

# **AN ANALYSIS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UNDER CIVIL AND MILITARY REGIMES IN POST-INDEPENDENT NIGERIA (1960 – 2019)**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Post-independent Nigeria was bedeviled with plethora of troubles that disrupted her economic growth. Thus her enthusiasm that with independence profound economic development goals would be realized was marred. Economic policies of the military and the civil politicians, though laudable, but implementation was often the challenge. As such, series of developmental plans were mapped out at different stages of policy making, but the snag has always been poor execution. Both the military and civilians are culpable. Staggered and result-deficient different projects were embarked upon without completion in most cases. The impact of all these is poor human development index assessment occasioned by unemployment, poor infrastructure, antagonism, down-ward economic projection and general poverty. This has retarded the growth oil revenue could have entrenched, as agriculture and other avenues of raising foreign exchange were undermined.

## **Introduction**

In this article, the first major observation that draws our attention is that at independence, Nigeria was primarily an agricultural economic nation. Two, she developed her economy fundamentally from proceeds accruable from agricultural produces. To a large extent, that propelled her

development rapidly even though it was agrarian economy. To this Michael Crowder attests that the basis of rapid post-war economic changes was agriculture, “which on the eve of independence still accounted for over 85 per cent of the country’s exports. This was the result not so much of the increase in agricultural production, which was considerable, but of the rise in world prices for the exports crops produced by Nigeria”.<sup>1</sup>

Still on agriculture and its components, C. O. Dureke has argued that deviation from agriculturally related economic arrangement caused a lot for Nigeria. According to him, the former regional governments of Nigeria took off with the sharing on the basis of derivation of the Marketing Board’s Consolidated Revenue reserve from which the former western region got ₦68 million from cocoa sales, the North ₦56 million from groundnut and the development was moving upwards<sup>2</sup>.

It is an established fact that prior to independence and even at independence before the advent of the military in the Nigerian political space, agriculture to a large extent was the mainstay of the economy. However there were preponderances of revenues accruing from some mineral and mining industries like Columbite in Jos and coal at Enugu etc. In the words of Crowder:

For instance, Nigeria’s national income in 1956-1957 was estimated at just € 84.4 million, whilst locally consumed foodstuffs were valued at € 342.6 million. Revenue from duties on export crops in 1957 only brought in just over 10 per cent of the total revenue earned by the Federal and Regional governments<sup>3</sup>.

Thus, there was a dire need for increase in foreign exchange which would boost the revenue structure of the Country. A major hope in this direction “was the exploitation of large oil reserves in the Niger Delta. By 1960, Shell –B. P. had spent something in the range of € 60 million on the search for oil and Nigeria was already beginning to export small quantities of crude oil”.<sup>4</sup>Abdulah Mohammed once opined that “the drive for economic independence is becoming a component of the process of economic development in the outlying regions of the world economy and is seen as an indispensable condition for their being active participants in the division

of labour”.<sup>5</sup> How far is this postulation worked out for Nigeria as an emerging economy in the 1960s? The civilian regime of the Late Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Balewa was there for barely six years before the military incursion of Gen. Aguiyi Ironsi and Counter Coup of Lt Col. Gowon. The question now is: How was the economic foundation of Nigeria laid by the civil government of Balewa? Was the military regime of Gowon and his successors better than the deposed Balewa regime economically? What was the contribution of Alhaji Shehu Shagari’s Second Republic in the economic development of Nigeria? Subsequent military putsch of Muhammadu Buhari claimed that it was correctional, what was the economic impact of that regime? Can we effectively argue that Ibrahim Babangida, Sani Abacha and Abdulsalami Abubakar’s military juntas were contributory to the economic downturn of this country? Is the fourth Republic democracy a saving grace for this Country? In this article, we shall make an attempt to tackle the above posers within the limit space will allow us. While doing so, we shall not be unmindful of drawing our conclusions based on analytical comparative formula.

### **NIGERIA FROM 1960-1966**

At independence, Nigeria’s development index was at its lowest because her population growth far outweighed her economic base. She could boast of a few secondary schools and two higher institutions, one at Yaba and a University College at Ibadan, University of Nigeria Nsukka was at its offing. There were several primary school leavers, few secondary school leavers and very limited graduates at the time the expatriates were leaving the shores of Nigeria. Whereas there were surplus of low income job seekers, there were shortage of high Income job seekers. This socio-economic imbalance was one of the very first challenges of the new independent regime of Balewa.

