



**POLITICS
AND GRASSROOTS
ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA:**

Issues, Challenges And Prospects

Editors

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Chapter One

POLITICS AS AN INSTRUMENT OF DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Introduction

There is a direct relationship between politics and development; one can not go without the other. Development indeed involves politics or most appropriately, political decisions and politics on the other hand can result in either development or underdevelopment. If this is so, politics is no doubt a potent instrument of development and because it is so flexible, it can also be seen as an instrument of underdevelopment. There is no nation in the world that does not engage in politics. And nations do just that because they want to progress, advance and ultimately develop.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the relationship between politics and development and to show in it how politics can either be used to develop a country or be used to undermine the development of a country. To do this, the chapter is divided into four parts. The first part treats conceptual clarifications. The second part examines the relationship between politics and development and the focus of part three is on how politics undermines development in Nigeria. The last part is conclusion.

Conceptual Clarifications

Politics and development are two value-laden concepts without uniform and universal definition and understanding. These concepts, in other words, mean different things to different people. For us to understand the inner meanings of the concepts and the relationship between them, they have to be critically examined and analysed.

Politics means different things to different people. Some see it as the art and science of statescraft while others are of the opinion that it has to do with decision making; not just in government alone but also in every aspect of life of the individual. The understanding here is that everybody on earth is a politician, that is, a practitioner of politics. This understanding is derivable from the fact that there is no human being that does not engage, one way or the other, in decision-making. Perhaps, it is this understanding that informed Aristotle, a foremost philosopher several years ago to observe that man is a political animal.

Notwithstanding the above observations, several writers have attempted to conceptualize politics in many ways. For instance, for Appadorai (1975) politics "deals with the state or political society, meaning a people organized for law within a definite territory." This relates to matters of statescraft and the organization of a state in a manner that would bring about progress and advancement of the society. For a good society to be constructed, politics has to be used as an instrument of progress. Through this instrument, the society is arranged in such a way that would promote the common good as against individual

desires. On the other hand, David Easton (1965) argues that politics has to do with the "authoritative allocation of values for a society." In examining the components of these values, Awofeso (2003:23) asserts that:

By values Easton means those things desired by man to live a comfortable life in the society. These values according to him are allocated authoritatively by the members of the society, which in effect suggests that they are binding. But values are not allocated in a vacuum. There must be some kind of interplay of power as individuals and groups struggle to influence the governing authority to reflect their interests among values to be allocated or distributed.

Introducing some elements of power into the outcome of politics and political endeavours, Quincy Wright (1955:130) sees politics as the "art of influencing, manipulating and controlling others". This understanding is not quite far from the perception of power as given by Hans Morgenthau. According to him, power is nothing other than "man's control over the minds and actions of others and can be determined by examining the psychological relationship between actors." (Morgenthau, 1973:120). But in an attempt to control the minds and actions of others, the actors must engage in competition and or struggle. In this case, the winners would easily place themselves in advantageous positions to control others. This probably explains why Vernon Dyke (1960:134)

defines politics as "a struggle among actors pursuing conflicting desires on public issues". Harold Laswell (1930:11) equally sees politics through the lens of power and that is why he describes it as "who gets what, when and how." From this epigrammatical description, it can be seen clearly that politics is the struggle for power and influence.

With power and influence, political actors can then use the paraphernalia of state to embark on development for the common good of the society or to use same to plunder the resources of the state to create sorrows and ill-feelings in the citizens. The point to note here is that politics can be used to achieve development for people just as it can also be used to foster underdevelopment. To determine how politics can either be used in a given polity, it is necessary to understand the general concepts of development and underdevelopment.

Just like politics, development and underdevelopment do not mean the same thing to everybody. Todaro sees development as a multi-dimensional process involving the re-organisation of entire economic and social system. According to him, development must present the entire gamut of changes by which an entire social system, turned to diverse basic needs and desires of individuals and social groups within that system, moves away from a condition of life widely perceived as unsatisfactory and towards a situation or condition of life regarded as materially and spiritually better (cited in Okolie, 2003:266). For scholars of the liberal persuasion, development is seen as "the maximization of the growth of the Gross National Product (GNP) through capital accumulation and industrialization." (cited in Akpan, 2003:106). To this extent, development means "the capacity of a national economy, whose initial economic condition has been more or less static to

