



# Political Leadership and the Paradox of African Economic Development 1960-2010: A Historical Analysis of Nigeria as a Case Study

*Kepemimpinan Politik dan Paradoks Pembangunan Ekonomi Afrika 1960-2010: Analisis Sejarah Nigeria sebagai Studi Kasus*

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## ABSTRAK

Pada kemerdekaannya pada tahun 1960, Nigeria menawarkan prospek menjadi salah satu ekonomi tercepat di dunia, dan pencapaian status industri dalam satu generasi. Ini karena dia tampaknya memiliki semua yang diperlukan untuk mencapai tujuan: pertanian yang subur, kelas wirausaha yang tegas, kelas menengah yang sedang berkembang, basis keuangan yang memadai, dan lingkungan keuangan eksternal yang ramah. Begitu cerah prospeknya sehingga Malaysia datang dan mendapatkan bibit kelapa sawit dari Institute for Oil Palm Research (NIFOR) miliknya. Namun lebih dari lima puluh tahun kemudian, sementara orang-orang sezamannya telah bergabung dengan liga ekonomi industri maju, Nigeria masih terjebak di perairan buruk dunia terbelakang, yang membuat warganya malu. Makalah ini berpendapat bahwa penyebab dari pengalaman tragis ini adalah kegagalan kepemimpinan. Yang multiplier effect-nya adalah suap, korupsi, perbendaharaan, penjarahan, dan berbagai corak instabilitas politik. Efek agregat dari semua ini adalah negara Nigeria yang bersujud yang mengerang di bawah beban kemalangan politiknya.

**Kata Kunci:** Kepemimpinan politik; pembangunan ekonomi afrika; Nigeria; analisis sejarah.

## ABSTRACT

At her independence in 1960, Nigeria held out prospects of being one of the fastest economies of the world, and attainment of industrial status within a generation. This was because she seemingly had all that was needed to attain the objective: buoyant agriculture, an assertive entrepreneurial class, a burgeoning middle class, an adequate financial base, and a friendly external financial environment. So bright were her prospects that Malaysia came and got oil palm seedlings from her Institute for Oil Palm Research (NIFOR). Yet over fifty years on, while her contemporaries have joined the league of advanced industrial economies, Nigeria is still trapped in the bad waters of the underdeveloped world, much to the embarrassment of her citizens. This paper argues that the cause of this tragic experience is leadership failure. Whose multiplier effects are bribery, corruption, treasury, looting, and the various shades of political instability. The aggregate effect of all these is a prostrate Nigerian state groaning under the weight of its political misfortune.

**Keywords:** Political leadership; african economic development; Nigeria; historical analysis.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, a former British colony was granted political independence on October 1, 1960, after almost fifty years of nationalist agitation (Crowder 1978). Britain had acquired the Nigerian colony to serve her imperial interests: to be a source of raw materials on the one hand, and be a market for her manufactured goods on the other. To fulfill this role effectively, the colonial authorities had to front a number of infrastructures in place. First, roads, railways, and seaports were built to ease the transportation of agricultural raw materials and minerals to the factories in Britain. Second, agricultural research institutes help boost agricultural production through improved seedlings and extension services. Third, schools and hospitals were built or supported to help provide the needed manpower in the exploitation of the human and natural resources of the colony (Nwala 1981).

Fourth, Britain consciously encouraged rifts in Nigeria nationalism in a classic divide and rule tactic, one of which tactics was the creation of regions in 1945 through the Richards constitution of that year (Ekekwe 1985). Fifth, Nigerians were enticed to imitate wholesale European, way of life, the concept of development, both of which reinforced the colonial's belief of inferiority before their former colonizers (Nnoli 1981; Odey & Sambe 2019). Sixth and finally, the colonial authorities successfully

Created a capitalist oriented economy firmly linked with That of Britain. As an instrument for the excellence of the Foreign bourgeoisie, the colonial state sustained what Old traditional institutions and practices this bourgeoisie Thoughts would further its aims, it also accelerated the destruction or restructuring of those things that thwarted the goals of this same bourgeoisie (Ekekwe 1985, p. 56).

Even though there were differences between, the views of the local and foreign capitalist classes, yet these differences were not fundamental and so were easily contained (Ekekwe 1985).

