



## **The Political Economy of Infrastructural Development in Nigeria**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The adequate provision of public utilities has become a critical determinant in the 'failed state' question. In pre-colonial Nigeria, the indigenous communities in response to the principle of 'environmental determinism' initiated projects to facilitate their participation in variegated socio-economic activities such as farming, fishing, trading, hunting and smiting, amongst others. With the advent of colonialism and the entrenchment of a colonial economy, the idea of infrastructural development was predicated on the exploitation of the natural resources of the 'subject people'. It is this factor that succinctly provides the *raison d'être* for railways coursing from the coastlands to the hinterlands to the coal, cocoa, groundnut and palm produce terminals. At political independence, there were great expectations for a revolutionary approach that would have transformed the physiognomy of the rural and urban centres but this dream remained unrealized. It is not a matter of policy formulation but that of implementation. Bearing in mind that the availability of public utilities and basic amenities form the pivot on which more than 80% of the socio-economic life of a people revolve, this paper critically subjects the relevant agencies, such as the Public Works Department (PWD) of the colonial era, the Director of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRR), the Federal Roads Maintenance Agency (FERMA) and the various ministries of Works and Transport at the Federal, State and Local Government levels, to the crucibles of scrutiny. An x-ray of these organs abysmally reveals a culture of ineptitude and non-performance traceable to endemic corruption and mismanagement of public funds. It is this observation that justifies the adoption of the political economy approach which posits that the politics of functional infrastructure is a public concern for private benefit. To break this jinx, all the stakeholders in the public utilities industry, must adopt an approach that takes accountability, value re-orientation and moral discipline cum due process into consideration in the award and execution of contracts.

**Key words:** political economy, public utilities, corruption, accountability, due process.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The issue of infrastructural development is very critical in assessing man's ability to harness the natural endowment of his environment to tackle various economic challenges. The provision of basic amenities has become a yardstick for measuring the success or failure of any given polity. It is interesting to note that when there is

## ***Political Economy of Infrastructural Development in Nigeria***

evidence to demonstrate the inability of a state to provide public utilities, it is deemed to have failed or has become comatose. In pre-colonial Nigeria, the indigenous economy of various ethnic nationalities evolved local technologies, though at embryonic stage, to harness the potentials of their immediate environment. With the advent of colonialism and the need for effective occupation, there arose the need for the establishment of structures that would not only change the physiognomy of the 'subject people' but aid in tapping their economic resources. In essence, the state of infrastructural development during the colonial period left much to be desired.

At independence in 1960, the Nigerian nation under the aegis of its home grown executive leaders inherited a weak economy that was bereft of adequate public utilities. There is every indication that the self-serving nature of political administration in the neo-colonial times marred the commitment of its agents to focus on the transformation of the economic landscape of the state. As will be shown later, the bane of infrastructural development in Nigeria has always revolved around official corruption and ineptitude. This observation is what informed the adoption of a political economy approach.

### **Explication on the political economy concept**

In this paper, there is the need for an explication on the meaning of political economy and infrastructural development. The political economy model seeks to interpret historical causations as a fall-out of material conditions. In other words, economic realities form the pivot on which other social variables like politics, philosophy, religion, culture, inter-group relations, amongst others revolve. Ekekwe's (2009:15) view on political economy approach is synonymous with historical materialism and also sees it as a viable instrument for studying society. Similarly, Udeala (2009:92) posits that the political economy approach stresses that in any given society, the economic factors are preeminent and ultimately determine the essence and character of other spheres of social existence such as culture, politics, and religion.

Unfortunately some scholars apply the political economy approach without a proper grasp of the fundamental issues at stake. For example Ekpo & Omomeh (2001:89) lay emphasis on the forces of politics before the dynamics of productive forces. Idemudia (2008:5) in his theoretical framework does not address the critical issues associated with the political economy approach. Influenced by the classical view of Ricardo, he posits that ... 'by its modern context, political economy, can be seen as an instrument of analysis of public choice. It is a study of social laws governing production and distribution of national output in relation to social classes, their inherent conflicts and the quest for public policies to resolve them'. In the definition, it must be observed that the critical issue of historical materialism is not adequately addressed.

