

Nations Development Agenda for Strategic and Sustainable Growth

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Abstract: Socioeconomic development is a goal that all countries strive towards, and different tactics are used by different countries to get there. Governments and organizations use development planning as a vital tool to express their ideals and turn them into real realities. Nigeria, a country with abundant natural resources and a sizable population, has long pursued sustainable development but continues to meet obstacles. Progress has been hampered by poor management, corruption, and wrong policies, which have led to widespread poverty, unemployment, inadequate infrastructure, social services, and security issues. The study recommends among others that Government should implement policies that target disadvantaged and vulnerable individuals, such as access to high-quality education, healthcare, and social safety nets, in order to minimize economic disparity and promote shared prosperity. Include environmental sustainability in development plans, placing a focus on renewable energy, resource management that is ethical, and conservation. Put measures in place to combat climate change and lower greenhouse gas emissions. Develop international infrastructure more easily, and align trade laws.

Keywords: Nation, Development agenda, Strategic growth, Sustainable growth

1. Introduction

The pursuit of socio-economic development is an enduring aspiration shared by nations around the world, regardless of their level of development. The pathways to achieving these goals vary widely, shaped by the unique circumstances and challenges each country faces. Development planning, consequently, emerges as an indispensable instrument wielded by numerous governments and organizations to delineate their overarching visions, mission, objectives, and the proficient methodologies required to translate these aspirations into tangible developmental outcomes. This structured approach to development planning serves as a means of not only charting a deliberate course but also exercising judicious direction and control to ensure that the envisaged progress is effectively attained. In essence, developmental agenda acts as a blueprint that guides the strategic actions and resource allocation necessary for fostering sustainable growth and achieving desired developmental milestones.

For Nigeria, a nation endowed with abundant resources and a burgeoning population, the quest for development has been a constant thread in its history. Over the years, Nigeria has relied on a diverse array of strategies, ranging from annual budgets for short-term goals to comprehensive long-term plans, all in a bid to chart a course towards sustainable growth (, 2009). Nigeria's substantial wealth in resources, and notably its strategic location on the Gulf of Guinea, would have seemingly ensured a sustainable trajectory of economic development. However, this anticipated prosperity has remained elusive. The underlying reasons for this can likely be traced to a history of mismanagement, inconsistent and distorted policies, rampant corruption, and the unchecked pursuit of personal gain, particularly among public officials. Nigeria's bleak economic standing, characterized by pervasive poverty, soaring unemployment rates, crumbling infrastructure, and deficient social services, as well as a prevalence of misguided values and detrimental behavioral patterns, compounded by widespread insecurity and crime (Ayodele et al., 2013), have collectively created an existence that defies imagination for its citizens. It is plausible to consider that this predicament could have taken a different turn had the country's leadership opted for a path of harnessing its resources through the adoption of genuine, long-term economic planning encapsulated within visionary frameworks.

The main focus of this paper is to explore Nigeria's developmental agenda, along with an examination of the historical evolution of National Development Plans in the country. Additionally, the paper will highlight the obstacles present in the policy landscape of National Development Plans in Nigeria. The recommendations presented in this paper aim to promote strategic and enduring progress in the Nigerian context.

2. Literature Review

Conceptualizing Development

'Development' as a social science concept does not have a precise meaning. Different scholars from various schools of thought have their diverse perspectives on the meaning of the concept. The Modernization school considers development as a social change which particularly involves movement from the traditional society to a modern society by following the direction of developed societies of

the west. Rodney (1972) conceives development as the ability of man to conquer his environment and utilize it to his advantage. The process involves the development of tools, skills and the mobilization of required resources for development purpose. Sen, (1999) observes that 'Development' encompasses a broad array of economic, social, and environmental processes aimed at improving human well-being and overall living standards. Hence, sustainable development thus entails inclusive growth that addresses poverty, inequality, and environmental conservation (UNDP, 2020). Dudley Seers raised some critical questions that are key to the understanding of development. For him; the questions to ask about a country's development are three:

What is has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to Unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If all these three have declined from higher level, then beyond doubt this has been a period of development for the country concerned. If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, especially if all three have, it will be strange to call the result, development even if per capita income doubled (Seers, 1969, p.2).

Seers' rhetoric underscores the importance of focusing on people's well-being as the ultimate goal of development. National Development Plans that align with this perspective prioritize policies and programs aimed at improving education, alleviating poverty, healthcare, and social services, as these directly affect the lives of citizens. The emphasis is on human development, which contributes to overall national development. Therefore, National Development Plans that incorporate this perspective go beyond mere economic targets. They encompass a wide range of sectors to create a comprehensive strategy for the nation's progress.

