



Navigating Colonial Legacies and its Varying Impacts on Nigeria's Development

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Abstract

The long-lasting effects of colonial legacies on Nigeria's growth in the 20th and 21st centuries are examined in this study. Nigeria's colonial past has resulted in structural inequality, governance issues, and socioeconomic gaps that persist even after the country gained independence in 1960. Through the integration of post-colonial theory with a historical-analytical framework, the study critically examines the socio-political and economic aspects of Nigeria's development trajectory. The long-lasting effects of colonial legacies on Nigeria's growth in the 20th and 21st centuries are examined in this paper. The issue being addressed is how Nigeria's potential for equitable development has been hampered by the enduring effects of resource exploitation, cultural hegemony, and colonial administrative frameworks. Through the use of a mixed-methods approach that incorporates qualitative analytical research, the study demonstrates how colonial practices have influenced current governance, ethnic conflicts, and economic underdevelopment. The research shows that colonial legacies have contributed to cyclical poverty and instability by strengthening corruption, exacerbating regional inequities, and impeding national integration. Furthermore, the study notes that young people in Nigeria are becoming more conscious, which is resulting in movements that support accountability and structural change. The results stress how important it is that Nigeria take a proactive approach to decolonization, redressing historical wrongs and promoting inclusive governance. A few of the recommendations include to improve participatory governance frameworks to empower local people, invest in infrastructure that spans regional boundaries, and adopt educational reforms to encourage critical historical understanding. This study emphasizes how crucial it is to acknowledge and deal with colonial legacies in order to create a sustainable future for Nigeria's growth.

Keywords: Colonialism, Development, Legacies, Economic Exploitation, Historical Challenges.

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Introduction

The legacy of colonialism has profoundly shaped the trajectory of Nigeria's development throughout the 20th century till date. As a nation rich in cultural diversity and natural resources, Nigeria emerged from colonial rule with both promises of progress and enduring challenges. This paper explores how colonial legacies continue to influence Nigeria's development, examining their varied impacts across political, economic, and social dimensions. Nigeria's encounter with colonialism began in the late 19th century, as British imperial forces established control over various ethnic groups and regions through treaties, military conquests, and indirect rule strategies. The amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria in 1914 created a unified administrative entity under British rule, laying the groundwork for a centralized governance structure that persists till date (Falola, 1999). Colonial authorities imposed new economic systems, exploiting Nigeria's resources for the benefit of the British Empire. The extraction of palm oil, cocoa, and later, the discovery of oil reserves, became pivotal to Nigeria's integration into the global economy, albeit largely on terms dictated by colonial powers (Adejumobi, 2007).

Indeed, the colonial legacy profoundly influenced Nigeria's political landscape, establishing a framework characterized by ethnic diversity and regional disparities. British policies fostered a divide-and-rule strategy, empowering local elites in some regions while marginalizing others. This strategy exacerbated ethnic tensions and laid the foundation for post-independence political conflicts (Osaghae, 1998). For instance, the northern region was accorded special status that made them enjoy more benefits than the south. First, the Governor General, Lord Fredrick Lugard ruled the north by proclamation, while administering the south through legislations. Second, the resources generated from the south were used to administer the north during the colonial rule. Upon gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria inherited a colonial-era political structure that struggled to accommodate the diverse aspirations of its populace. The legacy of centralized power and a weak federal system contributed to cycles of military coups, civil unrest, and a persistent struggle for political stability (Ihonvbere, 1994). Economically, Nigeria's development trajectory reflects the enduring impact of colonial exploitation and dependencies. The colonial economy prioritized export-oriented agriculture and natural resource extraction,



leading to an uneven development that left Nigeria vulnerable to global market fluctuations and dependency on commodity exports (Mkandawire, 2001).

The discovery of oil in the Niger Delta in the 1950s dramatically reshaped Nigeria's economic landscape, concentrating wealth and power in the hands of a few while neglecting investments in other sectors crucial for sustainable development (Watts, 2008). This resource curse phenomenon underscored the enduring legacy of colonial economic policies that prioritized extraction over diversification and local development (Ross, 2012). On the Social aspect, colonialism left a profound impact on Nigeria's cultural identity and societal structures. The imposition of Western education and legal systems reshaped traditional social hierarchies and governance structures, creating new avenues for social mobility while undermining indigenous systems of knowledge and governance (Afigbo, 1991). Furthermore, the legacy of colonialism contributed to enduring social inequalities based on ethnicity, class, and region. Post-independence efforts to forge a national identity and social cohesion have been challenged by historical grievances rooted in colonial-era injustices and disparities (Suberu, 2001).