In an agrarian focused economy where over 80 percent of the population was subsistent farmers, Nigeria was far from development. Again the rate of population growth was astronomical. The disparity on the census figure between the North and South was breeding bad blood because demography was the basis for distributions in both the economic and political resources of the country. The census of 1963 gave Nigeria a population of 55 million

as against 31 million for the 1952-1953 census according to Crowder<sup>6</sup>. There was also restiveness on the part of Nigerian Labour, coupled with irreconcilable differences among the leading politicians.

However, in the midst of these teething problems, Nigeria was determined to grow, as she conceived her first development plan of six years 1962-1968. The crises of the era and the military incursion of 1966 January truncated the smooth completion of the developmental plan. While analysing the economic policies of Balewa era which was based on non-alignment policy of the regime i.e. not oriented fully into capitalism or socialism, but a mixture of both, otherwise called mixed economy, Prof. B. U. Ekuerhare's assertion on the requirements of capitalist colonisation which was "maximum primary export production, and maximum importation of manufactured consumer goods from, the metropolitan economy" is not to be disputed.<sup>7</sup> The major and fundamental challenges faced by Balewa regime was the fact that there was nothing or little that independence could attract in export-based revenue otherwise called foreign currency. Nigeria of the era was a dumping ground for European goods especially goods of British origin. That affected the independent growth of the economy. Thus the non-colonialism theory of the era was a bane to the economy and this became worsened by the signing of the Anglo-Nigerian pact of 1962 which gave undue privilege to the British protectionist agenda which was more or less exploitative to the detriment of Nigeria. "Producing agricultural and mineral export commodities", in the word of Ekuerhare: meant constraining the reallocation of resources from the primary producing sectors into the manufacturing sector, and because importing manufactures from the metropolitan economy meant that in order to prevent competition with the metropolitan manufactured exports, the colonial state discouraged the development of manufacturing industry in the economy. The consequent decline of the pre-colonial indigenous manufacturing industry without a replacement by modern manufacturing industry was consistent with ensuring maximum economic advantage for expatriate bourgeoisies in the management of the economy.<sup>8</sup> The argument here is that by the time of independence in 1960 and beyond, Nigeria was still suffering from the paralysis of dependency, colonialist effects and neo-colonialism which invariably depicts the fact that there was

political independence but no economic independence, perhaps, up to 1963, when the country became a republic. Anya O. Anya has argued that any country with poor human capital could suffer perpetuation of underdevelopment, and that in itself could entrench continued underdevelopment. “It is a vicious circle of some sort,” he submits.<sup>9</sup> At independence, the above view of Anya was the case in Nigeria because there was a huge gap of Human Capital amongst the regions in Nigeria. The North was hugely affected by poor socio-economic infrastructure more than the three southern regions, in as much as the whole regions were backward and were suffering from under-development.

Efforts of the Balewa regime to develop the country were minimal and were marred by political and civil unrests as epitomized by the workers’ General strike of 1964, the Tiv Riot of the 1963-1964, the census imbroglio of 1965 and general unrest of the era. These and more political crises dislocated the economic plans of Balewa government. That made the implementation of the 1962-1968 development plan difficult and that retarded the economic agenda of the first civilian government in Nigeria modeled after Westminster parliamentary democracy.

### **THE MILITARY ECONOMIC POLICIES FROM 1966-1979**

Military incursion into Nigeria’s leadership in 1966 caused a serious accident and fatalities to the modest foundational economic policies of Balewa government. Basically, military involvement in politics is an aberration. The soldiers were at the time not trained in economic and political leadership, therefore, their policies were simply armature and devoid of professionalism. First, they plugged the country into an avoidable civil war which claimed millions of lives and several items of property worth millions of pounds. A policy that retarded the economic growth of the country for decades of years after. Humungous resources were put into what they thought a mere police action could control. 30 months of intensive warfare were wasted, and infrastructures damaged.

With the truncation of the first National Development Plan by the military, they introduced the second National Development Plan of four years, 1970 to 1974 soon after the civil war in 1970. It could be stated here obviously that the first National Development Plan achieved among others the

execution of projects like the Oil Refinery in Port Harcourt, the paper mill, the sugar mill and the Niger Dam in Jebba, the Niger Bridge, and the ports extension, and construction of a number of trunk 'A' roads. <sup>10</sup>E. O. Ojo contends that it was also in the first National Development plan execution by the Civilian regime of Balewa that universities of Lagos, Zaria, Nsukka etc. were established by their respective regional governments.<sup>11</sup>

The senseless policy of plugging the nation to 30 months civil war caused some negative economic consequences on both sides. Newspaper analysis of the era indicated that "facilities such as electricity, bridges, telecommunication, health facilities, schools, water pipes, public buildings, etc. were devastated."<sup>12</sup> These monumental damages naturally needed repairs at the end of the war and there came the need for development of new infrastructure. Ojo argues that "this informed the launch of the 1970/1974 second National Development Plan by the Gowon regime.

