

Democratizing Entrepreneurship And Poverty Reduction Policies For National Development In Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper explores the critical nexus of democratizing entrepreneurship and poverty reduction policies as a measure to stimulate national development in Nigeria. Given the wealth of untapped resources and prevailing level of unemployment and poverty rate in Nigeria, various programmes of action and policy documents have been engineered and advanced towards renewal or recovery of the national economy from the doldrums. It was observed that non-democratization of the processes leading to the formulation and eventual implementation of these policies hampered their successes. Exploring a content analysis of available information, this work descriptively links democracy, unemployment poverty and development to justify the inevitability of compliance with democratic ethos in any effort to roll back unemployment and poverty in Nigeria. The study emphasized the centrality of creating enabling political ecology that provides equitable access to Nigerians. It was suggested that democratic ethos of popular participation and inclusiveness should be the building block of integrated micro and macro-economic principles for attaining national greatness in as much as policies are meant to revamp the welfare of the people.

Keywords: *democracy, entrepreneurship, poverty, unemployment, development*

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I. Introduction

Successive administrations in Nigeria have within the Fourth Republic introduced various recovery plans and strategies to boost employment, reduce poverty and reform the economy. Such programmes included the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) which the civilian administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo set up in the year 2000. NAPEP consisted of four schemes, namely: Youth Employment Scheme (YES); Rural Infrastructure Development Scheme (RIDS); Social Welfare Services Scheme (SOWESS); and Natural Resources Development and Conservation Scheme (NRDCS). The Umar Musa Yar-Adua administration introduced and launched the 7-point Agenda in 2007; the President Goodluck Jonathan - led administration brought forth the Transformation Agenda; through the Vision 20:2020 in 2010, the National Industrial Revolution Plan in 2014 and the Nigeria Integrated Infrastructure Master Plan in 2014. The President Muhammed Buhari led administration in 2016 launched the Strategic Implementation Plan for the Budget for Change. The administration also launched a comprehensive economic intervention plan that was christened the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan was introduced shortly before the country's economy finally slumped into deep recession. The current administration has also launched measures such as the \$2.25 Billion Economic Stabilization Fund, Consumer Credit System and the Presidential Economic Coordination Council

Meanwhile, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) have given different degrees of attention to ensuring that the reform strategies percolate through the system to reach the common man on the street.

The implementation of these policies was variously beset by numerous challenges ranging from administrative, institutional, economic, to political issues. Out of many narratives on the mitigating factors for result oriented implementation of most of these schemes, the political dimension and perspective as a critical element in explaining policy failure has not received much attention on the part of the ruling elites. Part of the problem was the fact of long period of undemocratic military rule in Nigeria as well as the subjugation of the popular will by the ruling elites in the democratic era. As the country transited from one administration to the other, citizens were surreptitiously cut off from the structures and system of development aspirations which they were exposed to, by the preceding administrations, and in contradiction to the rationale for introducing such policies. It is a common fact that strategies and policies have remained largely ineffective in addressing the

plight of the poor because successive administrators adopted the top-down approach which lacks linkage with the citizens; a strategy that is antithetical to participatory democratic practices. The consequence is that unemployment and poverty which entrepreneurship is set to tackle continue to skyrocket and take their toll on Nigerian citizens.

Justification of the Study

The relevance of good government to successful poverty elimination, or in real sense, its reduction cannot be over emphasized. Good governance obtains truly in a democratic state. Amartya Sen described democracy as the best remedy for hunger (ACP-EU, 1999). This perspective underscores the fact that unemployment, poverty, hunger and other associated malaise are not exclusively social or economic problems. Rather, they are intertwined phenomena that affect all spheres of life particularly in a new state like Nigeria.

In political parlance, unemployment manifests itself in form of marginalization. This means that at every point in the administration of the state, the people must be effectively involved, to close door against alienation or deprivation of right. People must take keen interest in the processes of governance, particularly in the area of policy formulation and implementation to ensuring that policies and programmes benefit the target population. Onibokun and Kumuyi (1996) asserted that poor representation in the political process constituted the root of poverty. Thus, the need for the democratization of the system of implementation of entrepreneurship and poverty reduction policies constitutes the justification of this study.