Sustainable Growth and Development

Sustainable growth, also known as sustainable economic growth, refers to a pattern of economic development that can be maintained over the long term without causing significant harm to the environment, depleting natural resources, or compromising the well-being of future generations. It is a concept that seeks to strike a balance between economic advancement and environmental and social responsibility. Sustainable Growth has a close nexus with the concept of Sustainable development. Sustainable development is a multidimensional concept that encompasses environmental, economic, and social aspects. Sustainable development has become a central concept in contemporary discourse, addressing the need to balance economic growth, environmental protection, and social well-being for present and future generations (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). It involves integrating economic growth, environmental protection, and social equity to create a harmonious and enduring path of development (UN, 2020). According to Salisu (2017), Sustainable Development (SD) involves achieving economic growth while simultaneously safeguarding environmental quality, with each aspect mutually reinforcing the other. It encompasses maintaining equilibrium between the human desire for enhanced lifestyles and well-being and the preservation of vital natural resources and ecosystems, which both current and future generations rely upon.

In line with the World Conservation Union (1991), sustainable development can be defined as striving to enhance the quality of life while staying within the ecological limits of our ecosystems. Consequently, the concept of sustainable development extends beyond purely environmental concerns, encompassing a broader scope that includes three fundamental policy domains: economy, environment, and society. In this context, economic activities must be conducted with great care to prevent environmental degradation. In essence, sustainable development seeks to ensure that the basic needs of the global community are met, excesses are minimized, and environmental harm is averted.

Principles of Sustainable Development

As outlined by Osem (1989), sustainable development can be achieved by adhering to the following principles:

- Sustainable development necessitates the promotion of values that encourage consumption standards that remain within ecological boundaries and are attainable by all individuals.
- Meeting fundamental needs relies in part on realizing the full potential for growth, and sustainable development unequivocally calls for economic growth in regions where such needs are unmet.
- While the issue extends beyond population size to encompass resource distribution, sustainable development can only be pursued if demographic trends align with the changing productive capacity of the ecosystem.
- Sustainable development should not jeopardize the natural systems that sustain life on Earth, including the atmosphere, water bodies, soils, and all living organisms.
- Although growth does not have rigid limits in terms of population or resource utilization, the pursuit of ecological sustainability demands equitable access to limited resources long before these limits are reached, along with a redirection of technological efforts to alleviate the strain.
- Most renewable resources are intricately interconnected within ecosystems, and determining the maximum sustainable yield must consider the holistic impacts of exploitation on the entire system.
- Sustainable development necessitates minimizing the rate at which non-renewable resources are exhausted to ensure that future options remain open.

- Sustainable development entails the preservation of both plant and animal species.
- Sustainable development mandates the minimization of detrimental effects on the quality of air, water, and other natural elements to uphold the overall integrity of ecosystems.

A Historical Overview of Development Planning in Nigeria

Development planning in Nigeria can be categorized into three distinct eras, each characterized by its unique approach and objectives. These eras are the Era of Fixed-Term Planning (1962-1985), the Era of Rolling Plans (1990-1998), and the New Democratic Dispensation (1999 to the present day). During the Era of Fixed-Term Planning (1962-1985), Nigeria implemented a series of notable development plans aimed at achieving specific economic and social goals (). This era saw the formulation and execution of four significant plans:

First National Development Plan (1962-1968):

This inaugural plan covered the period from 1962 to 1968 and initially allocated 2.2 billion Naira for capital expenditure. The First National Development Plan laid the foundation for subsequent development plans in Nigeria and set the tone for the country's approach to economic development (Ogwuma, 1992). The primary objectives of the First National Development Plan were to promote economic growth, reduce poverty, and improve the standard of living for Nigerians. It emphasized the expansion of infrastructure, agriculture, education, and healthcare as key areas of focus (Oni, 2006). However, due to the Nigerian Civil War, the plan's implementation extended to 1969-70. Notably, the First National Development Plan prioritized employment promotion, leading to the establishment of the National Manpower Board (NMB) in 1962.

Regrettably, this plan appeared to serve ulterior motives, ostensibly favoring the colonial powers rather than the nation's true progress. The country was divided into three regions to ensure a more widespread distribution of development initiatives. A primary emphasis was placed on agriculture, particularly the cultivation of cash crops destined for export to colonial metropolises. During this period, Nigeria began to seek external assistance to support its development endeavors. Consequently, the plan heavily relied on foreign resources, technology transfers, and expertise to execute substantial capital projects. An astounding 50% of the total planned capital expenditure was anticipated to originate from foreign sources (Saadu, 2017). The plan encompassed objectives such as mining mineral resources, enhancing infrastructure for efficient goods and services distribution nationwide, advancing education, and improving the general well-being of Nigerian citizens.