On the eve of the departure of the British colonialist, Nigeria educationally was in a disequilibrium state. While the whole of Northern Nigeria had only eleven secondary schools and no lawyer, the Eastern region had one hundred and eight secondary schools, and the Western region had one hundred and nine to cater for eighteen, eight, and six million people respectively (Usman & Kwanashne 1995). This bored gave

implications for political stability and socio-economic development of a future independent Nigeria. Equally, Nigerian rulers

did not promote nationhood ... our leaders were all - committed to regionalism. The sandnana upheld "one north". Awolowo insisted on the West, on Oduduwa, and Zik started by saying he is a national man, all Nigeria man, but after he lost in the Western House of Assembly, he moved back to the East. He created a lot of problems in the East and became the Premier of the East. He too became an Igbo spokesman. So by design on defunct our three leaders were all regionalists. And where you have regionalism in a multi-ethnic, multinational community it is difficult to evolve time nationhood (Usman & Kwanashne 1995, p. 57).

By no means, to compound Nigeria's problems, her political elite was divided into two major groups – mutually opposed and antagonistic: the Muslim oligarchy in the North and the Christian and secular and Western-oriented in the South. The two competing cultures and world views operated in an environment that had no overarching national ethos on attitudes mediated by the right type of education to help Nigerians develop a common purpose (Akinola 2009).

## 2. POST-COLONIAL NIGERIA

Postcolonial Nigerian state was a minefield of political and socio-economic booby traps for her leadership. These were made worse by the expectations of Nigerian citizens. It marked the "end of political oppression, economic exploitation and human degradation which are the essential characteristics of alien rule" (Awolowo 1977, P. 35). During the nationalist struggle Nigerian leaders made promises which "raised high hopes and expectations" as they had pledged that attainment of independence and sovereignty, they would among other things, put an end to oligarchic oppression and capitalist exploitation elevate them from the morass of humiliation and indignity into which colonialism had kept them and usher in for them new basic freedoms and the full enjoyment of the fruits that come from the products of their lands and labour (Awolowo 1977). The target audience of these promises lived in squalor, below the poverty line, ridden, with diseases and ignorant and the unemployed. They all believed and trusted their leaders and these expectations of brighter days to come sustained their loyalty and patriotism (Awolowo 1977; Undiyaundeye 2005; Undiyaundeye 2011a; Undiyaundeye 2011b).

Nor was this high expectation confined to Nigerians. The international community of which Nigeria became a member had considerable optimism about her future—particularly the Western countries. And why not? Independence had come through patient and peaceful negotiation and not by a violent revolution. What made it all very appealing to the West was that not only did her three governing parties at the regions respond “Western-style parliamentary democracy” but also at the federal level

The NPC and the NCNC, despite the considerable differences in the political philosophies, had agreed to form a coalition government; while the Action group provided the “loyal opposition” Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe... agreed to take on the purely ceremonial post of governor general... the PM, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa... known for his political Moderation, a factor which particularly appealed to the Western powers with whose economies Nigeria was still Closely integrated (Crowder 1978, p. 259).

Perhaps what made it all so appealing was that unlike the majority of African countries Nigeria had “a viable diversified economy with great potential for development given the size of its market and the existence of substantial oil resources. Furthermore, despite declarations of socialist intent, all the governing parties were committed to the capitalist economic system” (Crowder 1978, p. 259). Even though Nigeria was still a sea of tranquility after its first year of sovereign nationhood, yet the tensions that were generated before independence made it clear that Nigeria needed a leader to help confront the problems that faced it.

At independence, Nigeria was “closely integrated” with the Western capitalist system and there was a declaration of socialist intent, so the country's political leadership had to make a choice one way or the other which development path the country was to adopt; either the capitalist, socialist or mixed economy. The capitalist path was propagated by her petty bourgeoisie that is to say captains of industry, merchants, and the professionals – left behind by the departed colonial masters (Nnoli 1981). The capitalist path was presumed to lead to a pattern of the good life which has been achieved by the advanced capitalist nations even though these nations and societies vary politically, economically and militarily (Nnoli 1981).

The central distinguishing feature of this path of development

Is the transformation of labour power of a man into a commodity to be bought and sold in the market for gain like any other object of exchange. It was the first system of production and so far the only one in the history of humanity to make labour power a marketable commodity (Nnoli 1981, p. 2).