generate and sustain an initial increase in its GNP at rates of perhaps 5 to 7 percent or more" (*Ibid*:106). This can be achieved through industrialization. It is believed that industrialization has ripple effects which would stimulate other sectors of the economy of a given state. Industrialization has been of immense benefit to the developed countries. Indeed, it is industrialization that has contributed significantly to making industrialized countries industrialized. But in the Third World Countries (TWCs), the industrialization process is yet to fully take-off and the implication is that TWCs cannot readily talk about development when they are not industrialized. Yet this conclusion provokes a soul-searching question which is: can industrialization be equated with development? Or to put it in another way: does industrialization result in all round development for a country? Radical writers and even Development Economists do not and cannot answer the questions in the affirmative. To them industrialization is just one way to develop a country. Walter Rodney for instance is of the opinion that development takes place when members of a given society jointly increase their capacity for dealing with their environment in order to cater for their needs (Akpan, 2003:107). Expatiating further, he asserts that:

Development in human society is a many-sided process. At the level of individual it implies increased skills and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. . . at the level of social groups, it implies an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relations . . . In the past, development has always meant the increase in the ability to

guard the independence of the social group.

Dudley Seers on the other hand feels that regardless the level of industrialization or economic growth of a country, if it cannot take care of the health needs, educational aspirations and indeed guarantee a reasonable higher standard of living for the citizens, such a country cannot be said to claim that it engages in development. Writing about this, he says that:

The questions to ask about a country's development are therefore what has been happening to poverty? And what has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If all three of these have declined from high levels 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 worst especially if all three have, it would be strange to call the result development even if per capita income is doubled.

From the above submission by Seers, it can be seen that a country may be industrialized and may even double its per capita income and yet a sizeable portion of the citizens are poor. This situation normally takes place because as we shall see presently politics is not used to institute equity in the body politic. This brings us to the issue of underdevelopment.

There is a tendency to see underdevelopment as the opposite of development, but the understanding of underdevelopment goes beyond that. To the liberal scholars, underdevelopment is equated with backwardness, stagnation and primitivity (Akpan, 2003:110). This means that the given economy does not record any progress of any sort. But Marxist scholars believe that underdevelopment is a product of the lop-sided relationship between the developed states and the developing ones (Akpan, 2003:110). This process started with imperialism and continuing with neo-imperialism whereby despite political sovereignty, the countries that are victims are controlled by the metropolis. In the course of the perpetuation of this oppressive tendencies, the developing world came to have some of the following features:

- ✍ high birth rates;
- ✍ poor communication network;
- ✍ meagre rate of capital formation;
- ✍ low rate of industrial development;
- ✍ short life expectancy;
- ✍ Malnutrition;
- ✍ high rate of unemployment;
- ✍ high rate of illiteracy;

- ✍ low status for women;
- ✍ dominance of agricultural sector;
- ✍ rudimentary middle class; and
- ✍ Political authoritarianism (Ekpe and Okrereke, 2002:21).

In a sentence, poverty is the commonest feature of underdevelopment in any country.

Relationship Between Politics and Development

With the basic knowledge about politics and development, the relationship between the two can therefore be determined. As stated before, there is a direct relationship between politics and development. Politics, if played according to the rules, can lead to development and development can shape politics in a given country positively. For politics to serve a people well, the leadership must be and indeed always act on the part of equity. Politics, it should be re-emphasized, involves decision making and decisions should be taken after a careful analysis of the issues at stake and the alternative courses of action. And to embark on such a policy, the leadership has to be patriotic, nationalistic and altruistic. Since leadership epitomises a nation, the leader must always be seen to be neutral or impartial in the discharge of his function otherwise he would create an environment of cynicism

which would simply re-enforce underdevelopment.

A major way that politics can lead to development concerns policy formulation and the development of strategic plans. In governance, it is always advisable to formulate policies that can aid development. Same with strategic plans. Together, the two act as the compass directing a people on what to do and how to take care of the present challenges and future aspirations. But, it should quickly be added that politics can lead to underdevelopment also. This occurs when the political leadership of a country decides to use politics as instruments of graft and inordinate ambition.

Perhaps one of the greatest problems that make development burdensome in a country has to do with executive incapacity. When the leadership is inept, incompetent, and ineffective, no matter the level of resources of a people the country concerned can never ever embark on development.

How Politics Undermines Development in Nigeria

Nigeria is one country that is abundantly endowed by nature. The country equally parades a resourceful population but it is a thing of concern that she is not developed and it is evidently ranked among the least developed states in the world.

Several factors conspire to make Nigeria look big for nothing in the eyes of the world. And these factors have their foundations on politics. These include corruption, policy somersault, ethnicity, mismanagement of resources, lack of strategic plans

and vision, religious riots and political instability.

