernization theory were legion. Some detractors of this apparently dominant theory as at that time subsequently united under the dependency framework. Even at that, Gilman (2018) still sees modernization theory as a type that never dies. Consequently, in adopting it as the complementary theory of this paper, the focus is not on whether it is the ultimate theory of development. It is adopted because of its immense relevance in explicating the composite issues that must be addressed for the developmental challenges of the case study country to be reduced to the barest minimum. Furthermore, these multifactorial questions of development in Nigeria also border on the tendencies of the elite in the place (particularly the political elite), necessitating the introduction of the elite theory to the theoretical framework of the paper.

In the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences (2022), it is highlighted that —classic elite theories were formulated at the end of the nineteenth century and in the first decades of the twentieth century by Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923), Gaetano Mosca (1858–1941), and Robert Michels (1876–1936). Then subsequent renditions of these theories also carried a strong imprint of Max Weber 's ideas, especially concerning the centrality of political power and charismatic leadership. According to the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences (2022) —the classic theorists focused on the inevitability of a group of powerful —elites in all large-scale societies, offering a radical critique of two competing theoretical-ideological streams of thought: the democratic theory (—government of the people, by the people, for the people in Lincoln 's Gettysburg Address), and the Marxist vision of class conflict leading to revolution and egalitarian socialism. Citing Bottomore (1993), the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences (2022) elucidate that —in contrast with both of these ideologies, the elite theories suggested an inescapable division between dominant minorities (variously called —elites, || —ruling

classes, —political classes, —oligarchies, —aristocracies, etc.) and the dominated majority, or the masses. In the application of this theory to this study, the emphases are on how the actions and inactions of the elite (particularly the political elite) might have contributed to the continuing developmental challenges in the Nigerian state, and that stands on one side of the interrogations. On the other side, the paper also focuses on how the elite may lead in the engendering of solutions to the developmental challenges in the country, in the context of their socio-cultural dimensions.

THE SOCIO-CULTURAL INDICATORS

This section of the work is further framed on the positions of Okereke & Ekpe (2002, p.28) as they argue that —given its numerous dimensions and complexities, the most outstanding sociocultural indicators of development are as follows:

- The level of social mobilization
- The extent of cultural secularization
- The prevalence of universalistic norms and
- The extent to which recruitment is based on achievement rather than ascription

EXAMINING THE NIGERIAN SCORECARD

Furthermore in this section of the paper, the taxonomy of socio-cultural indicators of development as outline by Okereke and Ekpe (2002) is used to scrutinize Nigeria 's developmental scorecard.

The Level of Social Mobilization

Explicating —the level of social mobilization Okereke and Ekpe (2002, p. 29) subsequently highlight that —from the modernization perspective, the level of social mobilization could be used as a barometer for measuring the level of development, as social mobilization implies the strongest feelings of solidarity attached to units. It is then assumed that if the level of social mobilization is high, this is an index of development. On the contrary, if social mobilization is fragmented along such units as extended family, the tribe, the village, the caste (etc.), this is an open testimony to the prevalence of traditionality as against modernity. According to Okeke (2019, p.31) —social mobilization is the compelling galvanization of the masses, into undeviating patriotism. It is the process of enlisting the services of most citizens in matters of the state. In other words, a high degree of patriotism is an index of development from the socio-cultural hue. Moreover, the incidence of most citizens enlisting in matters of the state is indicative of development from this socio-cultural perspective.

For the purposes of explicating social mobilization in this study, the Nigerian state is a unit of analysis around which social mobilization may ideally revolve for development to be recognized. The attaching of the strongest feelings of solidarity to this Nigerian unit implies patriotism. Nigerians as a matter of fact are not known for patriotism (Ajang, 2022; Enahoro, 2021; Mathias, 2020; Odukoya, 2015). A perverse tendency towards corruption

which is generic in a nation is not the hallmark of patriotic people. It is, to say the least, a primitive tendency. Social mobilization in Nigeria is fragmented along such units as extended family and the tribe. In the public or private sector, opportunities for anything are first extended to one 's immediate and extended family (after self) and then to the person 's tribe. Any claim of possessing interest in spreading such chances to people from other tribes is highly likely to contain inherent egocentric undertones. Only very fleeting moments of social mobilization is recorded in the country, during international soccer tournaments (when the Nigerian side emerges or appears to be emerging victorious). When the game is won by Nigeria, the surrounding euphoria lasts for probably a few hours, and the nation is restored to damaging intertribal animosities. The palpable deficient level of social mobilization in the country is an index of underdevelopment.