Conceptual Clarification

Democracy

Democracy has many connotations. Elites most of the time use the word to convince subjects that they live in a just system. Every regime lays claim to being democratic. For instance, the Mainland China still classes itself the Peoples Republic, despite its manifestation of democratic contraptions; similar thinking applies for the government of North Korea and many other third world states that show disdain for inclusive popular participation. The various explanations of democracy often subject it to abuse. Notwithstanding, it is a political system of mass participation, competitive elections and human and civil rights (Norris, 2022; Roskin, M.G. et al, 2010). The idea of Robert Dahl (1989) on the concept is instructive for this work. He particularly conceived democracy as synonymous to polyarchy, to which seven qualities are assigned. These qualities are: free and fair elections, elected officials, inclusive of suffrages, the right to run for office, freedom of expression, alternative information, and associational autonomy. At the heart of Dahl conception lays the people.

Democracy germinates and grows under certain conditions. These, according to Ray (1989) included, an educated and informed citizenry who have the required pedagogical tool for understanding issues and for making rational choices, freedom of expression and press and independent judiciary to defend the hopes and aspirations of citizens as well as checking executive arbitrariness. In terms of attitude, democracy is the game plan where majority of the people have faith that no matter the nature of national problems, change must come within the parameters of democratic norms, and particularly through the citizenry.

Paraphrasing Lipset, Roskin et al maintains that democracy permits citizens to play a more general role. The system supplies regular constitutional opportunities for people to change government officials and their policies and procedures. It is a social mechanism which permits the largest possible part of the population to influence major decisions by choosing among other contenders for public offices. The system does not fall into place automatically, but is carefully constructed over time through conscious participation by the people.

Magstadt (2006) maintains that creation of a stable democratic government is particularly a herculean task, especially in societies where modernization is a challenge; however, he provides a gauge for measuring the probability of democracy. These correlates are economic, political, psycho-cultural and historical or circumstantial issues. The economic correlates hinge on fair distribution of national wealth. Democracy and prosperity are inseparable. In the other way round, poverty is anathema to democracy. National wealth must be consciously distributed to the mass of people through careful formulation and implementation of national policies to ensure sustainable development within the polity. Particularly, the middle class must not be eliminated in order to avoid sharp class differences. Where a sharp class difference occurs, democracy cannot be consolidated.

In answering the question of what strategy should a nation lacking development pursue, emphasis should be placed on democratization of economic policies as a way of meeting basic economic needs of the people. With this done, a fundamental obligation of the state to guaranteeing political liberties could have been met. A vibrant democratized economy will have immediate impact on the quality of life through provision of social services, infrastructure and educational opportunity that will translate to further deepening of democracy (Ohemeng, 2018).

An understanding of development can intrinsically be linked to democratic processes and the institutionalization of democratic ethos in the structures and institutions so much that the people are involved in

the critical aspect of development processes. Thus, there is a linkage between democracy, good governance and national development. Democracy requires consultation with the people and their involvement in the planning and implementation of programmes for which they are the ultimate target and beneficiaries. Their involvement will eliminate apathy and consequently domesticate development.

The importance of good governance was underscored by Jan-Erik and Svante (1997) when they declare that economic aspect is relevant to the rise and decline of nation but of much significance is how states score on the political criteria of evaluation in the areas of democratic values. Therefore, democracy has become a universal gauge for measuring global, as well as national development. To this end, the fact of dysfunctional and unsustainable development in Nigeria is explainable.

Poverty

Poverty is a household currency in Nigeria. It has been a major phenomenon since the early 1980s. Indeed with the termination of the Second Republic by the military dictatorship, there has been deterioration in the welfare and increase in poverty level in the country thereby bringing to reality the organic connection among unemployment, poverty and poor development. The evolution of one is ultimately linked to the evolution of the other. Promotion of economic growth through job creation and empowerment of people constitute important vehicle for national development. It must also be emphasized however that although, economic growth constitutes a necessary condition for poverty reduction, it is much more important that the trade off and conflict between growth and wealth redistribution be settled within the ambit of democratic practices.

A number of studies on poverty (Smith, 2019; UNDP,2021; World Bank, 2022) provide detailed analysis of the state and evolution of poverty in Africa. Ali and Thorbecke (2000) analyse the effect of growth and income distribution on spread, depth and severity of poverty for rural and urban areas. On their analysis of sensitivity of poverty to changes in economic growth and income distribution, it was found out that growth has a bigger effect on poverty in rural than urban areas. Similarly, Bruno et al (1998), Okunmadewa (1997) among others carried out investigation on poverty and national development. Okunmadewa identifies a number of poverty reducing strategies. These include the promotion of high and broad-based growth as well as employment generating growth, increase in access to social services and infrastructure by the generality of people among others.

Who are the Poor?