Second National Development Plan (1970-1974):

The Second Plan, spanning from 1970 to 1974, had a capital expenditure allocation of approximately 3 billion Naira. It sought to address some of the deficiencies identified in the first plan. The planning process was strengthened, with an emphasis on soliciting public input. This involved convening a national conference on economic development and reconstruction. Additionally, various levels of government, ministries, and agencies, including vital planning entities like the National Manpower Board and the Federal Office of Statistics, contributed to the plan's development. The second National Development was launched shortly after the end of the civil war as a means of reconstructing the facilities damaged by the war and promoting economic and social development throughout the nation. The plan aimed at a capital expenditure programme of N3, 192 Billion during the four years and this was expected to be distributed between the public and the private sectors. The public investment programme was set at N2, 100million while the private sector was expected to make an investment of N1, 632 billion. The implementation of this capital programme was expected to result in a rise in the gross output of the economy from a level of N3, 028 billion in 1969-70 to N3, 987 billion in 1973 in real term. The average growth rate expected throughout the plan period was about 7 percent per annum (Saadu, 2017).

The plan successfully revitalized manufacturing establishments, including the reopening and expansion of facilities such as the Calabar and Nkalagu cement factories. A second oil refinery was implemented in Warri, and the super phosphate fertilizer project was launched in Kaduna. Automobile assembly plants, including Volkswagen and Peugeot, were established, and two salt refineries commenced operations. Significant progress was also made in education, with primary school enrollment increasing from 3.5 million in 1970 to about 4.5 million in 1973. At the secondary level, the number of students nearly doubled during the plan period, and numerous educational institutions were established or expanded, including federal government secondary schools, colleges of technology, and trade centers (Saadu, 2017).

Third National Development Plan (1975-1980):

This plan covered the period from 1975 to 1980 and aimed to consolidate the gains of the previous plans while addressing emerging challenges. It continued to emphasize public participation and collaboration among government agencies, ministries, and relevant stakeholders. The plan signifies a pivotal moment in the evolution of economic planning in Nigeria. Notably, it was distinguished by its substantial initial investment, initially estimated at ₦30 billion and later revised to ₦43.313 billion, a size that was tenfold

larger than the first plan. Moreover, its formulation involved extensive consultations with the private sector, facilitated by the establishment of the National Economic Advisory Council in 1972 (Saadu, 2017).

This expansion of objectives represented an improvement over the second plan in terms of goal clarity and specificity. The overarching strategy of the third plan aimed to harness the revenue generated from oil resources to bolster the productive capacity of the economy, thus ensuring a sustained improvement in the living standards of the populace. The significant size of the plan was partly a reflection of the optimism fostered by highly favorable financial conditions prevailing in the country on the eve of the plan's launch. During this period, there were substantial increases in both the price of crude oil and its production levels (Saadu, 2017). By March 1975, Nigeria's oil production had reached a historic high of 2.3 million barrels per day, with projections indicating that it could potentially reach 3.0 million barrels per day by the plan's conclusion. Regrettably, these projections were not realized due to the global economic downturn, resulting in declining production and oil prices. In fact, in the first year of the plan (1975/76), the estimated value of oil exports plummeted by approximately ₦1.0 billion (Saadu, 2017).

Furthermore, other challenges, such as port congestion and accelerating inflation, impeded the plan's progress. Inflation, in particular, not only disrupted plan priorities but also eroded living standards across the nation.

Fourth National Development Plan (1981-1985):

The Fourth Plan, spanning from 1981 to 1985, was developed with the objective of sustaining the country's developmental momentum. It built upon the foundation laid by previous plans and remained committed to the principles of comprehensive planning and public involvement. The fourth National Development plan represented an improvement over the third plan (FRN 1981). It aimed to further solidify the groundwork for economic and social development. An examination of the sectoral allocations would reveal that, similar to the third National Development plan, all the subsectors were retained, albeit with increased funding in some cases.

One key distinction between the Third and Fourth National Development plans lay in the enlargement of objectives. In the fourth plan, the objectives became more specific and detailed. These objectives encompassed; Increasing the real income of the average citizen, Achieving a more equitable distribution of income among individuals and socioeconomic groups, enhancing the level of skilled manpower, Reducing unemployment rates, Decreasing the economy's reliance on a narrow range of activities, Fostering balanced development, Encouraging greater citizen participation in the ownership and management of productive enterprises, Promoting self-reliance, Advancing technology development, Increasing productivity, Cultivating a new national orientation that emphasizes discipline, a positive work ethic, and a clean environment (Ayo, 1988).