In this mode of production, the producers are separated from the means of production. This system was nonexistent in pre-colonial Nigeria ethnic nationalities where whether peasant or craftsman produced and marketed his products, and where the purchase and sale of inanimate objects, not human labour power was of primary concern. Capitalism is governed by a private investment of capital in the production of goods, the decision of what to be produced, how the products are to be distributed and profit maximization (Nnoli 1981; Undiyaundeye 2011b; Undiyaundeye 2017). Capital dominates labour power since labour power can be hired and fired by owners of capital.

As far as Okrondiba Nnoli (1981) sees it, the capitalist path of development is not a suitable path to adopt by Nigeria in her quest to develop because, among other things, its export system is not based on the sale surpluses of goods that are consumed first and foremost by our people but for external consumption, absence of an independent and creative ruling class of the type that brought about the industrial revolution in Western Europe and Japan; a high rate of rural to urban migration that is not related increased productivity, of agriculture in the rural areas and the worsening of urban conditions all leading to lower standards of living and thereby deteriorating their capacity for self and national transformation.

The second alternative path of development is the socialist path advocated by Nigerian Marxist scholars (Nwala 1981). The socialist path is also presumed to lead to a pattern of good life enjoyed by the advanced socialist countries and that predicted by socialist theory (Nnoli 1981). In this path of development, there is no separation of the actual producers from their means of production as the means of production are concentrated in the hands of the social collectivity as a whole, that is the state and labour power is not a commodity to be bought and sold for profit and the interests of labour are superior to, and dominant over those of capital in deciding what is to be produced, how it is to be produced and how the products are to be distributed (Nnoli 1981). This path emphasizes collective ownership and control of the means of production and collective appropriation of the surplus social product. Labour is “regarded as a means to the full development of all the faculties and potentialities of the individual and as a conscious service by him to the

society (Nnoli 1981).

Socialist ideology posits that cannot be in the interest of the workers unless it is transferred from private to public hands (Nnoli 1981). It also argues that public ownership is important only if it leads to worker's control of production which in turn should lead to their control of the decision of the process of production and how the surplus is distributed (Nnoli 1981). There was no working class- the proletariat- in precolonial ethnic nations that comprised pre-colonial Nigeria essentially because there was no separation between the producer and the means of production. Second, even in colonial Nigeria, public companies were not controlled by the workers because they were not so designed, but rather they were meant "to service the activities of the foreign capitalist, their local agents and the colonial state". This basic character of public enterprises was carried into the post-colonial state..." (Nnoli 1981, p. 4).

The third path of development was the mixed economy model first stated by Elliot Berg and accepted by the Constitutional Drafting Committee (CDC) in 1976. Elliot Berg argued that the mixed economy option was advocated because of the absence of skilled workers and what he called impediments like difficult climatic conditions, the ossified structure of the African community (Ekekwe 1985). Although the Nigerian leaders were yet to choose the path of Nigerian development, yet the capitalist path was the one ground having been bequeathed by the colonial masters. During colonial rule, the peasant farmer, artisan and petty industrialist groaned under various disabilities.

The peasant farmer bore the brunt of the production of cash crops and it was through this that he was linked to the international economy initially through the commercial houses like the United African Company (UAC), John Holt, Lever Brothers, etc and after the second world war through the Marketing Boards. By paying the peasant producer pittance of what were the prevailing world market prices, the Marketing Boards earned surpluses which went into helping British reconstruction efforts after the second world war on one hand; and on the other ensuring the supply of the needed raw materials for British industry. Very little benefit accrued to the Nigeria peasant (Ekekwe 1985; Odey & Okeyim 2014). Yet emphasis was on cash crop production and at the same time the introduction of consumer goods, taxation and in some cases alienation of land helped out in the penetration of peasant society (Ekekwe 1985). The state on the other hand came to depend on the export of cocoa, palm produce and groundnuts for over 57.7% of its earnings as at 1960 (Nwala 1981).