Generally, poverty has been defined in terms of a situation of low income and low consumption expenditure. People are counted poor when their standard of living is below poverty line. Chambers (1995) maintains that poverty is a sub-set of living under general condition of deprivation whose dimension includes isolation, physical weakness, vulnerability, seasonality, powerlessness and humiliation. The World Bank reports (1995, 2022) classified the poor as those who are often illiterate, unstable in health condition, and often have a short life span. The poor have no access to the basic necessities of life such as good food, clothing and decent shelter. They are unable to meet their social and economic obligations, they lack sustainable employment. Thus, it is not difficult to identify a poor man. The poor are unable to obtain adequate income, secure a reliable job, and own property or maintain ideal living condition. Poverty however may be chronic, structural, conjunctional or transient (Abdullahi, 1993). It may further be absolute or relative (World Bank, 1993). Causes of poverty may include the following::poor access to gainful employment opportunities, minimal access by the poor to credit, inadequate physical assets, low endowment of human capital, environmental degradation and reduced productivity, lack of participation i.e. failure of the ruling elites to draw or design programme for poverty alleviation with collaborative support and contribution from the target beneficiaries i.e. the poor.

Unemployment

Different definitions of unemployment have been provided. Dantwala (1971) defines unemployment as a state in which people who can work are without jobs and are seeking work for profit. Falae (1971) deviated from the position of Dantwala when he asserted that those who are mentally retarded, or suffering from severe emotional or psychological problems and those who are physically challenged are excluded from labour force because some categories of people who are without work should not really be categorized as unemployed. The National Bureau of Statistics (2018) relies on the International Labour Organization variant to define unemployment as the proportion of people in the labour force (not in the entire economic active population, nor the entire population) who are active looking for work but cannot find work for at least 20 hours during the reference period to the total currently active population. The unemployment rate is determined by:

$$\frac{\text{Unemployed population}}{\text{Labour force population}} \times \frac{100}{1}$$

Unemployment can therefore be seen as the underutilization of productive resources which ultimately leads to unmitigated social vices. Scholars have identified five basic traditional categories of unemployment viz: frictional, seasonal, cyclical, structural and technological unemployment (Jhingan, 1975) cited in (NISER, 2005), With reference to the country, the NBS (2018) revealed that economic growth has been decelerating since the second quarter of 2014, culminating in economic recession in the second quarter of 2016. The technical indicator of recession is two consecutive quarters of negative economic growth as measured by the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Unemployment was accelerated by recession which eventually peaked in the fourth quarter of 2017.

The economically active population in Nigeria increased from 110.3 million in Q in Q2: 2017 to 111.1 million in Q3: 2017. The labour force increased from 83.9 million in Q2: 2017 to 85.1 million in Q3: 2017. The total number of people on full time job declined from 52.7 million in Q2: 2017 to 51.1 million in Q3: 2017. The unemployment rate increased from 14.2% in Q4: 2016 to 16.2% in Q2: 2017 and 18.8% in Q3: 2017. In Q3: 2017, 16.4% of rural dwellers and 23.4% of urban dwellers in the labour force were unemployed.

The statistics above was associated with the period of recession which Nigeria slid into in Q2:2016. An economic recession occurs when the GDP of economy posts two consecutive quarters of negative growth. It is often exacerbated by skyrocketing inflation and unemployment, reduction in capital and Foreign Direct Investment inflow into the country, as well as imbalance in foreign trade. Nigeria has wriggled out of recession but unemployment persists.

Development

Development is an omnibus concept (Ohemeng, 2018). Its usage depends on the ideological persuasion of its handler. The concept has been seen by some commentators as an escape from underdevelopment. Some however see it as a mere euphemism for an escape from the United States hegemonic domination (Thomas, 2000). He further sees development as an all embracing change and not just an improvement in one aspect. It is also seen as a process which builds on itself, where change is continuous and where improvement builds on level of social change and at that level itself. It also involves changes occurring at the level of social change and at the level of individual human beings. Development aims to improve the various agencies including governments, organizations and social movements.

Magbogunje, (1995) suggested that two ideas underline the notion of development. The first is that development is about wealth creation for the use of the citizens and the second is that every society succeeds best, when and if it is able to adapt and transform its own institutions as well as mores and the general attitude of its people towards the attainment of the societal goals. It can be inferred from the above that development is the ability of a community of people to manipulate resources at its disposal to ensure a good standard of living, thereby eliminating abject poverty, ensuring a good living standard and earns respect among the comity of nations in the global system.