In the 21st century, Nigeria continues to grapple with the multifaceted legacies of its colonial past. Persistent challenges such as corruption, infrastructure deficits, and socio-economic inequalities reflect deeper historical roots that intersect with contemporary governance failures and global economic pressures (Ake, 1996). Navigating these challenges requires a nuanced understanding of how historical trajectories have shaped Nigeria's development path. Addressing the legacy of colonialism involves promoting inclusive governance structures, fostering economic diversification, and reconciling historical injustices through policies that empower marginalized communities and promote equitable development (Oluwole, 2004).

Statement of the Problem

The persistent impact of colonial legacies on Nigeria's socioeconomic and political growth from the 20th century to the present is the main issue that this paper seeks to explore. Nigeria still has structural problems, mostly carried over from its colonial past, such as corruption, ethnic tensions, and regional inequalities, even after gaining independence in 1960. The colonial government put in place institutions that segregated ethnic groups and gave priority to resource



extraction, which encouraged rivalry and mistrust among the populations. It is, therefore, crucial to note that, this historical background has hindered the achievement of equal development by contributing to economic stagnation and governance shortcomings. Furthermore, the nation's inability to forge a unified national identity has been hampered by the remnants of colonial policy, which has prolonged unstable cycles. With a focus on how historical injustices continue to affect current issues and possible avenues for meaningful reform and sustainable growth, this study attempts to critically analyze these colonial influences and their many effects on Nigeria's development. Addressing Nigeria's current issues and promoting a more just future require an understanding of this link.

Literature Review

Colonialism undoubtedly impacted negatively on Nigeria's development trajectory in the 20th century, leaving enduring legacies across political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions. This literature review synthesizes findings from some scholarly sources to explore the complex interactions between colonial policies and Nigeria's contemporary challenges and opportunities. During colonial era, governance in Nigeria was characterized by indirect rule, a strategy aimed at maintaining control through indigenous intermediaries while preserving British authority (Afigbo, 1991). Indirect rule made the colonial administration appear as though it were the indigenes that were ruling, however, in the actual sense, it was the British that were in control. This governance model entrenched ethnic divisions and weakened local governance structures (traditional leaders, elders-in-council, age grade system, *umu-ada* etc.), laying the foundation for post-independence political instability and conflicts (Suberu, 2001). Ihonvbere (1994) argues that the legacy of colonialism continues to influence Nigeria's federalism, centralization of power, and challenges in achieving effective governance.

Just as was experienced in other parts of Africa, colonial economic policies focused on exploiting Nigeria's natural resources, particularly palm oil and later petroleum, for export to fuel industrialization in Europe (Bohannon, 1957; Ross, 2012). This led to the neglect of local industries and agricultural sectors essential for food security, perpetuating dependency on oil revenues and contributing to economic volatility (Ross, 2012). The "resource curse" thesis posits



that Nigeria's reliance on oil has hindered diversified economic development and exacerbated inequalities (Ross, 2012).

In terms of education systems, the British promoted Western ideals and undermined indigenous knowledge systems, leading to cultural transformations and identity challenges (Afigbo, 1991). The imposition of Western legal systems also marginalized traditional justice systems, contributing to social tensions and legal pluralism (Akinjogbin, 1967). Socially, colonialism exacerbated ethnic cleavages and inequalities, influencing social stratification and urban-rural disparities (Mabogunje, 1968; Onibokun & Kumuyi, 1996). With regards to infrastructural development, it has been acknowledged that, the colonial infrastructure projects focused on coastal ports and railways to facilitate resource extraction and administrative control, shaping urbanization patterns and regional disparities (Mabogunje, 1968). These developments neglected rural areas and traditional trade routes, exacerbating rural-urban migration and informal settlements (Onibokun & Kumuyi, 1996).