The Perspective Plan and The Rolling Plans (1986-1994)

A fresh perspective on planning emerged during the preparation of the fifth Development plan. The conventional five-year planning model was perceived as inadequate for providing a realistic long-term solution to the country's economic challenges. This new approach was initiated with a conference jointly organized by the Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER) and the Federal Ministry of National Planning to deliberate on strategies for the National Development plan. In response to the recommendations of planning experts who gathered at the Ibadan conference in November 1984, the government decided to implement what became known as perspective planning, covering a 15-20 year span to allow for a more extended view of the country's issues. The first phase of this perspective plan would become the fifth National Development Plan, marking the cessation of the conventional five-year National Development Plans from 1986 to 1989.

The Babangida administration fundamentally departed from the previous system of fixed five-year development plans and embraced two distinct national planning approaches: the perspective plan, spanning 15-20 years, and the rolling plan, covering three-year periods with annual reviews to assess economic performance and alignment with goals. Given its comprehensive nature, the perspective plan required a substantial amount of information and data. To address this, the national bank undertook a significant statistical survey in January 1991 to ensure data completeness and facilitate effective planning and economic performance monitoring.

The economic challenges Nigeria faced since 1983 revealed the limitations of fixed five-year plans in addressing the complexities of economic management and adjustment amidst uncertainties and urgent issues. The introduction of the three-year rolling plan by the Developing Country Studies government aimed to provide a more flexible and indicative approach to planning, enabling a systematic and orderly transition from one plan to another, ultimately culminating at the end of the perspective plan's time frame.

National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) (Olusegun Obasanjo 1999- 2007)

The period from independence saw the launch of a total of five national development plans between 1962 and 1980, all characterized by poor implementation. However, systematic planning faced setbacks from the mid-1980s as the nation grappled with challenges

related to defining the roles of the public and private sectors. The introduction of a three-year rolling plan during this experimental phase did little to reverse the country's declining economic fortunes. A combination of factors, including corruption, a decline in crude oil prices, and flawed policy formulation and implementation, led to a sharp economic decline. Poverty emerged as a significant and growing concern in Nigeria during this period, worsening through to 1999.

It was against this backdrop that the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) was introduced as an ambitious developmental blueprint. This document aimed to establish the foundations of a developmental state and design instruments to accelerate economic growth and reduce poverty. NEEDS responded to the development challenges facing Nigeria, although it initially underestimated the extent of the country's social, political, and economic decay.

While the NEEDS document explicitly stated that it was Nigeria's homegrown poverty reduction strategy and aligned with the concept of a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), it shared some of the shortcomings identified by Ohiorhenuan (2003) in African PRSPs in general. These shortcomings included weaknesses in poverty diagnostics, a descriptive rather than analytical approach, and inadequacies in setting economic targets.

The most significant drawback of NEEDS as a PRSP, however, was its reliance on a "trickle-down" approach to poverty reduction, instead of adopting the more internationally recognized "Rights-Based Approach," (AAIN 2005).

Vision 2020

Vision 20:2020, introduced in 2009, was Nigeria's long-term economic transformation strategy with goals to elevate living standards and position the nation among the top 20 global economies. It aimed for a minimum GDP of \$900 billion, a per capita income of \$4,000 annually, fiscal discipline, low inflation, and enhanced infrastructure. The plan spanned 2009 to 2020 and included a series of Medium-term Plans (FRN, 2021). This vision required substantial investments from the public and private sectors, totaling N31.95 trillion, with the government contributing N19 trillion and the private sector N12.95 trillion. Although Nigeria didn't achieve top 20 GDP status, it improved its global ranking during this period, despite economic challenges like declining oil prices and COVID-19.

While some progress was made toward realizing the Vision 2020 goals, Nigeria did not achieve a position among the world's top 20 economies in terms of GDP size by 2020. However, it did improve its global ranking, moving from the 30th position to the 27th position during this period. The Nigerian economy experienced robust growth of 7.8% in 2010 but faced slowdowns from 2015 onward due to exogenous shocks, notably lower and volatile oil prices. The economy endured two recessions in 2016 and 2020, largely attributed to declining oil prices, with the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbating the latter downturn. Progress in social development was modest, as evidenced by a slight increase in the Human Development Index (HDI) from 0.47 in 2005 to 0.54 in 2019. In 2020, although the HDI remained at 0.54, Nigeria's global ranking declined to 161. In the realm of governance, Nigeria made slight improvements in its corruption rating, as indicated by the Corruption Perception Index (CPI), which decreased from 26 points in 2019 to 25 points in 2020 (FRN, 2021). However, while Vision 2020 effectively identified key constraints, such as weak institutions and unreliable power supply, significant progress in addressing these issues remained elusive. Social development progress was modest, as reflected by a slight increase in the Human Development Index. Governance saw slight improvements in corruption ratings. While the plan had clear objectives and strategies, challenges like volatile finances, low absorptive capacity, infrastructure limitations, and inadequate monitoring hindered its implementation.