The second Development Economic plan trust, was to reconstruct the "War-battered" economy and its social ideal as recorded by E. Isichei, was aimed to establishing:

A just and egalitarian society, that would put "a premium on reducing inequalities in inter-personal incomes and promoting balanced development among the various communities... it organizes its economic institutions in such a way that there is no oppression based on class, social status, ethnic group or state."<sup>14</sup>

The regime of Gowon introduced the indigenization decree of 1972 which became implementable in 1974. The policy compelled the expatriate firms to reserve some branches of their businesses to Nigerians and to sell shares to Nigerians in that other. Isichei writes that, "in practice, this opened up new economic opportunities to the prosperous, rather than introducing more equality into society as a whole".<sup>15</sup> This attracted some criticisms amongst some leading press outfits within and outside the Country. For instance, *West Africa* not known for its critical remarks against West Africa governments had this to say:

Foreigners may find it strange that at a time when Nigerians are suffering from unemployment, a raging inflation, and a soaring food prices the wider dispersal of equity

shareholding should be at the centre of the government's policy for dealing with what Gen. Obasanjo Called 'some of the basic economic and social problems facing us'.<sup>16</sup>

However, it was the bazaar of the two commissions established by Gowon's regime to workers that escalated the inflation level of the country to 30%, otherwise called Udoji awards and backdated nine months, which released ₦ 370 million into immediate circulation, "and producing galloping inflation," in 1978.<sup>17</sup>

The economics of oil was a catalyst to boom in infrastructure witnessed in Nigeria soon after the civil war. Generally, the country's economy boomed in leaps and bounds since 1960, but according to the Second Republic President, Alhaji Shehu Shagari in his inaugural meeting of the National Economic Council said on the health of the nation's wealth that "it is by any standard, still far being developed".<sup>18</sup> It is true that Gowon made some modest achievements in the boosting of infrastructure in Nigeria soon after the war due to the devastating effects of the civil war. the success registered in the execution of his 3 'Rs' (reconciliation, reconstruction and rehabilitation) agenda was modest. It is not out of place to say that the enormity of wealth in his disposal through the oil boom of the 70s would have catapulted him to do more if the vision was there. In his confusion he boasted that Nigeria's problem was not money but what to do with money! Isichei comments that "Petroleum earnings raised Nigeria's income to levels undreamed of either in the colonial period or in the first Republic, and made possible massive development projects which were entirely self-financed".<sup>19</sup> By 1976, oil revenue had accrued to six billion naira.<sup>20</sup> Ted Iwere writes that "Since the 1973-1974 oil price rise", Central Bank Governor, Mr. Ola Vincent gleefully says, that "real Gross Domestic Product rose from ₦14.4 billion in 1974-1975 to ₦22.7 billion this year (1979) while National Income also leapt from N1.7 billion in 1973-1974 to N 8 billion in 1977-1978; a 370 per cent rise in 4 years"<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, in a continent that is the lowest per capita income in the world, Nigeria's Gross National Product (GNP) Per head rose from N 267 in 1975 to ₦355.8 in 1979, and with her GNP at ₦28.718.2 million, made her unarguably the richest country in black Africa.<sup>22</sup>

It is on account of the above that one can safely argue that Nigeria missed it during the military era of Gowon and Obasanjo when the Petro Dollar was flowing. It is true that there were a plethora of infrastructural developments like “flyover bridges and major express ways in Lagos and indeed, the bulk of the physical infrastructure the nation enjoys today were built during the Gowon regime<sup>23</sup>. However, the military regime of Gowon would have laid the economic foundation of this great country if it were visionary, but it failed. By 1979, Mr. C.C. Okoye, the then Chief Planning Officer in the Federal Ministry of Economic Development explained that “our problem of manpower shortage is critical in such occupations as medicine, pharmacy, accountancy, audit and qualified teaching staff.”<sup>24</sup> This could have been tackled viciously with resources available soon after the civil war by the two successive military juntas.