The persistence of colonial legacies presents challenges for contemporary Nigeria, including governance deficits, economic diversification, social cohesion, and sustainable development (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Policy responses require addressing historical injustices, promoting inclusive governance, diversifying the economy away from oil dependence, and investing in education and infrastructure (Falola & Heaton, 2008). It is imperative to note therefore that, colonialism left indelible marks on Nigeria's development in the 20th century, influencing its political, economic, social, and cultural landscapes. This review synthesizes insights from a range of scholarly sources to explore how colonial legacies continue to shape Nigeria's contemporary challenges and opportunities.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for understanding "Colonial Legacies and Its Varying Impacts on Nigeria's Development in the 20th and 21st Centuries" draws on several key theoretical perspectives from post-colonial studies, dependency theory, and historical institutionalism. Post-colonial theory illuminates how colonialism's cultural and political impositions continue to shape Nigeria's national identity and governance structures (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Dependency theory provides insights into the economic repercussions of colonial exploitation, emphasizing



how Nigeria's dependence on resource extraction has hindered broader economic diversification and development (Ross, 2012). Historical institutionalism helps analyze how colonial-era institutions and legal frameworks established during British rule continue to influence governance, law, and public policy in contemporary Nigeria (Akinjogbin, 1967).

Around the middle of the 20th century, post-colonial studies began to take off, and after World War II, many colonized countries gained their freedom. The theory looks at how colonialism and imperialism affected former colonies on a cultural, political, and economic level. Important figures in post-colonial studies include Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who stresses subaltern voices and the complexities of power dynamics, Homi K. Bhabha, who is well-known for his concepts of hybridity and cultural mimicry, and Edward Said, whose work "Orientalism" criticizes the West's representation of the East (Said, E. W. 1978). According to post-colonial scholars such as (Bhabha, H. K. 1994 and Spivak, G. C. 1988), conquered countries still bear significant psychological and cultural scars from colonialism. It draws attention to the colonial power structures' continued effect and the necessity of critically reexamining identity, language, and history. The theory's central tenet is that knowledge production is tied to power, often marginalizing indigenous perspectives.

In the context of Nigeria, post-colonial studies, the theory provides a lens to analyze how colonial legacies continue to affect national identity, governance, and social cohesion. This framework helps to understand the cultural narratives that shape Nigeria's development and the resistance movements emerging from historically marginalized communities. As a critique of modernization theory, which maintained that all nations follow a linear path to growth, dependency theory emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. It was born out of the unequal economic links between rich and poor countries and gained influence in Latin America. Prominent proponents of the theory include Samir Amin, who extended it to encompass the global capitalist system, and André Gunder Frank, who contended that external dependency was the primary cause of Latin America's underdevelopment (Frank, A. G. 1967 and Amin, S. 1974). The exploitative character of international economic interactions was highlighted by these academics.

According to dependency theory, the dependence of developing countries on richer nations hinders their ability to progress economically. It implies that because resources are taken out



without stimulating local development, this reliance sets up a vicious cycle of underdevelopment.

The theory emphasizes how global capitalism contributes to inequality.

Drawing from the work of (Cardoso, F. H., & Faletto, E. 1979), it becomes clear that dependency theory sheds light on Nigeria's challenges with its economic reliance on foreign investments and oil exports, which have stifled the country's ability to thrive economically in other ways. This theory contributes to the understanding of why persistent poverty and underdevelopment occur in spite of an abundance of natural resources by examining the dynamics of resource extraction and the effects of global economic structures. In political science, historical institutionalism first appeared in the latter half of the 20th century and focused on the long-term ways that institutions influence political outcomes and behavior. It highlights how crucial historical context is to comprehending the evolution and transformation of institutions (Skocpol, T. 1979). Notable academics include Peter Hall, who studies the process of formulating policies, and Theda Skocpol, who investigates the relationship between social movements and governmental structures (Hall, P. A. 1986). Political science, sociology, and history all contribute to historical institutionalism.

The theory argues that political and economic results are shaped by institutions, which are described as formal and informal rules guiding conduct. It highlights path dependency by implying that early choices or occurrences might have lasting consequences, affecting subsequent actions and institutional trajectories (Thelen, K., & Steinmo, S. 1992). Historical institutionalism provides insight into how colonial administrative methods generated long-lasting political behavior and governance systems in Nigeria. This paper contributes to the explanation of why corruption and inefficient government continue to exist in Nigeria by looking at the historical foundations of contemporary institutions. Each of these theories, namely, post-colonial studies, dependency theory, and historical institutionalism are three theoretical frameworks that offer insightful viewpoints for comprehending the intricate effects of colonialism on Nigeria's development. The study can more thoroughly address the complex issues Nigeria is currently facing, which are based in both its historical background and the dynamics of the global economy, by incorporating these ideas.