The lot of the artisan, trader or factory worker was not better in post independence Nigeria (Nwagbara *et al.*, 2009; Odey & Owan 2014). yet in a ministerial statement on Nigeria's economic planning policy, Mallam Waziri Ibrahim the Minister of Economic Development in 1961 argued that the policy was one of encouraging private investment both indigenous and foreign – in order to develop our resources... "justifying the adoption of this policy, he declared that although foreign investment comes in to make a profit, yet we"... must accept that and allow them to repatriate their profit". In a response to questions from members of the House of Representatives to the dangers of foreign economic domination and exploitation, he argued that both were "inevitable and natural" (Nwala 1981).

inevitable and natural... much as we appreciate the good intension of Hon. Members, we must also not overlook the fact that we shall continue to be under the control of imperialists and capitalists who have taken the lead in this world in economic development (Nwala 1981, p.160).

He then wondered whether a radical break with imperialism was even possible at all and rhetorically asked MPs what they thought informed the assassination of Patrice Lumumba. He answered himself

Imperialists saw that he (Lumumba) as a real nationalist, that he was out to see that the resources of the Congo were used to improve the welfare of the Congolese people as a whole... we do appreciate all the excellent ideas advocated by Hon. Members but a complete turnabout of the economic system is not an easy thing (Nwala 1981, p.160).

Waziri Ibrahim gave a seemingly plausible reason, yet he was very economical with the truth. Nigerian rulers benefit enormously from the socio-economic status quo fully aware that the economic system was exploitative and that they were themselves exploited as their material interests coincided with those of the foreign capitalist, hence they sought theoretical justification of the status quo, second economic missions abroad funded by the state became occasions for stinking private business deals while unviable government projects/agencies were created to provided jobs for their clients and supporters at a time when the working class was asked to make a sacrifice in very harsh economic times (Nwala 1981).

Third, cash crop production favoured Nigerian rulers by way of the provision of foreign exchange and surpluses. While the former gave them cash to spend, the latter helped the regional governments to establish loans boards from which they and their supporters secured

loans that went into conspicuous consumption and were often not repaid (Ekekwe 1985). Where the surpluses did not go to them directly, they went indirectly in support of overall capitalist development through the regional development corporations that owned either wholly or partly enterprises like Nigeria Cement Company and the Africa Continental Bank (ACB) in the East and West African Portland Cement, and Vono industries in the West and bottling industries and industrial estates (Ekekwe 1985). As a result of the emphasis on cash crop production, food shortages became life. This led to the establishment of the Nigeria National Supply Company (NNSC) to import and distribute consumer goods. Food shortages also informed the launching of the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) and later the land use act. The peasant was consistently short changes, sidelined and made extremely poor when these schemes were put in place supposedly to help alleviate their plight (Ekekwe 1985). So given the misery plight of the Nigerian peasant farmer and the working class-particularly those at the lower cadres under the Nigerian ruling class were there any hopes of development? The inevitable answer is no, than why?

Development connotes training in the art of rising local resources and creative human energy in solving problems rather than a wholesale imitation of the path to a good life that some societies have attained (Helleiner 1964). Clearly Nigeria was not developing since development refers to man's progressive qualitative and continued self-improvement socially, economically, culturally and environmentally.

Apart from diligent cooperation with international capital and imperialists, Nigerian rulers were very intolerant of dissent both before and after independence. Mallam Ibrahim Imam who was the Secretary-General of the Northern People's Congress (NPC) – the ruling party, and patron of the Borno Youth Movement (BYM) (Nnoli 1981), had cause to disagree with some of his party's policies and decisions and fell out of favour with the regional government. He was harassed into exile in Tiv-land where he contested and won a seat in the 1961 regional elections into the Regional House of Assembly under the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) from a constituency over a thousand miles from his home town- Yerwa. During the 1962 Eastern regional election campaign, Michael I. Okpara, party leader and premier, took the stand of "No vote for NCNC, no amenities". He went ahead and "vigorously carried into effect" this slogan in the minority areas of Calabar, Ogoja and Rivers Provinces (Nnoli 1981).