The Economic Recovery and Growth Plan

The last phase of the Vision 2020 period was characterised by serious macroeconomic challenges and recession. In response, the Federal Government introduced the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP). The ERGP aimed at restoring economic growth and driving sustainable, accelerated development. It focussed on promoting national prosperity. The main objectives were:

- Restoring growth through macroeconomic stability and concentric economic diversification;
- Investing in the Nigerian people through programmes on social inclusion, job creation, youth empowerment and improved human capital; and
- Building a globally competitive economy through investment in infrastructure, improved business environment, and promotion of the digital economy (FRN, 2021).

The ERGP was an emergency recovery plan primarily formulated to pull Nigeria out of recession. It targeted a growth rate of 7 percent by the end of the year 2020, with an annual average real GDP growth rate of 4.62 percent between 2017 and 2020. This was to be mainly driven by the non-oil sectors. It emphasized bringing the inflation rate down to a single digit of 9 percent by the end of 2020 from the double digits of 18.6 percent in 2016 (FRN, 2021). Macroeconomic performance, while below the ERGP's targets, was broadly in the right direction. From a negative real GDP growth of -1.58% in 2016, the economy grew gradually to 2.27% in 2019, however it declined to -1.92% in 2020, owing to the Covid-19 pandemic. Yearend inflation declined from 18.55% in 2016 to 11.98% in 2019, with the trend reversed in 2020 ending the year at 15.75% owing to supply constraints associated with the Covid-

19 pandemic, higher transportation and processing costs, and challenging security conditions. Unemployment rate rose from 14.23% in 2016 to 33.28% in 2020 in view of lower real GDP growth. Total revenue increased from 5.5 percent of GDP in 2016 to about 7.9 percent in 2019, reflecting tax policy and administration measures including the widening of tax base through efforts to increase the number of taxpayers. Revenue as a percent of GDP, however, fell to 5.94 percent in 2020 due to the impact of the pandemic. The government focused on infrastructure and social expenditures, culminating in an increase in consolidated public expenditure-to-GDP ratio of 11.80 percent in 2020 compared to 9.5 percent (FRN, 2021).

The Nigerian Developmental Agenda Conundrum: Planning Without Facts

Planning without facts, especially in the context of national development plans, can have serious consequences for a country's progress and prosperity. Nigeria, like many other developing nations, has often grappled with the challenge of formulating and implementing national development plans that lack a solid factual foundation. In many developing nations, the planning process is significantly hindered by a substantial deficiency in information and data. The issues of absence of data, inaccuracies, or inadequacies in data have characterized national development planning in Nigeria. These issues persist in Nigeria even in the present day. Nigeria lacks consistent efforts to compile statistics or maintain accurate records of data. In a sharp contrast, it can be argued that advanced countries of the world routinely gather data, including information on road traffic, hazards, and other relevant factors, as a crucial resource for development purposes.

For a country like Nigeria, without a reliable database, what then is planned? Development as a concept has been generally agreed even multi-dimensionally to be goal-oriented. Some will argue that the people is the beginning, the means and the end of development. Without proper data and information on the population and demography of the people, how then can a developmental agenda be championed to meet with the vision, objectives and the targeted goals of such agenda?

Wolfgang Stolper, a renowned economist, highlighted several arguments concerning the challenges associated with national development planning in the absence of reliable facts and data. Stolper argued that planning without adequate data is akin to navigating a ship without a map (Stolper, 2013). Without accurate and comprehensive information on a country's economic, social, and environmental conditions, policymakers are likely to formulate strategies that are disconnected from reality. This can lead to policies that do not address the actual needs and challenges of the population, resulting in inefficiency and ineffectiveness. Insufficient data can lead to miscalculations in various areas of national development planning. For instance, without accurate economic data, it becomes challenging to set realistic growth targets or estimate the fiscal resources required for specific projects. This can result in either overambitious plans that strain the budget or conservative plans that stifle growth potential.