This theoretical paradigm emphasizes how colonial legacies continue to influence Nigeria's political and socioeconomic environments. With a focus on the interaction of historical settings, institutional continuities, and modern issues, it provides a comprehensive grasp of the difficulties in navigating Nigeria's post-colonial development route.

Methodology

The study adopts a case study approach, which allows for a nuanced examination of specific regions or communities within Nigeria. These case studies can focus on varied impacts such as political governance structures under indirect rule, economic dependencies on cash crops and natural resources, social transformations in education and cultural identity, and infrastructural developments affecting urban-rural divides (Mabogunje, 1968; Onibokun & Kumuyi, 1996).

In addition, the paper used quantitative methods, such as statistical analysis of economic indicators and demographic trends, to help measure and compare the extent of colonial impacts over time. On the other hand, the qualitative methods, including recoded interviews, surveys or focus groups, and ethnographic research techniques are used to provide insights into local perspectives, cultural resilience, and community responses to colonial legacies (Afigbo, 1991; Akinjogbin, 1967). Conducting comparative analysis with other post-colonial communities or regions in Nigeria enhances understanding of commonalities, contrasts, and regional dynamics influenced by colonialism. This comparative approach enriches the analysis of Nigeria's unique historical trajectory and informs broader theoretical debates on colonial impacts across diverse contexts (Suberu, 2001; Mkandawire, 2001).

Finally, the methodology includes an assessment of current policies and initiatives aimed at addressing colonial legacies and promoting sustainable development in Nigeria. A recommendation focuses on institutional reforms, economic diversification strategies, educational reforms, and community-driven initiatives to mitigate negative impacts and foster inclusive growth (Falola & Heaton, 2008). It is against the backdrop of the forgoing that, the following sections and paragraphs below critically explores the British colonial legacies in Nigeria beginning with the 'colonial economic policies & the attendant exploitations' in the 20th century.



Colonial Economic Policies and Resource Exploitation in Nigeria

Colonial economic policies in Nigeria during the 20th century were instrumental in shaping its development trajectory, primarily through the exploitation of natural and human resources. The British colonial administration implemented policies that aimed to extract and export Nigeria's abundant resources, such as palm oil, cocoa, and eventually oil. These policies were designed to benefit the colonial power economically while often neglecting the long-term development needs of the Nigerian population. The colonial period saw significant investments in infrastructure that facilitated the extraction and export of Nigeria's primary commodities. Palm oil, for instance, was a major export during the early colonial era, leading to the establishment of plantations and trade networks that linked Nigerian producers to global markets (Adejumobi, 2007). This economic model reinforced Nigeria's role as a supplier of raw materials to the industrialized economies of Europe, perpetuating a cycle of dependency on external markets and vulnerable commodity prices.

The discovery of oil in commercial quantities in the Niger Delta region during the mid-20th century marked a pivotal moment in Nigeria's economic history. Initially seen as a potential catalyst for rapid economic development and modernization, oil quickly became a double-edged sword. While oil revenues soared and contributed significantly to national income, they also fueled corruption, economic mismanagement, and regional inequalities (Watts, 2008). The concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, exacerbated social tensions, widened the inequality gap and hindered investments in other sectors crucial for sustainable development. The legacy of colonial economic exploitation continues to manifest in contemporary Nigeria. The focus on resource extraction and export-oriented agriculture left enduring structural challenges, including limited industrial diversification, inadequate infrastructure development outside resource-rich regions, and a reliance on imported goods for consumption (Mkandawire, 2001). These factors have contributed to persistent socio-economic inequalities, with regions rich in resources often faring better than resource-poor areas.

Addressing the legacy of colonial economic policies requires a multi-faceted approach. Nigeria must diversify its economy away from dependency on oil and natural resources by promoting industrialization, agricultural modernization, and technological innovation (Ross, 2012). Policy



interventions should focus on enhancing local value addition to raw materials, improving infrastructure across all regions, and fostering inclusive growth that benefits all segments of society (Adejumobi, 2007).

Political Fragmentation and Legacy of Colonial Governance in Nigeria

The legacy of colonial governance profoundly shaped Nigeria's political landscape, contributing to fragmentation, ethnic tensions, and challenges in nation-building during the 20th century. This analysis explores how British colonial policies, including divide-and-rule strategies and the establishment of indirect rule, continue to impact Nigeria's political dynamics. British colonial administrators implemented divide-and-rule strategies as a means of maintaining control over Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups and regions. By empowering local elites and traditional authorities in some areas while marginalizing others, colonial policies exacerbated existing ethnic rivalries and created uneven political development across the country (Osaghae, 1998). This strategy sowed seeds of distrust and competition among ethnic groups that persisted long after independence, contributing to political instability and conflicts.