The same sense of evasion is palpable in the work of Idada & Okosun (2005:155) where there is no correlation between the title and the nitty-gritty of their discourse. This submission is critical because any explication on the political economy school of thought must endeavour to shed light on the role of material conditions vis-a-vis the dynamics of society. In his own contribution, Esho (2005:66) analyses the relevance of Karl Marx's of historical materialism to the study of society with special reference to the mode of production and exchange. In an answer to the pivotal question 'what is political economy? Aina (1986:1) enthuses that the notion of political economy both as a mode of analysis and the context within which socio-economic activities and forces operate has gained widespread currency in the literate of contemporary academic social science'. Jaja (2004:123) subscribes to a political economy approach

which adopts the materialist conception of history with implications for scientific socialism. In the political economy treatise, it is Ake's (1981) polemic discourse that revolutionized the understanding and application of the concept in relation to African economy. His emphasis was on the primacy of material conditions in understanding the dynamic character of society and the interplay between productive forces and social relations of production in determining the economic system or mode of production. The economic system is the fulcrum or substructure which determines other variables of social existence either in politics, philosophy, religion, law, culture, etc. collectively known as the superstructure. This explanation is important in unraveling the somersaults infrastructural development has witnessed in Nigeria, not only during the colonial era, but also in post-colonial periods.

By infrastructural development we mean the availability of public utilities and basic amenities such as functional road networks, railways, factories and the manufacturing sector that largely shape the economy of any society. These are subsumed under the Basic Needs Approach (BNA), to development. Kalagbor (2004:1) notes that people need food, shelter, water and medical services among others, to survive. Generally, Yesufu (1996:34) observes that the main indices of development are measured by a society's capacity in providing food, housing and clothing, transport, communication, energy and fuel, education, good health and adequate medical service to its citizenry. Still on the Basic Human Needs model in Africa, Kieh (2007:133) notes that they are defined in terms of adequate food, water, health care, shelter and minimum education". Steady (1995:89) paints a gloomy picture of the retrogressive state of social condition in the African continent when he submits that

Africa's social problems are legion and well-known. Living conditions are declining all over the continent and poverty, unemployment, famine and disease, illiteracy and malnutrition are now endemic. Poor social services and inadequate infrastructure exacerbate the widespread social problems.

### **The State of Infrastructural Development in Pre-colonial Nigeria**

Before the advent of colonialism, the indigenous economies of various ethnic nationalities in Nigeria were able to harness the potentials of their natural environment to tackle their survival needs. Their sustained involvement in result-oriented economic activities such as farming, fishing, trading and the construction of roads networks meant that their level of technology in infrastructural development was not in doubt. An in-depth study of pre-colonial infrastructural development brings to the fore a discourse on the dynamics of indigenous economies before 1900 and there about. Falola (1992:9) observes that the production system was characterized by remarkable changes and innovations, regional diversities and complex organizations resulting in the production of a very complex range of goods. The sectors in the production system comprised agriculture, mining, manufacturing and the provision of essential services'. Doigan and Gonn (1975:1-3) note that in pre-colonial indigenous economies, most African polities settled in small villages with crude technologies but this observation did not limit their capacity to explore and exploit their natural endowments.

Falola (1992:15) beams a searchlight on the manufacturing sector of pre-colonial African economy and stresses that much of the raw materials needed were, sourced locally with little dependence on foreign products. This observation is true in the fishing industry where canoe was locally produced by skilled men. Abdullahi (2007:254) am ply demonstrates that the indigenous people of the Igbala, Kakanda,

## *Political Economy of Infrastructural Development in Nigeria*

the Kyadyah and the Borgu were actively involved in canoe making in the confluence territory of Nigeria is Fokoja area. The same observation could be made concerning the Ijaw of the Niger Delta region who since their settlement in the said area as early as the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century have demonstrated ingenuity in canoe-making to aid them in fishing, their primary occupation.

The knowledge of iron manufacture marked a watershed in the infrastructural development of most pre-colonial communities in Nigeria. In Hausa land, iron technology provided the viable means of effectively exploiting the natural endowments of their environment in agriculture and textile production (Abubakar 2007:216). One important aspect of pre-colonial infrastructure is that the technology applied is the environment was a semblance of the cultural values of the indigenous people (Obi-Okogbuo, 2009:8).

Within precolonial Nigeria the movement of people, goods and services in their inter-group relevant was facilitated by a functional means of transportation. Ogunremi (1992:22) identifies different forms of transportation in the said period viz (human) portage (b) pack animals and (c) canoes with human head portage as the commonest. During the heydamp of the Trans-Saharan trade both herd portage and pack animal transportation were combined. Ogunremi (992:22) further observes that before the desiccation of the Sahara about 2000BC, trade between the northern parts of West Africa and North Africa was carried on foot. The natural provision various rivers in Nigeria like the Niger, Quaboe, Cross River, Benue, Ogun, Imo, etc made canoe construction and water transportation feasible "in spite of the limitation posed at times when the rivers dry up. One striking feature of transportation in pre-colonial Nigeria is that it was readily available and efficient and there is no doubt that the indigenous people polled their resources to make it a possibility.