Stolper also emphasized the danger of misallocating resources when planning without facts. Inadequate data can lead to the improper allocation of funds, with investments being directed toward less critical sectors or regions while neglecting more pressing needs (Stolper, 2013). This misallocation can exacerbate disparities and hinder overall development progress. This becomes a riskier venture because lack of reliable data can perpetuate biases in policymaking. Without an accurate understanding of social and economic disparities, planners may fail to address issues of inequality and exclusion adequately. This can lead to policies that inadvertently favour certain groups or regions over others and this has been the situation of Nigeria given a historical perspective of the development of National Planning in Nigeria.

From the colonial era, Nigeria's planning has always lacked factual backing. As an example, the 1940 Colonial Development and Welfare Act was established to manage the outcomes of Nigeria's social and economic structure. This was particularly crucial during the colonial era when urban areas and administrative centers experienced a significant surge in population (Adeyeye, 2010). The objective of the first national development plan spanning from 1962 to 1968, which considered a population estimate of 55 million people, was detailed by Ekundare (1971 p.1);

The basic objective of planning in Nigeria is not merely to accelerate the rate of economic growth and the rate at which the level of the population can be raised; it is also to give her an increasing measure of control over her own destiny.

Ekundare further elaborates that in the subsequent national development plan, it was asserted that national planning aimed to instigate a comprehensive transformation of society. The contemporary plan explicitly acknowledges the potential of using planning as a deliberate tool for bringing about social change by rectifying deficiencies in existing social relations across various aspects of production, distribution, and exchange. Challenges arise in Nigeria concerning the collection and compilation of data, where official statistics often prove to be incomplete or inaccurate. National development plans pertaining to transportation infrastructure encompass ports, airports, rail networks, roads, and their associated facilities, intending to connect hubs of significant activity and facilitate the movement of goods between production areas and markets (Ekundare, 1971). However, these plans have fallen short of achieving their objectives.

We can assert that the third national development plan had ambitious goals, even during the era of the oil boom and amidst inconsistent decision-making. Nevertheless, there was a lack of available facts, figures, and data to support the realization of these objectives.

The fourth national development plan was abruptly halted in 1988 with the introduction of the structural adjustment program. Ejumudo (2013) argued that the economic crisis faced by the nation during the 1980s revealed that fixed five-year plans were ill-suited to handle the challenges of economic management and adjustment in conditions marked by uncertainties and urgent issues. Therefore, the government's adoption of the three-year rolling plan can be seen as a response to the need for a flexible and indicative plan. This approach allowed for a more orderly transition from one plan to another at the conclusion of the perspective plan period. Essentially, the 1992-94 rolling plan marked the third instalment in the series of medium-term plans initiated by the Nigerian government since the adoption of the rolling plan strategy in 1990. This plan period could be considered the seventh, starting with the 1962-68 development plans.

The argument however remains that in the absence of reliable data, correct figures, concrete statistical data, the projection of positive outcome of the National developmental agenda will be a dream that will consistently remain far-fetched amidst the Nigerian complex overarching challenges ranging from acute rural poverty, subdevelopment and underdevelopment which remains a puzzle all the National Development Plans have not solved.

Major Problematic Issues of Development Planning in Nigeria

Despite the extensive proliferation of national development plans in Nigeria, significant development gaps remain, posing considerable challenges. Many years of development planning have not led to the envisioned sustainable development outcomes. This issue is exacerbated by the fact that sustainable development has not been a prominent focus of successive Nigerian governments (Mohammed, 2020). Consequently, Nigeria finds itself among the world's poorest nations, trailing behind in various development indicators. It's crucial to recognize that while numerous activities have been labeled as development plans, genuine development hasn't been at the forefront of Nigerian leadership's priorities. The absence of a clear vision has resulted in disjointed efforts with limited tangible outcomes in globally recognized developmental indicators.

Various factors contribute to this developmental planning dilemma in Nigeria. These subsidiary issues are symptomatic of the overarching problems, which is the absence of a true development agenda and planning without facts in Nigeria. Improving Nigeria's track record in implementing development plans necessitates a fundamental focus on reforming the public service, as it is the key institution responsible for carrying out these plans. The observation that Nigerians outside the public service exhibit considerable productivity suggests that the root of the issue largely resides within the service itself. While public service reforms have been initiated to enhance its professionalization, there remain significant challenges that need to be addressed.

One of the persistent issues in the public service is a management crisis characterized by inefficiencies. Additionally, there are problems related to inadequate remuneration for public servants, excessive staffing levels, a lack of well-defined job descriptions, and the absence of an institutionalized framework for management by objectives (MBO) (Mohammed, 2020).

Addressing these challenges within the public service is crucial for improving the successful implementation of development plans. Reforms should go beyond professionalization and encompass comprehensive management reforms, remuneration adjustments, right-sizing, clarification of roles and responsibilities, and the establishment of robust MBO principles to enhance efficiency and effectiveness in plan execution.