The adoption of indirect rule in many parts of Nigeria allowed colonial authorities to govern through indigenous rulers and institutions, thereby preserving local traditions and reducing administrative costs. However, this system also entrenched disparities in political representation and governance capacity across regions. The centralized authority established under colonial rule centralized power at the federal level, creating a strong executive but weakening the autonomy and influence of regional governments (Ihonvbere, 1994). Upon gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria inherited a political framework characterized by a weak federal system and deep-seated ethnic divisions. The legacy of colonial governance contributed to cycles of military coups, civil conflicts, and struggles for political dominance among ethnic groups (Suberu, 2001). The inability to effectively manage ethnic diversity and balance regional interests undermined efforts to build a cohesive national identity and inclusive governance structure.

In contemporary Nigeria, the legacy of colonial governance continues to influence political dynamics. Efforts to address historical grievances and promote national unity have led to constitutional reforms aimed at decentralizing power and strengthening federalism (Osaghae, 1998). However, challenges such as corruption, electoral manipulation, and ethnic mobilization



persist, reflecting the enduring impact of colonial-era political fragmentation. To address the legacy of political fragmentation requires proactive measures to promote inclusive governance, strengthen institutions, and foster dialogue among ethnic groups. Policies that decentralize power, enhance political representation at local levels, and promote equitable resource allocation are crucial for building a more cohesive and resilient political system (Ihonvbere, 1994).

Social Transformations and Cultural Shifts in Colonial and Post-Colonial Nigeria

Social transformations and cultural shifts in Nigeria during the 20th century were profoundly influenced by colonialism, leading to significant changes in societal norms, identity, and governance structures. This analysis explores how colonial education, legal systems, and economic policies reshaped Nigerian society, and the resulting cultural dynamics in the post-independence era. Colonial education policies aimed to indoctrinate Nigerians into British cultural norms and values, promoting Western education as a pathway to social advancement and employment opportunities within colonial administration (Afigbo, 1991). This educational system, however, also contributed to a cultural shift away from indigenous knowledge systems and languages, fostering a new generation of Nigerians with hybrid identities influenced by both traditional values and Western ideals.

Studies however indicate that, colonial legal systems introduced Western legal frameworks that replaced or modified traditional systems of governance and justice. The imposition of British laws and courts aimed to standardize legal practices but often marginalized customary laws and practices, leading to tensions between modern legal systems and indigenous socio-cultural norms (Afigbo, 1991). This cultural clash continues to influence legal reform efforts and debates over justice and human rights in contemporary Nigeria. Indeed, colonial influences also reshaped gender roles and family structures in Nigeria. Western notions of gender equality and individual rights challenged traditional patriarchal norms, leading to shifts in family dynamics and women's roles in society (Afigbo, 1991). While colonialism opened new opportunities for women in education and employment, it also exacerbated socio-economic disparities and cultural conflicts over gender roles and empowerment.

Also, the colonial encounter contributed to the emergence of a modern Nigerian identity that incorporates diverse ethnic, linguistic, and religious traditions. While colonialism initially



exacerbated ethnic divisions through divide-and-rule strategies, it also fostered a sense of national unity and collective identity among Nigerians striving for independence (Suberu, 2001). Post-independence efforts to promote cultural diversity and national unity have sought to reconcile historical grievances and celebrate Nigeria's rich cultural heritage. Presently, Nigeria's social transformations and cultural shifts continue to shape national identity and socio-economic development. Efforts to preserve and promote indigenous languages, traditions, and cultural practices alongside modernization and globalization pose challenges and opportunities for social cohesion and inclusive growth (Suberu, 2001). Policies that recognize and respect cultural diversity while promoting equality and social justice are essential for addressing historical injustices and fostering a harmonious society.

Infrastructure and Urban Development Under Colonial Influence in Nigeria

Infrastructure and urban development in Nigeria during the colonial period were pivotal aspects of British imperial strategy, aimed at facilitating resource extraction, trade, and administrative control. This analysis explores how colonial policies shaped urban centers, transportation networks, and infrastructure investments, and their enduring impacts on Nigeria's development trajectory.