Development and growth are intertwined. Scholars noted that growth involves a rise in total economic output; particularly per worker, increase in consumption per head, increase personal welfare, changes in economic structure and changes in stages of structural configuration. Development on the other hand is growth laced with equity, social justice and sustenance of growth. Thus, development is about change.

Development emphasizes the formulation and implementation of policies articulated to promote the well-being of the citizens. Through it, resources are utilized to build sustained growth with wealth creation, job creation and comparative advantage for national product in the global market. Furthermore, development is about the management of resources for the promotion of social and economic welfare of the ordinary man.

From the foregoing it can be deduced that development takes central position in the quest for transforming the lives of citizens in a state. This has necessitated the implementation of diverse development strategies in Nigeria since independence Among these, especially in the Fourth Republic, are: the domestication of New Partnership for Africa Development (NEPAD), New International Economic Order (NIEO), Vision 20:2020, National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 7-point Agenda, Transformation Agenda, Agenda for Sustainable Change, Economic Recovery and Growth Plan and the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Policy.

The rationale for the formulation and implementation of these policies and programmes of action was in line with the common thread that runs through the submissions of Goulet (1971), Norman et al (1972), Obasanjo and Mabogunje (1991) and Agagu (1995) among others, that effective policy formulation cum implementation is sine qua non for development.

Nexus of Democracy and Development

The trajectory of development across space and time has shown that democracy is significant for national development. It has accelerated growth more than any other political systems ems and particularly military authoritarian model. It provides fundamental rights to pursue diverse legitimate economic interests. A

well institutionalized democracy lives longer to guarantee rights. On the other hand, a dictatorial state may witness growth for the period of time such dictatorial leader leads. After the dictator, succeeding regime may abandon policies and programmes the dictator forced down on the people. Dictators enjoy what Mkandawire, quoted by Sumbine (2000) termed 'fragile legitimacy'. A fragile legitimacy is easily swept away by the undercurrent of economic crises.

Any overthrow of an institutionalized democratic regime may not lead to the end of economic development aspiration since the population could have imbibed such culture of development a democracy entails. This prognosis does not however preclude the fact that non democratic state cannot make appreciable development when good policies are put in place, the point is that, such state will lack the sustainable strength for democratic stability. The consequence of this is policy somersault and disorientated growth.

Third World states today face a huge challenge of political and economic stability because of the pattern of democratic practices in these states. These state parade themselves as democratic, but in real sense, the space of democratization actually restricted through many legislative and extra-legislative bridles and hurdles in their political practices. Simbine (op cit) citing Oslon argued that:

Obviously, a democracy is not viable if individuals lack the right of free speech and to security for their property and contract, or if the rule of law is not followed. The same court system, independent judiciary and respect for law and individual rights that are needed for a lasting democracy are also required for security of property and contract rights.

Essentially, the promotion and protection of civil liberties is needed as good antidote for corruption, high-handedness, executive recklessness non-transparency and non-accountability in public policy formulation and implementation that characterize development process in the Third World states. Little wonder these states have fragile economy and weak democracy. Since democracy is about accountability, legitimacy and transparency, sustainable development also rests on the tripod of these virtues. To this end, failure of policies or their abandonment mid way in Nigeria could be explained through an investigation into the nexus between democratic processes and economic development.

II. Case Study: National Policy On Micro, Small And Medium Enterprises (MSMES)

The national policy on micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMES) was developed by the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) with financial support from the African Institute of Applied Economic and the United Nations Development Programme in 2007. The policy was eventually approved by the Federal Executive Council on Wednesday May 9, 2007 and was officially launched on Thursday July 26, 2007. Following the inauguration of the National Consultative Committee on Thursday October 18, 2007 the implementation of the policy was kick started. In view of the federal nature of Nigeria, State Consultative Committees (SCCs) were also established.

The policy provided for a window period of four years of implementation before review would be carried out. The implementation period has spanned a decade now with a focus of addressing emerging economic and social challenges affecting (MSMEs) in the country and acting as impetus to drive national economy towards attaining the projection of vision 20:2020.

At the stakeholders meeting in 2012, the NCC was replaced with the National Council on MSMEs. The new council was expected to muster the necessary political and economic will to drive the implementation of the policy at the State level.

Objectives of the Policy

According to SMEDAN, the policy aims at:

- accelerating the profitable expansion of existing MSMES along the value chain, ensuring the transition from micro to small enterprises, small to medium enterprises and medium to large enterprises, thereby enabling them to increase their contribution to GDP and employment generation; and
- fostering the emergence of new MSMEs in Nigeria, especially among women and the youths.