In Nigeria, systemic corruption has manifested itself in various forms over the years. From the strategic corruption witnessed in sectors like the cement industry to the widespread corruption during the Second Republic, the country has experienced corruption at different scales. This trend has persisted through subsequent political eras, including the Third and Fourth Republics. Consequently, it would not be an exaggeration to assert that corruption has become an inherent issue within Nigerian society. The term "mega tonic corruption" aptly describes the magnitude and scale of corruption witnessed in the country, signifying that corruption has not only persisted but also expanded in scope and impact (Mohammed, 2020). Addressing systemic corruption in Nigeria requires a comprehensive and sustained effort to transform not only the legal and institutional frameworks but also the societal norms and values that have perpetuated this deeply entrenched issue. It necessitates a holistic approach that includes legal reforms, increased transparency, civic education, and efforts to reshape the cultural acceptance of corruption.

In the realm of executing development plans in Nigeria, one of the most significant challenges that loom large is the issue of inadequate executive capacity. This predicament poses a substantial impediment to the effective implementation of development programs. It's a frustrating endeavor to craft and plan the execution of various programs when the very foundation necessary for their realization is lacking. Specifically, this foundation comprises the availability of organizations, institutions, and a skilled

workforce that are essential for carrying out the envisioned initiatives. Regrettably, these prerequisites are often conspicuously absent within the country and cannot be reasonably expected to materialize during the designated plan period.

Executive capacity entails more than just having the grand vision for development; it encompasses the practical aspects of putting that vision into action. It necessitates not only competent and capable contracting firms but also the presence of essential socio-economic infrastructure. This includes robust and reliable systems for transportation, communication, energy supply, and public services. Additionally, executive capacity entails having a proficient and well-equipped civil service, as well as other government agencies and institutions that are vital to the execution of development plans. In Nigeria, the deficiency in executive capacity has consistently hampered the translation of development plans into tangible outcomes. Even the most well-conceived plans can falter when the requisite organizational structures, skilled personnel, and necessary infrastructure are lacking. This disconnect between planning and execution has been a perennial challenge that demands serious attention.

To overcome this critical issue, Nigeria must prioritize the development of executive capacity as an integral part of its planning and development strategy. This entails not only investing in training and capacity building but also fostering an environment conducive to attracting and retaining skilled professionals and organizations. Moreover, it necessitates a comprehensive approach that addresses both the immediate needs for capacity and the long-term strategies for building a sustainable framework for executing development plans. Only through such concerted efforts can Nigeria bridge the gap between planning and successful execution, ultimately driving meaningful progress and development within the nation.

Despite nearly two decades of post-independence planning, the enduring neo-colonial economic structure remains intact, characterized by its reliance on international capitalism. Remarkably, the industrialization strategies employed in these plans have further cemented this dependency, primarily through import-substitution policies that have, in turn, empowered multinational corporations. Post-independence planning has effectively woven our economy into the intricate fabric of global capitalism, dominated by imperialistic forces (Mohammed, 2021). Adding to this concern is the capital-intensive nature of neo-colonial industrialization, coupled with a focus on manufacturing consumer goods within the country. This shift entails an increased dependence on imperialist nations for capital goods, amplifying our reliance on external forces. A telling example of this vulnerability can be seen in the congestion of ports during the early post-independence years and the subsequent severe shortages. This situation highlights the nation's dependence on imperialist multinationals like Julius Berger and Dumez for critical civil engineering projects, including roads, harbors, large-scale bridges in cities like Lagos, and even housing construction.

This implies that enduring neo-colonial economic structure, perpetuated by post-independence planning, has left Nigeria in a state of vulnerability, where key sectors of its development are heavily reliant on imperialistic forces and international capitalism. This has negative implications for the nation's economic autonomy and sustainability growth plans.

3. Conclusion

Nigeria's journey through decades of development planning reveals a complex landscape marked by ambitious goals, persistent challenges, and evolving strategies. While these plans have articulated noble objectives, they have often encountered formidable obstacles in implementation. One recurrent theme in Nigeria's development planning narrative is the struggle to bridge the gap between intention and execution. Despite having extensive blueprints, data deficiencies, inadequate executive capacity, and systemic corruption have hindered progress in realizing these aspirations. Furthermore, the persistent reliance on foreign resources and the dominance of multinational corporations underscores the nation's vulnerability in shaping its economic destiny, echoing neocolonial dynamics.