Corruption is one of the causes of underdevelopment in Nigeria. It is an immoral, depraved and dishonest act committed by people for pecuniary interests. Its manifestations include bribery, grafts and embezzlement. In most countries of the world, acts of corruption are mostly perpetrated by politicians. Needless to add here that such acts frustrate development and result in the development of poverty.

Policy somersault also serves to further underdevelop a country and in any establishment. Policy somersault has to do with instability in policy directives for governance or operations. At times, policy is deliberately distorted or changed in order to benefit new political actors; yet governance is supposed to be permanent while different governments may come and go. Since policy is formulated by politicians and decisions-makers, it shows the extent to which politics is used to undermine development.

In Nigeria, ethnicity is the reigning political ideology. Where one comes from is more important than what he can offer. This policy is domesticated in the form of quota system. It is a policy that is erected and used by politicians but at the end of the day it creates ill-feelings and causes disaffection among the citizens.

Aside from ethnicity, mismanagement of resources is a clear case of the development of underdevelopment in Nigeria. Nigeria may be rich but more in resources that are yet to be harnessed; therefore, the country is only a political powerful nation. Even at that, the resources that have been

developed are heavily mismanaged. In most cases, they are used to develop white elephant projects; such that are abandoned with time. In most cases, in the course of developing such projects, monies meant for them are diverted into private pockets.

Side by side with mismanagement of resources is the fact of lack of strategic vision for development. A nation that needs development must have a strategic plan and vision. Outside plans, like the First and Second Development Plans; it was only the Abacha government in Nigeria that developed a strategic vision for the country called Vision 2010; it was a roadmap of development for the country such that by the time of the golden jubilee celebrations in the year 2010, Nigerians would have appreciated the level of development of the country. But as soon as General Abacha died in 1998, the new government threw the vision into the shelf and until now, it has not seen the light of the day. Yet, Nigeria needs such visions in order to grow and develop.

Religion is supposed to build the moral character of the individual and prepare him for heaven, but in Nigeria religious fundamentalism is on the increase and the act is perpetrated by adherents of the country's two foremost religions; Christianity and Islam. Its concern with politics lies with the fact that in most cases politicians influence religious zealots to embark on rioting. Nigeria has had a number of religious riots especially in Northern Nigeria between Christians and Moslems. In each of these exercises lives and property worth billions of Naira are destroyed. These acts constitute a cog in the wheel of progress of Nigeria.

Nigeria is one country that has never known

political stability. The sparks of political instability were first witnessed during the first republic. These manifested in form of rigging of elections, political gerrymandering, political killings and violence and the declaration of outlandish census figures by the federating units. All these problems led to the violent overthrow of the Balewa government through a coup d'etat in January 1966. That year witnessed yet another coup and prepared the ground for a civil war which lasted for thirty months. In the post-civil Nigeria, the country has witnessed more military interventions. The Gowon regime which midwived the civil war was overthrown in 1976 and shortly after that the country witnessed a bloody but successful coup carried out by young military officers led by Colonel Bukar Suka Dimka. The Dimka coup led to the regime of Brigadier Olusegun Obasanjo who handed over power to Alhaji Shehu Shagari to usher in the second republic. That republic was overthrown by another coup.

Today, Nigeria is operating a democracy in the fourth republic. For a country to experience four republics under forty six years of existence shows how politically unstable it is. Even the fourth republic has so far had its moments of stresses and strains which are not good for the health of the nation.

One curious fact about political instability in Nigeria is that it is instituted by politicians. For

instance, they create the right and indeed fertile ground for the military to intervene. They do this through needless unhealthy political disagreements and struggle for power, the use of ethnicity to get to power, abuse of office, mismanagement of resources and embezzlement of money meant for development. In doing this, they cause apathy in the land and at the same time create ill-feelings in the Nigerian society. A simple response to these suffocating and debilitating situations always result in political instability.

Conclusion

Politics has clear linkages with development and there is sense in seeing politics as an instrument of development. The foundation upon which development rests is controlled by politics and to a large extent development can influence the overall direction of politics.

The chapter has indicated the particulars of the linkages between politics and development. In the final analysis, politics has much to do with decision making. The quality of decision making in any country will determine the extent to which a country is developed or underdeveloped. Development as a concept is taken to be the promotion of the quality of lives of the citizens and equity in all spheres of life.

In the chapter factors that act as brakes to the development of a country have been examined. These

include corruption, policy somersault, ethnicity, mismanagement of resources, lack of strategic plan and vision, religious riots and political instability. All of these factors are used by politicians to undermine Nigeria's aspirations in development. If Nigeria is to be developed at all, it has to play politics according to the rules of the game.

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