### **ECONOMIC POLICIES IN NIGERIA FROM 1980-1999**

The military as at 1979 when they handed over the reins of governance willingly to Alhaji Shehu Shagari as the First Executive President of Nigeria, and the last President in the second Republic (1979-1983), had misused the opportunity nature offered Nigeria through the petro-dollar regime of the 70s. For instance, Obasanjo’s so called Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) a supposedly an agricultural revolution ended at Ota/Obasanjo Farm which was situated in Ogun State of Nigeria. Gboyga Ajayi and Ajishola Omojeji in an article bemoan that following Obasanjo’s pattern, “each successive military ruler appropriated the bigger chunks of the “national cake” to the side where his state, local government or ethnic group would benefit maximally thus circumscribing and parochalising infrastructural development.”<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Shehu Shagari’s Green Revolution did not fare better as it established River Basin authorities in each of the then 19 states of the federation that would have radicalized the agrarian revolution and food potentials of the country, but was poorly managed as corruption, profligacy and maladministration characterized its execution across the country.

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the former Minister of Finance in Nigeria reveals that “Nigeria received \$ 300 billion from oil between 1970-2001.”<sup>26</sup> Yet the country’s per capital income actually fell from \$ 254 to \$ 256 in

contrast to 1995 US dollar over 1970-2001. Infrastructure deteriorated because of a cutback in public investment forced by unsustainable levels of public indebtedness. Nigeria had paradoxically become a heavily-indebted oil rich country.”<sup>27</sup> she asserts. In the midst of plenty both Obasanjo’s military junta and Shagari’s civilian regime were culpable of monumental borrowing which landed Nigeria into heavy debts that landed the country into poverty. Writing on borrowing, Ted Iwere said that even though borrowing was not a relatively new development in Nigeria’s efforts at public finance, but “one disturbing face of her poverty is the growing size of her external national debt.”<sup>28</sup>

As at 1979, Nigeria was almost totally dependent on oil money which was a sign of poverty. “Oil production crept from a 1.5 million barrels a day in March 1978, sailed over the 2.4 mark in January 1979”<sup>29</sup> and stood at 2.2 million barrels daily accounting for over 80 per cent of the Country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Shagari’s regime did not do much to direct Nigeria’s ailing economy to progressive growth owing to unbridled corruption of his political lieutenants and associates, the country’s Fourth Development Plan collapsed after Shagari’s regime. The government had to introduce austerity measures to tighten the expenses of the era and palliative measures introduced to cushion the effects, were poorly executed and therefore not encouraging.

The Buhari military junta that ousted Shagari and successive military regimes did not do much to revamp the deteriorating economy in the 80s and 90s. For instance, Buhari’s regime which lasted for 20 months from January 1984 to August 1985 introduced what it called War Against Indiscipline, WAI crusade. According to the then minister of Internal Affairs, Major-General Mohammed Magoro as he then was: “the war Against indiscipline has gradually become a crusade for national rebirth aimed at bringing sanity into the entire fabric of our socio-economic and political life.”<sup>30</sup> Magoro further states that with the declaration of WAI since March 1984, it “has been.... launched in practically all states of government institutions and societal set ups throughout the country”.<sup>31</sup> The extent it imparted on the economy of the era was not clearly recorded but the fact remains that it developed accountability and minimized indiscipline in handling of government’s economic affairs. Other efforts of

Buhari like currency exchange of 1984 and his fight against economic sabotage among others did not stem the ailing economy. The regime of General Ibrahim Babangida that removed Buhari stayed for more than eight years in power but was noted for devaluation of Nigeria's naira, the slide that its downward trend continued till today. However, Omojeji and Ajayi credited the regime with some supposedly developmental programmes as Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), introduced in 1986, "alongside other policy instruments such as commercialization and privatization. There was also the establishment of various developmental projects like Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DIFFRI), Better Life Programmes, (BLP), Mass Mobilization for Social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER)".<sup>32</sup> etc. But the question is, was much recovered during the era? The answer is no!

Abacha's regime followed the path of Babangida's when it replaced the three-month Ernest Shonekan's entrapment in the name of Interim National Government. Such institution as Petroleum (Special) Trust Fund (PTF) which acted as a boost to "Nigeria's economic, social, technological and educational needs. There was also the renovation of the country's Railway system and the creation of Family Support Programme (FSP), and the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP)".<sup>33</sup> One aspect of Abacha's regime that was remarkable was its promulgation of the failed Bank and Financial Malpractices Decree as well as stabilizing the exchange rate, pegging it down to twenty-two naira to one dollar (N 22 to \$1). It also created a separate ministry for Solid Mineral Resources Development".<sup>34</sup> Again Center for Automotive Design and Development (CADD) was established to motivate the making of Nigerian cars. Not much was credited to Gen Abdulsalami Abubakar whose eleven-month governance was geared towards the democratization process that gave birth to Fourth Republic in 1999. Although, it was democracy, Obasanjo's second coming was facilitated by his military background.