The Extent of Cultural Secularization

On this score again, Okereke and Ekpe (2022, p. 29) depose that —the extent of cultural secularization is also used to measure the rate of modernization as secularization here implies the process whereby men become increasingly rational, analytical, and empirical in their political actions '. Consequently, —when a society continuously scrutinizes its ways of doing things in terms of their suitability, this is an indication of modernization. On the other hand, if response to issues is based on primordial factors rather than rationality this is seen as a mark of traditionality (Okereke and Ekpe, 2022, p. 29). Modernization theory regards traditionality as permissiveness (underdevelopment in newer conceptualizations). This paper examines the question of being rational, analytical and empirical with the political issue of who leads Nigeria as President. The end point of such —rational, analytical and empirical process usually leads to the emergence of leaders who totally fail to reduce the monumental level of corruption in the country. Sincerely speaking, Nigeria has not continuously scrutinized its ways of doing things in terms of their suitability over the choice of President of Nigeria. The issue is still based on primordial factors rather than rationality. The issue is still fundamentally and solely based on the particular tribe that should produce the next president of the country. This smacks of primitivity and underdevelopment.

The Prevalence of Universalistic Norms

Returning again to the outline provided by Okereke and Ekpe (2002, p.29), the scholars on this score assert as follows: —The prevalence of universalistic norms is indicative of modernization. Modern societies are those by which there is in existence universalistic laws which guide human conducts and behaviour. But when these laws are diffused and are not universally binding, this is seen as a sign of primitivity. Nigerian VIPs (very important personalities, ostensibly) even disobey traffic lights. When embargoes are placed on employment in the Nigerian public sector as economic management measures, the ostensive policies are meant for citizens with no one to speak for them. In each of such offices where such embargoes had been purportedly placed, employment of children of the privileged elite would continue to take place. According to Adeyemi (2021, p.1) even the Nigerian

Senate had —bemoaned the high scale secret employment in the civil service despite claims that the Federal Government placed an embargo on job placement. Adeyemi (2021, p.2) reports that Chairman of the —Senate Committee on Federal Character and Inter-Governmental Affairs, Senator Danjuma La'ah, said that —many people were being secretly employed but those in charge were claiming that there was an embargo on employment. At the ubiquitous security check points and roadblocks on the highways in some parts of the country, only the rickety vehicles of the underclass are stopped and thoroughly searched. The elite are freely allowed to pass through such barricades unmolested. In the process, highly criminal elements that also appear like VIPs pass through such putative blockades undisturbed.

The Extent to Which Recruitment is based on Achievement Rather than Ascription

Here is probably where Nigeria has reached its nadir in socio-cultural indicators of development. Okereke and Ekpe (2002, p.29) further posit that —the extent to which recruitment is based on achievement rather than ascription is another critical indicator of modernity. Ascription (the social status emanating from the circumstances of somebody's birth) appears to be the basis of existence in Nigeria. It may influence the type of school to be attended by the citizen because a certain quota of admissions has been reserved for people born in certain sections of the country. It can also be the deciding factor in whether the individual could get employed by anyone on graduation because the public sector personnel that influence such employments belong to the candidate's tribe. Even in the selection of the national football team, the circumstances of somebody's birth, as in the citizen's tribe of origin counts. Falola (2014, p.194) accordingly discloses that —the Nigerian Football Association (NFA) introduced —tribe into everything they did including the selection of players—.

Elucidating the primitivity of ascription as the basis of recruitment, Okereke and Ekpe (2002, p.29) highlight that —it is a hallmark of modernity if achievement and social status are based on merit but when they are based on gerontocracy and/or birth, this portends absence of modernization. As a matter of reality, the Nigerian state had since become a gerontocratic location. Nigerian youths are perpetually told by the rest of the society that they are the leaders of tomorrow. The Youths for Governance Group (YGG) (2022) has however described the embedded marginalization of youths in this Nigerian maxim as cruel. According to YGG (2022, p.2) the Nigerian aphorism —has become a scam and an unrealistic illusion as the Nigerian youths have lost their place to the old brigade who have vehemently refused to give them a new lease of hope. Indeed, modernity and development cannot be ascribed to gerontocracy and —old brigadism.

Ascription in Nigeria's socio-cultural tendencies has even segued its tentacles into the country's university system. It ought to be assumed that a certain level of universalism should be associated with the idea of a university but in Nigeria, the academic and non-academic staffs of universities are predominantly or even wholly made up of citizens from the specific tribe or state where the university is sited. Invariably, the Vice Chancellor

(President) and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the university can only come from the tribe where the institution is located. Incidentally, such schools have continued to produce unemployable graduates (Eneh, 2009; Olutola & Olatoye, 2020; Pitan, 2016). Un-employability of a nation 's university graduates again cannot be an index of development