However, it is crucial to recognize that development planning remains a valuable tool for steering a nation toward progress. The recognition of the public service's pivotal role in plan execution emphasizes the need for reforms that enhance professionalism, management efficiency, and clear job descriptions. Nigeria's experiences with development planning serve as a learning curve, highlighting the importance of holistic, data-driven, and domestically oriented approaches. To navigate the intricate challenges of the 21st century, Nigerian policymakers must prioritize sustainable development, address data deficiencies, and cultivate executive capacity. Ultimately, the success of Nigeria's development endeavors hinges on its ability to not only craft visionary plans but also translate them into tangible socioeconomic improvements. The nation's future will depend on its capacity to bridge the gap between planning and implementation, fostering a truly prosperous and self-reliant society.

4. Recommendation

Based on the discussions and challenges identified in this study, following this paragraph are detailed recommendations aimed at fostering sustainable growth and development in the country.

Establish Comprehensive and Timely Data Collection and Management System

Addressing the issue of planning without sufficient data in Nigerian development planning will not yield positive results. Hence, an effective establishment should be created or improved upon for provision of comprehensive and timely data collection, and management system. There should be more investment on data infrastructure. This infrastructure should be designed to collect, process, and store various types of data, such as economic, demographic, social, financial, and environmental information. Also, regular and systematic data collection exercises across sectors and regions should be encouraged. This should include conducting national census, surveys, and studies to gather up-to-date data on population, employment, income, education, health, and other key indicators. This effort should be consistent and well-coordinated.

Aligning National Development Plan with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Aligning national development plans with the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is essential for fostering holistic and inclusive development in Nigeria. The SDGs provide a universally accepted framework for addressing a wide range of development challenges, from poverty and inequality to environmental sustainability and governance. By integrating the SDGs into national planning, Nigeria can benefit from a comprehensive roadmap that promotes social, economic, and environmental progress. Additionally, monitoring and reporting on SDG progress are critical accountability mechanisms that empower citizens and civil society, to hold the government accountable for any development flaws. The SDGs also emphasize environmental sustainability (SDG 13, SDG 15), which is crucial for Nigeria's long-term development plan. Aligning with these goals will promote responsible natural resource management, climate action, and biodiversity conservation, among others.

Encouraging Inclusivity and Social Welfare

In the Nigerian context, prioritizing programs that enhance social inclusion, reduce poverty, and empower marginalized groups, such as women, youth, and people with disabilities. This may not be moral imperative alone but also a strategic approach to sustainable development. Implementing targeted social safety nets can address immediate welfare needs, reduce inequality, and create a more inclusive and prosperous society. Nigeria faces significant poverty challenges, with a large proportion of its population living below the poverty line. Prioritizing these programs which directly target poverty reduction can provide immediate relief to vulnerable households. Also, promoting gender equality as an inclusive approach to the developmental agenda is crucial for Nigeria's development. Programs that empower women economically, socially, and politically can lead to more inclusive and equitable growth. Women's participation in the workforce and decision-making processes can drive economic productivity and social progress in a country.

Political Stability and Policy Consistency

Promoting political stability and maintaining policy consistency are essential for sustainable economic growth and development. These may play a critical role in minimizing disruptions caused by changes in government, fostering an environment conducive for investment, and ensuring that development plans are effectively executed. Nigeria has experienced periods of political instability and transitions, that can hinder economic progress. Therefore, promoting political stability and continuity can create an environment where political actors; regardless of their affiliations, are committed to peaceful coexist, and follow democratic principles. This in essence can provide the necessary foundation for strategic long-term development plan, and sustainable growth.

In general, Government should establish an all-inclusive, long-term vision for growth that involves all parties and has political support. Implement policies that target disadvantaged and vulnerable individuals, such as access to high-quality education, healthcare, and social safety nets, in order to minimize economic disparity and promote shared prosperity. By diversifying the economy, investing in industries with strong development prospects, and promoting innovation and entrepreneurship, it is possible to lessen reliance on a particular sector (such as oil or agriculture).

In addition, government should increase economic productivity, make investments in vital infrastructure such as energy, digital communication, and transportation. Create a skilled and flexible workforce, with priority to education and skill development. Include environmental sustainability in development plans, placing a focus on renewable energy, resource management that is ethical, and conservation. Put measures in place to combat climate change and lower greenhouse gas emissions. Develop international infrastructure more easily, and align trade laws. Promote innovation and the use of new technologies, support research and development. Make sure that everyone has access to cheap healthcare and a good education. By lowering administrative barriers and simplifying rules, Government may create a favourable business climate, and offer incentives to both domestic and international investors. Encourage data gathering and analysis to support evidence-based decision, track development and infrastructure to boost economic productivity, including electricity, digital communication, and transportation.

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