British colonial administrators established urban centers as administrative hubs and commercial nodes to facilitate governance and economic activities. Cities like Lagos, Calabar, and Port Harcourt emerged as key centers for trade, shipping, and colonial administration, reflecting strategic locations for coastal access and transportation networks (Akinjogbin, 1967). These cities became focal points for economic development and cultural exchange, shaping urban growth patterns that continue to influence Nigeria's urbanization dynamics. Colonial infrastructure investments prioritized transportation networks, including railways, roads, and ports, to facilitate the movement of goods and resources from interior regions to coastal trading centers. The construction of railways, for instance, linked agricultural hinterlands to coastal ports, enabling efficient export of cash crops such as cocoa and palm oil (Akinjogbin, 1967). These transportation corridors remain critical for economic integration and regional connectivity in modern Nigeria.



It was during the colonial era, that the urban planning and architecture were introduced and patterned in line with European-style layouts, such as public buildings, and residential areas, which reflected British colonial aesthetics and functional requirements. Urban centers were designed to accommodate administrative offices, commercial activities, and residential quarters segregated along racial and class lines (Akinjogbin, 1967). The legacy of colonial urban planning persists in the spatial organization of Nigerian cities, influencing land use patterns, infrastructure development, and socio-economic disparities.

Also, colonial-era infrastructure investments contributed to spatial inequalities and regional disparities in development. Coastal regions and urban centers benefited disproportionately from colonial investments in infrastructure and services, while rural areas and the northern regions were marginalized and underdeveloped (Mabogunje, 1968). These disparities continue to shape socio-economic inequalities and development challenges in contemporary Nigeria, underscoring the enduring legacy of colonial-era infrastructure policies. Infrastructure deficits and promoting sustainable urban development remains a priority. Efforts to upgrade transportation networks, expand access to basic services, and promote inclusive urban planning are crucial for reducing development disparities and fostering economic growth (Onibokun & Kumuyi, 1996). Strategic investments in infrastructure, coupled with policies that prioritize equitable development and environmental sustainability, are essential for building resilient cities and fostering inclusive growth.

In another development, the colonial legacy significantly influenced Nigeria's health and education systems, shaping their development trajectories and creating enduring challenges. Colonial authorities introduced Western-style education systems aimed at training local elites to serve colonial interests, often neglecting broader educational access and indigenous knowledge systems (Afigbo, 1991). This approach laid the foundation for disparities in educational attainment and quality, exacerbated by post-independence struggles to reform and expand educational opportunities for all Nigerians. Similarly, colonial health policies focused on controlling diseases among colonial officials and maintaining a healthy labor force for economic exploitation, rather than building comprehensive public health infrastructures (Afigbo, 1991). This legacy contributed to persisting challenges in healthcare delivery, including inadequate



infrastructure, healthcare financing gaps, and disparities in access to quality healthcare services across regions and socio-economic groups. These challenges require holistic reforms that prioritize equitable access to education and healthcare, invest in infrastructure development, and integrate indigenous knowledge with modern systems to improve health outcomes and educational attainment nationwide.

International Relations and Diplomatic Legacy in Nigeria

Nigeria's international relations and diplomatic legacy have been profoundly shaped by its colonial past and subsequent independence struggles. This analysis examines how colonial-era interactions with European powers influenced Nigeria's diplomatic engagements, regional leadership aspirations, and global positioning in the 20th century. During the colonial period, Nigeria's international relations were largely defined by interactions with British colonial authorities and European powers. Colonial diplomacy focused on securing economic interests, managing territorial disputes, and negotiating treaties that shaped Nigeria's boundaries and administrative divisions (Falola, 1999). These interactions laid the groundwork for Nigeria's post-independence foreign policy priorities and regional leadership aspirations.

Nigeria emerged as a key player in African and global diplomacy following independence in 1960. The country played a pivotal role in the decolonization movement, supporting independence struggles across Africa and advocating for Pan-African unity through organizations like the Organization of African Unity (OAU) (Falola, 1999). Nigeria's diplomatic engagements aimed to promote African solidarity, peacekeeping initiatives, and economic cooperation within the continent, influencing its reputation as a leader in regional diplomacy. During the Cold War era, Nigeria navigated global diplomatic dynamics by balancing relations between Western powers and the Soviet bloc. The country's non-aligned stance allowed it to mediate regional conflicts, support anti-colonial movements, and participate in international peacekeeping missions under the United Nations (Falola, 1999). Nigeria's diplomatic engagements during this period underscored its commitment to promoting stability, security, and development within Africa while maintaining strategic partnerships with global powers.