### 3. BRITISH MILITARY TRADITION ABHORS MILITARY INTERVENTION IN POLITICS

Cadets who go through British military institutions have instilled the virtues of being apolitical. It is universally accepted that military intervention in politics is an aberration; that is not conducive to the enthronement of political culture. Unfortunately for Nigeria, barely five years of nationhood under a civilian dispensation, her military struck to deal with those it perceived were enemies of the country (Nwala 1981). The first coup d'etat was followed by four other successful ones. The military ended up having a longer time at one helm of affairs than the civilians. Instead of ushering in political stability, the military not only compounded the country's problems but also denied her the opportunity of evolving patriotic, people-oriented leadership (Kirk-(Greene 1976). Corruption appears to be the most formidable obstacle to the most quality political leadership in Nigeria. It has its roots in colonial Nigeria. It has gone so bad that the Emir of Yroandu moved a motion in the Northern House of Chief;

That this House agreeing that bribery and corruption are widely prevalent in all walks of life, recommends that native authorities should make every effort to trace and punish offenders with strict impartiality and to educate public opinion against bribery and corruption (Ojo 2014, p. 77).

It was the prevalence of this vice in the Western region that informed the setting up of a committee to study the ramifications of the vice and recommend ways of eradicating the disease. Corruption has indeed become so pervading that it literally walks on four legs particularly among the ruling elite. It has been used by some coup d'etat leaders as one of their grievances that informed their actions. Although the military used corruption as one of their reasons for staging their coup d'etat, yet heinous acts of corruption (Ojo 2014; Odey & Sambe 2019). It's not only the rulers who steal, their cronies, supporters, top government officials and even corporations e.g. the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) indulge in the act.

The prolonged and unhindered looting of the national treasury by the ruling elite and high government officials has brought with it many unsavory consequences. Although Nigeria earned \$500 billion from liquefied natural gas alone in 2010, yet her citizens live in grinding poverty. Nigeria is home to 7% of the world's poor with poverty levels of 72% North, 27% South and 35% Niger delta. Hence a World Bank report described Nigeria as an extremely poor country (Ojo 2014). Second, power generation is also badly hit. While countries like South Africa and South Korea generate 40,000 MW and 83,000

MW respectively for 50 and 55 million people respectively, Nigeria with over 170 million people generate a paltry 3400-4000 mw (Ojo 2014).

Consequent on the miserable power generation, unemployment is referred as according to the National Association Chambers of Commerce Industry Mines and Agriculture (NACCIMA), more than 9,000 businesses in Lagos either closed shop or relocated on account of poor industrial infrastructure like the electricity of which the country needs 85,000mw (Ojo 2014). Although the nationalist leaders had castigated the British colonial authorities over unemployment, yet this social vice has worsened under their watch largely because of the paucity of industries and neglect of agriculture particularly with the onset of the oil boom in the 1970s (Ojo 2014).

Corruption has impacted national security. Although a total of \$1.459 billion was allocated to the aroused services in 2010, yet they were hamstrung to discharge their assignment because Boko Haram fighters were better armed and the soldiers and police were ill-trained, ill-equipped and unmotivated (Ojo 2014). So it was that Boko Haram fighters were able to destroy churches, mosques, markets, schools and sack towns. While Boko Haram fighters were winding the northeast of the country militancy in the Niger Delta was wreaking havoc on the environment through pipeline vandalism, and oil exploitation activity through the kidnapping of foreign oil workers (Ojo 2014). In their aggregate Nigeria ends up the big loser as insecurity stalks the country, scaring away investors.

Colonial authorities built roads to facilitate the exploitation of the natural resources. Over fifty years after independence the situation of roads in Nigeria leaves much to be desired. Global Road Safety Faculty of the World Bank notes that roads in Nigeria "rank among the poorest in the world in terms of safety facilities and road network (Hutchful, p. 116), nor is the situation different with regard to potable water. Over 70 million Nigerians have no access to potable water and the implications of this to public health are obvious.

In the health sector, there is some improvement in the supply of medicines and other health products at the national level; more needs to be done to strengthen the capacity of national quality assurance policy at the state and primary levels. There is also a shortage of biomedical engineers and poor institutional capacity (Ojo 2014). Nigeria along with Pakistan and Afghanistan are the only countries in the world where polio is still endemic, outbreaks of meningitis are frequent and health facilities are not adequate (Ojo 2014).