### **The Colonial Period**

From the onset, it must be noted that colonialism created an economy that was exploitative. Tamuno (1980:393) notes that the primary aim of the (British) government in 1906 was economic- to use the better financial position of the protectorate of Southern Nigeria to cover the costs of administration and development in the financially weak Colony and Protectorate of Lagos, then saddled with the white elephant of a railway in need of extension in 1901. Colonial rule opened the doors of African indigenous economies to European modes of technology. Falola (2003:27) observes that with the advent of colonialism

Many new European ideas and institution spread in different areas with varying consequences, new economies emerged that promoted the cultivation of cash crops for experts and the exploitation of minerals by foreign companies; physical challenges included the growth of old and new cities the building of railways, roads, hospitals and telecommunications and western education.

While x-raying the nature of the colonial economy in the British zones including Nigeria, Kaniki (1990:173) identifies four underlying propelling factors namely (i) the colonies existed as primary sources of raw materials for the nascent Industrial Revolution that broke out in Britain in the 1760, (ii) the colonies were to function as dumping grounds for the surplus products from British factories (iii) the colonies were not expect financial support from the metropolis (iv) the colonies were to serve British economic interest in all its ramifications. It I a truism that the British embarked in infrastructural development in their Nigerian colony only in so far as it could pave way for the exploitation of the indigenous economy. The hospitals were built primarily to attend to the health challenges of expatriates while the railway

network terminated where the cash crops like cocoa, coal, palm produce and groundnuts would be evacuated. Omosini (1980:146) analyses the policies that birthed railway construction in Nigeria from 1877-1901 alluding still to the exigencies of the Industrial Revolution and states that the Iddo-Ibadan line was commissioned in 1901. The colonial administration also embarked on the construction of seaports in Nigeria. In this regard Ogundana (1980:159) notes that the period of colonial rule in Nigeria witnessed considerable investment of resources in the development of modern transport infrastructure. During this period there was a rapid transformation of transport facilities especially in railway, roads and seaports ... and the years 1914 to 1954 can be referred to as the colonial phase in Nigeria's seaport development. These seaports dotted Nigeria's coasts serving as the arrow head in the socio-economic incursion into Nigeria's hinterland. Ogundana (1980:161) further notes that as many as fourteen customs ports located at Lagos, Koko, Sapele, Warri, Burutu, Forkados, Akassa, Brass, Bonny, Degema, Port Harcourt, Opopo, Calabar and Ikeng had been established by 1914. Of all these, the Lagos and Port Harcourt's were very important because of their strategic locations and functions and were operated directly by Government agencies, while the rest were managed by private interests and various companies. These ports were hardly adequate for the volume of commercial transactions expected. One of the major setbacks of seaport development was the absence of a long-term spatial plan or land policy (Ogundana 1980:178) and this trend was inherited in the post colonial period by Nigeria's policy makers. Tamuno (1982:249) writing on the development and structural changes in the colonial economy, notes that Sir W. Egerton in 1904 created a separate Roads Department under the Supervisor of Roads but at about 1910 both the public works and Roads Department were merged. The P.W.D was the vanguard of most of infrastructural development of the colonial administration.

Ake (1981:43) observes that the colonial economy was characterized by incoherence and submits that the colonizer could not exploit the colonies wealth at no cost at all. In some cases, the extraction of the colony's resources entailed some investment in infrastructure development – roads, water resources, railways, electrical power and administrative structures. In keeping with the contradiction exploitative tendencies of capitalism. It must be mentioned that the infrastructure development the colonial administration could offer was tangential and never led to self-reliance. This is the kind of weak structure that the Nigerian political leaders inherited at the independence. The technology that anchored these cosmetic developments were not sophisticated enough to make the neo-colonial state of Nigeria less dependent on the erstwhile colonizers.