Critical Prerequisites of the Policy

This policy which will run through 2025 hinges on the following critical prerequisites:

- Streamlined and decentralized Federal, State and Local government agencies engaged in MSME development to reduce waste and increase efficiency in service delivery;
- Improvement in the capacity of streamlined agencies to deliver high quality services;
- Institutionalization of public private dialogue and partnership in MSME policy implementation to promote seamless co-operation;
- Provision of funding from public, private and no-profit organizations to drive the implementation of the policy coupled with in built mechanism to promote transparency and accountability, and

- Measurement and evaluation to ensure impact assessment and inform additional policy and programme modification

Classification Adopted by National Policy on MSMEs

For the purpose of coherence and standardization, the policy adopts a dual criteria classification of employment and assets (excluding land and buildings) as follows:

Size/Category	Employment	Assets (in million naira)
Micro enterprises	Less than 10	Less than 10
Small enterprises	10-49	10-less than 100
Medium enterprises	59-199	100-less than 1,000

Assessment of the Policy

Nigeria's economic focus is on the realization of Vision 20:2020 and the attainment of this fact rests on collaboration between government on the one hand and the private sector on the other hand, as engine of growth for creation of wealth, employment generation and poverty reduction. Government facilitates, regulates and enables while the private sector invests and manages. There is the preponderance of micro enterprises in Nigeria, cutting across all spheres of economic activities.

The national economy is currently facing both internal setback emanating from insecurity and external shock arising from a plunge in the global oil price. Commitment to economic diversification has only existed at the level of rhetoric. There is the manifestation of weak micro and macro-economic indicators. Both national and sub-national governments are unable to meet their obligations to workers, as backlog of salaries are owed. These fundamentals coupled with rising unemployment have created breeding grounds for social uprisings in the nation.

Although, this policy is a progressive framework towards fostering growth and development, its implementation has been hampered by weak mass participation, weak institutional synergy and lack of commitment by all tiers of government, among others. It has ab initio been stated that democracy is about the people and MSME policy is also about the people. The congruence here is the people, especially large majority that operate at the micro level of the economy. The launch of trader money by the administration of President Muhammed Buhari attested to the fact of misplacement of implementation priority in micro investment development. Similar intervention funds appropriated for entrepreneurship development by the current administration of president Bola Tinubu have not generated the expected short term gains in view of the worsening material condition of the poor masses in the country. The procedure and processes adopted by politicizing empowerment cash disbursement was a deviation from the semblance of practice in other climes e.g. India, South Africa and Indonesia where micro credit had been provided for people (Augustor & Co, 2016) with effective collaboration of the people down to the grassroots.

III. Conclusion

In view of the poor state of development in the country and abysmal level of micro, small and medium enterprises, there is need for diversion of energies from generation of data for policy formulation through arm chair approach to real collection of data from the people who are the ultimate beneficiaries of any government policy. Such data in this regard could include the economic, demographic, and occupational distribution of people who are qualified to benefit from MSMEs.

While combating corruption and other socio-structural challenges that hinder national development, the primacy of inclusive process and procedure of policy formulation and implementation must be emphasized. This will ensure that specific needs are met based on the comparative advantage such scheme provides for the people.

IV. Further Recommendations

The following recommendations are hereby suggested:

- There is need for coherence and continuity in national development plan and projection which is only made possible in a democracy. Democracy is not only about competitive elections; it is a complex web of evolving process, system and phenomena. For its sustainability, the process of continuity in policy implementation must be registered in the psychic of every Nigerian through adequate political education. A newly democratizing state like Nigeria needs the education of its citizenry for the deeper understanding of the dynamic of this system and its benefits. Such increased understanding will engender move interest, the desire to participate and constructively engage office holders in any case of aberration in policy process or its somersault. The responsibility should be that of agencies for national orientation. Citizens should actively demand for policy coherence and continuity.

- There is need for more accountability and transparency in the management of public resources. Good governance must be the guiding philosophy for politicians in their day to day official conduct Literature is replete with suggestions on transparency in governance and public administration in Nigeria. The citizens who essentially are central focus in a democracy should be more interested in institutionalization of transparency and accountability.
- Since politics is primary to foster development, there is need for good governance which ultimately respects the views of people as the custodian of popular sovereignty. Citizens role must be more defined for mobilization and enlightenment in ensuring that policy process pass the democratic test.

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