Nigeria faces diplomatic challenges related to regional security threats, economic diversification, and global governance reform. The country's diplomatic strategy focuses on promoting



economic diplomacy, attracting foreign investment, and leveraging its position as Africa's most populous nation and largest economy (Falola, 1999). Challenges such as terrorism, transnational crime, and climate change require Nigeria to engage proactively in international forums to address global challenges while safeguarding its national interests.

Legacy of Colonial Land Tenure Systems and Rural Development in Nigeria

The legacy of colonial land tenure systems profoundly influenced rural development and agricultural practices in Nigeria during the 20th century, shaping socio-economic dynamics, land use patterns, and access to resources. This analysis explores how colonial policies established land tenure systems that continue to impact rural communities, land ownership, and development challenges in contemporary Nigeria. Colonial authorities introduced land tenure systems aimed at facilitating colonial administration, promoting agricultural production for export, and maximizing revenue extraction. These systems included practices such as Crown land ownership, individual land titling, and communal land rights under indirect rule (Bohannon, 1957). The imposition of these systems disrupted traditional land tenure arrangements and communal ownership practices, leading to conflicts over land rights and access among ethnic groups and communities.

Colonial land tenure policies prioritized cash crop cultivation, such as cocoa and palm oil, for export to meet colonial economic interests. This focus on export-oriented agriculture contributed to the neglect of subsistence farming, local food security, and sustainable agricultural practices (Bohannon, 1957). The legacy of colonial agricultural policies persists in contemporary challenges related to food insecurity, rural poverty, and limited access to productive land for smallholder farmers. The legacy of colonial land tenure systems perpetuated socio-economic inequalities and regional disparities in rural development. Coastal regions and areas conducive to cash crop cultivation benefited from colonial investments and infrastructure, while marginalized communities in the northern and interior regions faced land scarcity, limited access to resources, and underdevelopment (Bohannon, 1957). These disparities continue to shape rural-urban migration patterns, socio-economic mobility, and challenges in achieving inclusive rural development.



Nigerian government need to revisit the colonial land tenure systems, which requires policy reforms that promote equitable land distribution, enhance land tenure security, and support sustainable agricultural practices. Efforts to formalize land rights, empower rural communities through participatory land management systems, and promote agroecological approaches to farming are crucial for improving rural livelihoods and fostering inclusive economic growth (Bohannon, 1957).

Conclusion

The paper explored some of the colonial legacies impacting negatively on the contemporary efforts to attain sustainable growth. It argued that, Nigeria's development in the 20th century has been profoundly shaped by its colonial past, influencing political, economic, and social dimensions in complex and often contradictory ways. The enduring legacies of colonialism continue to pose challenges and opportunities for Nigeria as it strives to build a more inclusive and sustainable future (Mkandawire, 2001). By critically examining these legacies, policymakers and scholars can better understand the dynamics shaping Nigeria's development trajectory and work towards solutions that address historical injustices while fostering a more prosperous and equitable society.

Drawing from existing scholarly and historical facts, it was observed that Nigeria's development path continued to implement some of the colonial legacies by prioritizing resource extraction economic model that made the country dependent and mono-economic state, instead of focusing on diversification, which supports industrialization or agricultural revolution leading to export-oriented economy. It suffices to state, therefore that, the exploitation of natural resources, coupled with the discovery of oil, brought both opportunities and challenges that continue to influence Nigeria's economic landscape today (Suberu, 2001). Challenges such as this, requires strategic and effective policy reforms aimed at diversifying the economy, promoting equitable development, and reducing dependency on volatile commodity markets.

It was also noted that, the legacy of colonial governance in Nigeria has left a complex and enduring impact on its political landscape. From divide-and-rule strategies to the centralization of authority under indirect rule, colonial policies shaped ethnic rivalries, regional disparities, and



challenges in nation-building. These legacies require thoughtful reforms that promote inclusivity, strengthen democratic institutions, and reconcile historical injustices (Ihonvbere, 1994).

Based on the existing historical and empirical evidences, the paper posits that, the social transformations and cultural shifts in Nigeria during the 20th century were deeply influenced by colonialism, which introduced Western education, legal systems, and economic structures that reshaped societal norms and identities. The legacy of colonial encounters continues to shape Nigeria's cultural dynamics, influencing debates over education, gender roles, legal reform, and national identity. With this, the need arises to develop policy framework that promote cultural diversity, social inclusion, and equitable development to build a cohesive and resilient society.