### **Infrastructural Development at Post independence era**

At political independence in 1960, it became very obvious that the agents of executive administration inherited socio-economic cum political structure that needed an overhaul. In keeping with the challenges of a nascent independent nation, the political leaders formulated policies at moving the country forward Yesufu (1996:59-60) notes that the first National Economic Development Plan and Post- Independence Development which spanned from 1960 -1970 culminated in the setting up of an Economic Council with the Prime Minister, Sir Tafawa Balewa as Chairman, and Regional Premiers and four Ministers from each Government of the Federation, with the Economic Adviser to the Federal Government as an officer member. The avowed objectives of the Council were according to Yesufu (1996:61)

## *Political Economy of Infrastructural Development in Nigeria*

achievement and maintenance of highest possible rate of increase in the standard of living and the creation of the necessary conditions to this end, including public support and awareness of both the potential that exist and the sacrifices that will be required.

The first development plan spanned 1962-1968 but was aborted due to the unstable political climate that climaxed in the Civil war. At the end of the Civil war, the second National Development set out to mitigate the decimations of the gory Civil war with the following objectives viz to establish (i) a united, strong and self-reliant nation (ii) a great and dynamic economy (iii) a just and egalitarian society (iv) a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens and free a democratic society (Second National Development Plan 1970-1974 cited in Yesufu 1996:62). National Development Plan if implemented could revolutionize the economy of any nation. The Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin and Chairman Mao- Tsetung of China tried Communist regimes with huge successes; they chart the way for material progress. Salawu, B, Mohammed, A.Y, Adekeye , D.S & Onimajesin, I.S (2006:107) trace the history of National Development Plans in Nigeria to the 1946 when the Colonial Government adopted the Ten-Year Plan of Development and Welfare Fund. The Fourth Development Plan of 1981-1985 was punctured by the coup d'etats of 1983 and 1985 with adverse implications. The Babangida administration departed from the traditional Development Plans to declare a rolling plan which was to cover the period 1989-2008. The General Sani Abacha junta abandoned the rolling plan of his predecessor for what he tagged vision 2010.

Irrespective of all the human and material endowments Saliu, et al (2006:119) posits that Nigeria's Development indices point to a low rate of economic growth, low capacity utilization in the industrial sector, poorly performing utilities/infrastructure and the attendant increase in operating costs, among others..... With the jettisoning of development plans, which today remain one of the greatest tragedies occasioned by military rule, corruption was allowed to grow really unchecked. One major question that was created to address the provision of public utilities was the Directorate of Foods, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI) by General Ibrahim Babangida in 1986 with these cardinal objectives (i) to effectively promote a frame work for grass root socio/mobilization (ii) to mount a wide programme of development monitoring and performance evaluation and (iii) to undertake the construction of about 60,000km of rural federal roads (Olisa, M.S.O. & Obiukwu, J.I. 1992:300).

DFFRI had the mandate to construct 90,000 kms but after one and half years of existence was able to successfully accomplish 29,000 kms. DFFRI was bedeviled by the characteristic and endemic Nigerian factor which is synonymous with corruption in official circles. According to Yesufu (1996:249) 'one has to search carefully now to locate the DFFRI roads – most of which have been over grown with tall grass weeds or transformed into mud roads: glaring examples of the country's penchant for grandiose and unassailable principles and policies, unplanned and uncoordinated strategies, fitful unsustainable and half hearted implementation, wasteful and mismanagement of scarce financial resources, that run into billions of naira and millions of dollars'.

Other public institution established for the infrastructural development of the country has not fared better. In their study Aloni & Elayelagha (2001:64) discovered that the Niger Delta Basin Development Authority (NDBDA) has failed in its task of providing potable water for rural dwellers in most communities of Rivers State and by extension this apply to other of geo-political zones of the country. Irrespective of billions of naira budgeted and released to the

## ***Kingdom E. Orji***

Niger Delta Development Authority, there is little or no evidence to justify the staggering huge fiscal commitment in terms of physical infrastructure. Accusation and counter-accusation of looting of public funds trail some officials of the agency. Presently in Rivers State most communities like the Eneka, Oroigwe, Elingbu, etc, are requesting that NDDC should pull out of their communities because most of their projects in the area of road construction are abandoned.