DEFEATING THE DEVELOPMENTAL CHALLENGES

Fundamentally stated, defeating Nigeria 's socio-cultural challenges require scrupulous leadership. In the context of this essay, there is an additional developmental variable added to the extant socio-cultural conundrum in the country, implying a double whammy for leadership. The Nigerian state is invariably a daunting concourse of diverse socio-cultural tendencies. The place has been dejectedly described as God 's own experiment with the impossible. According to Gadu (2019, p.1) —in a fit of righteous indignation, the late venerated Nigerian journalist and essayist, Dele Giwa, in his regular columnl Parallax Snapsl which used to run in the defunct Concord newspaper once described Nigeria as God 's experiment with the impossible. He was moved to say this looking at the fractious contradictions and dysfunctional state of Nigeria in his time, which by his own conclusion would never allow the country rise to its potentiall. Central to this certainly hyperbolic depiction is the character of the nation 's socio-cultural milieu. Sociocultural tendencies refer to how a society traditionally conducts its affairs. Nigeria 's sociocultural tendencies consist of an egregiously interminable list of behavioural and cultural compliances and deviations. To think about the Nigerian nation means an attempt to make meaning out of the embedded socio-cultural quagmire in this geographic location. Invariably, for Nigeria to be considered developed in self-evident trajectories, the nation 's diversities of sociocultural tendencies have to be harnessed and harmonized.

The leadership class in Nigeria seems historically unable to harness and harmonize these disparate socio-cultural ramifications of the country. It is not truly a case of inability as in the leadership group not knowing what to do but inability / failure that is deliberate and aimed at the perpetuation of leadership privileges for themselves, their families, their future generations and their anointed ones forever. Consequently, the defining attribute of the leadership class in Nigeria is corruption (Bankole & Olaniyi, 2014; Ijewereme, 2015; Kure, 2020; Ojogiwa, 2021; Okolie & Igbini, 2020). At each point in time, attempting to keep records of the cases of corruption within the leadership group of Nigeria is a waste of time. Newly emerging mindboggling cases are usually there to consign the existing issues to the dustbin of history.

On the specific issue of political corruption, Onwudiwe (2017, p.108) points out that —the difference between Nigeria and other countries, especially the advanced countries, is that in Nigeria, political corruption is a way of life and is commonly accepted and tolerated while such practices are not tolerated in many advanced countriesl. The country 's political elite accordingly revels in mindless manipulative venality. According to Onwudiwe (2017,

p.137) who cited Nigeria 's former Attorney General and Minister of Justice, Mohammed Bello Adoke, the country —loses about ₦240 trillion annually to corruption. Half of the amount was looted directly from the national treasury while the other half originated from bribing public officials by foreign governments and corporations.

The point of this paper is that a leadership class so enmeshed in corruption can never lay the groundwork of development in a country. Hence, what has continued to occur in the country is that each generation of hollow leaders comes on board the ship of governance, launches one putatively developmental programme or the other that is thereafter remembered more in terms of the accompanying sloganeering than any form of achievement. Among the most recent of such programmes must be counted Vision-20-2020 under which Nigeria was expected to be among the twenty most developed nations in the world by the year 2020. The magical year of the nation 's Eldorado has already passed and nothing happened. In that year, 2020, the country 's —National Bureau of Statistics, NBS, said more than 80 million Nigerians lived in extreme poverty (on a dollar per day), while in 2022 70 million people were living in extreme poverty in the country, representing 33 per cent of Nigeria 's over 200 million people (Vanguard News, 2022). For purposes of comparison —in 2018, Nigeria held the position of the poverty capital of the world with about 87 million people in extreme poverty, compared with India 's 73 million. According to new data, about 83 million Indians have been plunged into extreme poverty in 2022, representing six per cent of the country 's population which stands at 1.3 billion (Vanguard News, 2022). When Nigeria emerged the global headquarters of poverty, India was the runner-up and now that India has ascended (descended) to the first position, Nigeria has descended (ascended) to the second position. But away from the wordplay in ascending or descending to the unenviable positions, it needs to be noted that it is 33 per cent of Nigerians that are currently living in extreme poverty, while in India the number represents six per cent of the country 's population. In developmental interpretations, the Nigerian case remains extremely pathetic. It is poignantly illustrative of the developmental challenges in the country and except the national socio-cultural divergences are harnessed and harmonized, the poverty syndrome will not recede.

The political elite are strategically positioned in government from where the expectations are on them to help in salvaging the country from the muddle of underdevelopment. Onwudiwe (2017, p.308) add that —creation of opportunities for citizens 'wellbeing, including their safety, is a paramount reason why governments are created. This is an allusion to the role of government in catalyzing development. Defeating the developmental challenges therefore requires the turning of new leaves by the current leadership class to follow the lines of leadership dependability in governance.

CONCLUSION

This paper has utilized the socio-cultural indicators of development in analyzing Nigeria 's developmental challenges. The paper found that on the grounds of the considered socio-cultural indicators, Nigeria remains an underdeveloped nation. The import of this finding is as follows: Those policymakers and the political elite, who are at ease with the orthodoxy of classifying the country as a developing nation, must wake up to the realities embedded in defeating the country 's developmental challenges. The paper has not presented its findings with any claims to finality. The implication of the findings for further research is that scholars on the opposing side of the underdeveloped nation categorization of the country can also embark on studies to challenge the positions of the paper.

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