## **ECONOMIC POLICIES OF THE FOURTH REPUBLIC**

There were unprecedented economic activities that the fourth republic has thrown into fore in Nigeria. The first four years of President Obasanjo was confronted with "the twin problems of unemployment and poverty which

were considered to be the greatest of Nigeria's headaches".<sup>35</sup>The other challenge was the epileptic power supply which the regime sunk a whopping sum of \$16 million dollars, but little or no remarkable progress was made on it.

By 2003, the regime came up with its clear cut economic policy which it called National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (**NEEDS**) F. A. Oluleye and K. Obi note that "NEEDS is an economic development programme that was well articulated and adequately documented. The document (NEEDS) contains the strategies of revamping and transforming the Nigerian economy".<sup>36</sup>The question now is how successful was NEEDS in laying the economic foundation for Nigeria battered economy? M.D. Yusuf dismisses Obasanjo's economic agenda as shambolic, and epileptic power supply, as there were scarcity of water, death-trap roads, poor health services and dislocated education system as many factories were closed down and hundreds of thousands of workers and families thrown into poverty.<sup>37</sup> O. M. Ikeanyibe in his observation on Obasanjo's regime opines that policies in Obasanjo's era were anti-masses because they never favoured employment. He gave example of the Central Banks retirement of almost 1,000 bankers in the name of banking reforms in 2005. <sup>38</sup> But Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala is full of praises of Obasanjo's era especially on the debt cancellation by Paris Club. According to her,

Here in a nut shell was the economic report card for 2003-2007: OPFR key, manifestation of break with the Paris Club debt negotiation: external debt down from \$ 38 billion in 2003 to \$ 3.5 billion in 2006. Reserves up from \$ 7 billion in 2003 to \$ 38 billion to seal the Paris Club debt deal; adoption of NEITI and general move towards budgetary transparency growth of non-oil economy more than doubled to 8-9 per cent per year between 2004 and 2007 compared to 3-4 per cent over 1995-2000. Agriculture accounts for some 40 per cent of non-oil growth.<sup>39</sup>

Whatever was the achievement of Obasanjo's 8 years presidency, the impact was minimally felt by the masses in the positive.

Yar Adua's Seven-point agenda suffered some setbacks due to the terminal sickness of the president that claimed his life barely three years gone in his regime. The seven-point Agenda was planned to achieve the vision 20:2020, that would have made Nigeria one of the biggest twenty economies in the world by the year 2020.<sup>40</sup> Both the Needs and 7-point agenda contained similar policies since they were enunciated by the two presidents.

Dr. Goodluck Jonathan Presidency (2010-2015) was a continuation of his former boss' administration.

However, Jonathan was lucky because oil revenue sky rocketed during his tenure that the economic meltdown which retarded his successor's economic policies because of economic recession occasioned by low income from oil did not affect his regime. That will be a discussion for another day. Meanwhile President Buhari's current regime is bedeviled with a lot of economic challenges which are becoming a threat to his three-point agenda of fight against corruption, security and economic recovery. This also is a topic for another discussion.

## **CONCLUSION**

First, I want to state that there is a little or no difference between the economic achievements of Nigeria's civil or military politicians except the fact that there is no legislative Assembly during the military eras, although the military used to have non-elected military councils. The question is how democratic were the supreme military or Revolutionary councils? Again the military as an institution does not rule alone, they employ the service of the civilian politicians in what is called a diarchy arrangement. Therefore, economic decisions accredited to the military rules emanated from their civilian appointees. C. O. Dureke in his argument against the military use of civilians to rule contends:

Now the civilian rule has become an aberration instead of the military in this country. It is my suggestion that the military should hence forth rule solely without civilian ministers, commissioners or advisers just as civilian rule without the military. That will enable us to identify easily whose responsibility it is when things go wrong.<sup>41</sup>

Another issue here is that both in the civilian and military regimes, most of the times, decisions come from the career civil servants who are technocrats trained on the formulation of policies not necessarily the politicians. It is also these technocrats that go for the execution of contracts and realization of policies. Any government that comes meet them on seat. They however should share in the criticism of poorly executed policies. Be that as it may, from 1960 to date, the problem is not ideas or policies or writing of white papers, but the real challenge is working out the talk. This is what is lacking among the Nigerian leadership elite. Take for instance, the issue of power shortage in Nigeria, since finding solution to perennial power outage in the country, has been a battle for successful regimes, but none seems to have been achieved. Methinks that the problem lies on the implementation. Brilliant ideas with no practical implementation are nonsensical and meaningless. This poor execution of policies and programme is not limited to military or civilians in Nigeria both suffer the same disease. This is why the Human Development index in Nigeria will remain poor or at minimal increase as it was in 1990-2017 statistical data.

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