The climax of the deplorable state of infrastructural development in Nigeria is the fact that radio commentary on National Network News of 25<sup>th</sup> July, 2011 reveals that there are currently 11,000 abandoned road projects in Nigeria running into 1.3 trillion naira. In fact, on motion that a state of emergency should be declared on our national highways as most of the roads have turned to death traps for commuters. It is now a common slogan that 1.3 million persons are lost to road accidents every year as a result of bad road with the Okene-Lokoja and Benin-Lagos road ranking high. Against the backdrop of the political economy approach, it is obvious that corruption is the bone of Nigeria's infrastructural development project. Both government officials and private contractors work in tandem to loot the public treasury at the expense of the masses. It is shocking to note that Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu that led the first coup d'etat in Nigeria in his national broadcast remarked that:

... our enemies are the political profiteers, swindlers, the men in the high and low places that seek bribes and demand ten percent, those that seek to keep the country divided permanently so that they can remain in office as ministers and VIPs of waste, the tribalists, the nepotists, those that make the country look big for nothing before international circles, those that have corrupted our society and put the Nigerian political calendar back by their words and deeds Obasanjo (1987:99).

On the consequence of corruption on national development, Ighodalo (2009:25) observes that 'political corruption has resulted in financial hemorrhage in government, some of the country's vast revenue earnings have been pilfered and squandered by public officers most on conspicuous consumption and extravagant lifestyle. These are monies that could have been used to provide the populace with the basic necessities of life but are diverted into private purses and accounts thereby robbing the society of much needed funds for development ..... base infrastructural facilities such as roads and electricity are at various stages of dilapidation thereby increasing the stress placed on the ordinary citizenry.

The overall consequence of infrastructural decay is enormous. It is on record that the origins of youth restiveness in the Niger Delta, apart from other factor could be associated with the impact of the two million march of late General Sani Abacha in 1992 when helpless youths of the Region were rented in their thousands under the umbrella of Youth Earnestly Ask For Abacha (YEARN) in Abuja, the capital city. These youths who hail from the Niger Delta region ravaged by environmental degradation were infuriated at the sight of the 'Eldorado status of the city of Abuja dotted by express highways and state of the art mansions. The list of consequences is endless but the question is, what is the way forward?

### **The Way Forward**

The greatest bottleneck to infrastructure development is corruption. In recent times, the nation with its agencies has paid lip service to the eradication of this

## *Political Economy of Infrastructural Development in Nigeria*

monster. It is disheartening to note that since 1988 the East –West Road has not been completed. As at 1988, the contract was awarded at the cost of about N133,000,000 but the Obansajo regime it was valued at 70 billion naira while the Dr. Goodluck Jonathan’s administration it has been rescheduled for more than N200 billion yet the road is not completed. The Government and its agencies must wake up to their responsibility of ensuring that all projects are completed in schedule.

Contracts for road construction and the provision of basic amenities should be awarded to contractors/companies with proven ability in the area of accountability and delivery of services. Breach of contract execution should be seen as a Capital Offence and punished accordingly. A situation where contracts for road construction are awarded to political cronies who in turn sublet same is condemnable. There should also be a maintenance culture. Roads and other public utilities must be maintained, while we acknowledge the effort of the Federal Government in setting up the Federal Roads Maintenance Agency (FERMA) it is sad to note that this unit has not lived up to expectation as a result of ineptitude.

### **CONCLUSION**

The paper has demonstrated that the current state of infrastructural development in Nigeria is deplorable. Adopting a historical approach, the paper examines the state of infrastructural development in pre-colonial and post-colonial Nigeria. It became obvious that in the pre-contact period, the indigenous polity sourced raw materials from within as against the colonial and post-colonial era where such materials were imported. Because the Colonial economy was created to serve the capitalist interest of the metropolis, it was difficult to evolve a post- independent self-reliant substitute. The colonial economy ensured that the conquered territories served a dual purpose as a source of raw materials for the factors that came into existence in Europe because of the Industrial Revolution and as a markets or dumping grounds for finished products. In this regard, public infrastructural development either as roads or railways was designed to exploit the economy further. For example, railway were constructed to terminate at points where cash crops like cocoa, palm produce, groundnut etc could be easily evacuated.

In the post-colonial period, even under democratic dispensation, the state has fared abysmally in its commitment to ameliorate the sufferings of the teeming population of more than 150 million persons. It is the political economy approach that explains unequivocally the self-serving nature and abysmal failure of Government agencies like DFFRI, NDBDA, FERMA, and the like in providing basic infrastructure for the overall welfare of the deluded Nigerian citizenry. With more than 11,000 road projects abandoned and the Senate moving a motion for the declaration of a state of emergency on the nation’s highways, it is time for the stakeholders to re-evaluate earlier strategies with the hope of finding lasting solutions as recommended in this paper.



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*Political Economy of Infrastructural Development in Nigeria*

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