Also, the study concurs with scholars who argued that, colonial-era infrastructure and urban development policies in Nigeria were integral to British imperial strategies aimed at enhancing administrative control, facilitating resource extraction, and promoting economic interests. The legacy of colonial infrastructure investments continues to shape Nigeria's urban centers, transportation networks, and development dynamics, influencing spatial inequalities and socio-economic disparities (Onibokun & Kumuyi, 1996). In order to mitigate these challenges, the government should proactively pursue policies that promote inclusive urban development, equitable infrastructure investments, and sustainable growth to build a more resilient and prosperous Nigeria.

On a different note, it was observed that Nigeria's international relations and diplomatic legacy reflect a complex interplay of colonial legacies, independence struggles, and contemporary challenges. The country's diplomatic engagements have evolved from colonial-era interactions with European powers to proactive efforts in promoting regional stability, economic cooperation, and global governance reform (Falola, 1999). Addressing current diplomatic challenges requires Nigeria to adapt its strategies to meet emerging global dynamics while leveraging its historical diplomatic experiences and regional leadership aspirations. To this end, it is important to mention that, internal dispute was and still remains one of the factors instigating instabilities in Nigeria. Indeed, colonial land tenure systems in Nigeria has had far-reaching implications for rural development, agricultural productivity, and socio-economic inequalities. Colonial policies disrupted traditional land tenure arrangements, promoted export-oriented agriculture, and



perpetuated disparities in land ownership and access (Akinjogbin, I. A. 1967). These legacies require proactive policies that prioritize equitable land reforms, sustainable agricultural practices, and inclusive rural development strategies to empower rural communities and promote economic resilience.

Recommendations

Navigating the enduring legacies of colonialism in Nigeria requires a comprehensive approach that addresses historical injustices, promotes sustainable development, and fosters inclusive growth across political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions. This paper outlines essential recommendations based on scholarly insights and historical analyses to guide Nigeria towards a path of equitable and resilient development. These recommendations include:

1. To effectively navigate colonial legacies, Nigeria must first acknowledge and address historical injustices perpetuated during the colonial era. This entails: Truth and Reconciliation, which entails establishing mechanisms such as truth commissions to uncover and document the full extent of colonial atrocities and their impacts on Nigerian society. Another important step is an investment in education and awareness that will focus on incorporating comprehensive colonial history into educational curricula to promote understanding and reconciliation among future generations.
2. Similarly, reforming governance structures or what has been termed restructuring in contemporary Nigerian politics is crucial to mitigate the divisive legacies of colonial rule and enhance democratic participation, this can be achieved focusing on these three areas:
 - (a) Decentralization - Devolving powers to local governments and communities to foster inclusive decision-making and accountability.
 - (b) Legal Reforms: Overhauling legal frameworks to integrate indigenous legal systems alongside Western laws, ensuring justice that reflects Nigeria's cultural diversity.
 - (c) Diversification: Investing in agriculture, manufacturing, and technology sectors to create employment opportunities and reduce vulnerability to commodity price fluctuations. Sustainable Practices: Implementing environmentally sustainable



- practices in resource management and infrastructure development to mitigate ecological degradation.
3. Enhancing educational systems and skills development is critical for preparing Nigeria's workforce for modern challenges: Curriculum Reform: Modernizing education curricula to blend Western knowledge with indigenous wisdom, fostering critical thinking and cultural pride. Vocational Training: Expanding vocational training programs to equip youth with practical skills that align with market demands and entrepreneurial opportunities. Improving infrastructure and promoting regional integration are pivotal for fostering balanced development and social cohesion: Prioritizing investments in transport, healthcare, and education infrastructure to bridge urban-rural divides and enhance access to basic services.
 4. Also, it is important to strengthen regional integration initiatives to harness collective resources and promote equitable development across Nigeria's diverse regions. Supporting initiatives that celebrate and preserve Nigeria's diverse cultural heritage through festivals, arts, and crafts will promote national cohesion, growth and development.
 5. The Federal Government of Nigeria promulgate policies that are designed to empower local communities through participatory development approaches that respect indigenous knowledge and promote community-led initiatives. Collaborating with international organizations, donor agencies, and foreign governments to access expertise, funding, and best practices for sustainable development. Championing fair trade policies that ensure equitable benefits from natural resource extraction and promote responsible investment practices that benefit local communities.



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