In the Niger Delta and elsewhere in the country, the unemployed youth have become an instrument of criminality in the fierce and unbridled struggle for political power by the elite largely because of the huge benefits that come with the acquisition of political power. The World Bank estimates that "about 80 percent of Nigeria's oil and gas revenues accrue to just 1 percent of the population, while 600 billion of the annual fuel subsidy paid by the government goes to the pockets of just a few persons who constitute the cabal. These huge sums of revenue, go according to the World Bank, to feed "political venality" (Ojo 2014, p. 81). Instead of being left to the state to fund education which is very critical to the socio-economic development of the country but which is in shambles because of neglect and has been the cause of the frequent conflicts between the federal government and the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). Since acquiring political power has become a very lucrative business, the ruling elite goes to any extremes to subvert the people's will by all manner of electoral malpractices.

Since the 1922 elections, all other elections in Nigeria have been rigged by all the political parties involved (Jonwe *et al.*, 2011). These electoral malpractices are many and varied. Allied to these electoral concerns is the population census upon which seats in the legislatures are allocated. Not surprisingly since 1962, the country has been unable to conduct a credible census and this sad development does not allow for socio-economic planning which is very essential in economic development. The ruling elite tolerates corruption and it does it with panache Yakubu Gowon, who had cleared Joseph D. Jonwalk of accusation of financial wrong doings and whose (Gowon's) regime was overthrown for corruption, was given a national award. So were Ibrahim B. Babangida, who squandered \$12 billion Gulf War, oil windfall; Sanni Abacha who stole billions from the national treasury, and Abdulsami Abubakar whose regime was also faced with monumental corruption (Usman & Kwanashie 1995).

Equally, Diepreye Alamiyeseigha who was convicted of money laundering charges after jumping bail in London was given both presidential and state pardon. While James O. Ibori who had been discharged and acquitted by a Nigeria court was convicted and parted by a London Crown Court of some of the 170 charges he had been acquitted. It is clear from the afore-going that if Nigeria is to make significant progress in her development effort she will be led by transformational leaders (Elaigwu 1986). These are leaders who disseminate new values, seek alternatives to existing arrangement unity and shared purpose of leaders and followers and concentrate on long term issues and have

an organic world view and altruistic motives based on the promise of a better future.

In economic terms, transformational leadership entails staunch decisions by leaders to

reduce imports and encourage local domestic consumption and export, a determined policy to improve the quality of education at all levels and a conscious decision to insert indigenous professionals, technicians and workers at the center stage of building national development infrastructure (Ukaegbu 2010, p. 30).

This type of leadership does not imply isolation from globalization. Rather it asserts independence and exercise of courage in making choices (that are) in the best interests of their countries in the global system of interaction (Ukaegbu 2010). Qualities that the Nigerian ruling elite seem not to possess and which account for the difference between Nigerian leaders and rulers and rulers of Southeast Asian states like Singapore, Hongkong, Taiwan, and Malaysia, states that were contemporaries of Nigeria but which are today industrial nations (Ukaegbu 2010).

The iron and steel industry plays a crucial role in industrial development. This was recognized by the rulers of Nigeria in 1960 (Ukaegbu 2010). It was the Olusegun Obasanjo's regime that signed the contract for the construction of the Ajoakuta steel plant, but it was the Shehu Shagari administration that implemented the idea in the early 1980s. The rolling mill and some shops of the steel complex were commissioned in 1983. The entire project had attained a 95% completion rate. Then the project was stalled as government officials during the military regimes that followed got bogged down with the international politics between the Western bloc and USSR on the viability and desirability of owning an integrated steel plant by a third world country. The Sanni Abacha regime's debt buying back syndrome compounded matters after \$7 billion (1.1 trillion) had been sunk into the project. Through the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) the USA and Britain –Nigerian rulers' supposed friend-increased their opposition to the project describing it as unviable. As a result successive regimes have failed to complete and operate the mill. Thanks to the ideological poverty of the rulers of Nigeria.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

With her natural and human endowments, Nigeria does not need any form of development aid. All she needs is a large-dose ruler who has a clear vision and understanding of what are the national interests of the

country. Rulers who possess abundant faith and devotion to serve the people of Nigeria and not themselves, rulers who are committed to the enthronement of good governance, accountability, and the rule of law. Rulers who sincerely believe and are committed to the Nigeria project. It is the absence of this crop of rulers that has kept Nigeria in the backwaters of the developed world since her independence.

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