

Governance and Economic Development in Africa: The Nigerian Experience

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Abstract

This paper explores the intricate relationship between governance and economic development in Africa, with a specific focus on Nigeria. Nigeria, as Africa's most populous nation and one of its largest economies, offers a compelling case study of how governance impacts economic trajectories. Marx and Engels' concept of historical materialism was employed to deepen the understanding of governance and economic development dynamics in post-colonial Africa, with a specific focus on Nigeria's current governance system. This choice is also because it seeks to establish a scientific foundation for fostering a better future for humanity. Secondary sources of data were collected and analyzed mostly in descriptive forms. This study, describing Nigeria's economic and development trajectory as a microcosm of the broader African experience suggests that the quality of governance can either strengthen a weak economy or stifle a potentially thriving one. It underscores the significant impact of governance, highlighting the paradox of Nigeria's vast natural resources coexisting with persistent poverty and underdevelopment. It attributes this to governance issues such as lack of visionary leaders, corrupt practices, embezzlement /misappropriation of public funds, inefficiency, ineptitude, weak institutional capacities, and undue foreign influence. The paper recommends that well-managed and adequately funded Civil Societies Organizations (CSOs) and NGOs have the potential to alleviate the impact of poor governance in Africa and contribute to the establishment of a better society.

Keywords: Governance, Development, Corruption, Post-Colonial Africa, CSOs/NGOs.

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INTRODUCTION

Governance refers to the frameworks, processes, and systems by which an organization, entity, or society is directed, controlled, and held accountable. It encompasses a wide range of activities and mechanisms that ensure the effective, transparent, and responsible management of resources, adherence to laws and regulations, and the achievement of strategic objectives. The act of governance is a cornerstone in any society, fundamentally shaping its trajectory and quality of development. Its function is pivotal in determining the societal framework, influencing not only its effectiveness but also sustainability and equity in development. It could be argued that governance is not a new concept; it is as old as human civilization. Its roots can be found in the Greek word 'kybernan', which means to steer or to pilot a ship, but the concept was also used during the Roman Empire under the Latin word 'gubernare', meaning to direct, rule and guide. Albareda & Forberger (2014, p.8). Governance and development are intertwined and mutually reinforcing. Effective

governance creates the conditions necessary for development, while development strengthens governance structures and capacities. Consequently, good governance drives development forward, whereas ineffective governance can pull a potentially thriving economy into a morass. Could this be the case in Africa? In response to this question, Ake (1996) contends *that political conditions are the greatest obstacle to development*. According to him, over the past thirty years, Africa's intense focus on development has yielded limited progress. In fact, most African's today face deeper hardship than in previous decades, struggling with widespread malnutrition, deteriorating health outcomes, and crumbling infrastructure. Although numerous scholars and analysts have identified several underlying factors contributing to Africa's enduring development challenges; ranging from the enduring legacies of colonialism and entrenched corruption to limited technical capacity, unequal trade dynamics, and deficits in managerial and entrepreneurial competence, Ake offers a more pointed perspective. As he asserts that,

above all, it is the adverse political climate, characterized by institutional fragility, leadership failures, and chronic instability, that constitutes the most significant impediment to meaningful and sustained development across the continent (Ake, 1996).

Adegboyega & Arikewuyo (2020, p. 9) support Ake's notion as they assert that, "Failure of many developing countries was attributed to too many activities undertaken which eventually resulted in the unleashing of unproductive rent-seeking activities". As regards politics, African nations have faced several challenges related to corruption, authoritarianism and weak institutions. According to Abou-Zaid, Amusa & Alabdulwahab (2021, pp. 23-31); "high level of corruption and mismanagement among government officials has made sustainable development unachievable". Expectedly, some scholars present a divergent view, suggesting that the perceived lack of vision among African leaders is situational and more a consequence of contextual challenges than a reflection of personal incompetence or deficient governance capabilities. In support of this perspective, Omotola and Saliu (2009) observed that the post-independence era of the 1960s was marked by great optimism.

With political sovereignty secured, Africa's emerging leaders were confident that the continent's rich human and natural resources would pave the way for sustained democratic governance and meaningful development. Unfortunately, these early aspirations were soon undermined by prolonged periods of military rule and the influential role of external forces, both of which derailed the continent's developmental trajectory.

This paper aligns with the school of thought that believes that poor quality of governance, policies and institutions in Africa are responsible for the slow growth and underdevelopment in most of these countries. Africa, the second largest Continent on Earth, is blessed with abundant natural and human resources. It is a significant producer of key commodities such as oil, minerals, and agricultural products. Rich in natural resources, cultural heritage, and human potential, Africa's potential is immense. However, despite these abundant resources, the continent struggles with poverty due to poor governance, marked by widespread corruption, ineptitude, and inefficiency.

The economic and developmental situation in Nigeria is a microcosm of the African continent. This fact is accentuated by Ake, as he challenged the notion that Africa's development efforts have simply failed. He argues that this perspective is misleading because, in truth, genuine development was never a central priority to begin with. According to him, the core issue lies not in failed attempts at development, but in its absence from the political agenda altogether. He further stated that the struggle for power was so absorbing that everything else,

including development, was marginalized. Political power was everything; it was not only access to wealth but also the means to security and the only guarantor of general well-being. Those in power were so involved in the struggle for survival that they could not address the problem of development. Nor could they abandon it, "because it was the ideology by which the political elites hoped to survive and to reproduce its domination". The above scenario best explains the political economy of Nigeria. The present government and elites, who constitute the ruling class, are disconnected from the realities of the nation-state. Their focus lies on the acquisition and retention of political power, even as the economy nosedives with the citizens groaning under the weight of excruciating hardship.

Using the Nigerian experience, this paper, seek to unravel the impact of governance on the economic development of Africa by posing the following questions: Has the quality of governance undermined the economic development in Nigeria? How does corruption within governance structures affect economic development in Nigeria? Have governmental institutions been effectively leveraged to catalyze economic development in Nigeria? To what extent can civil societies and NGOs mitigate the effects of poor governance in Nigeria? The paper is structured into six sections. The first is the introduction. The second section covers the theoretical framework, while the third conceptualizes key concepts. The fourth section discusses the research questions, and the fifth and sixth sections present the conclusion and recommendations respectively.

Theoretical framework

The analytical framework employed in this study is Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels historical materialism. (Engels 1878, Len 1978). This framework is instrumental in understanding the nature of societal organization and development. According to Adam Volle (2024); the theory posits that all institutions of human society, such as government and religion, are the outgrowth of its economic activities. In essence, all institutions within human society arise from economic activities. Marx and Engels posited that the material conditions of a society's mode of production (its economic base) fundamentally determine its organization and development (its superstructure). According to this view, the economic structure of society, or the way production is organized, shapes social relations, political institutions, and cultural values (Engels, 1878). Volle (2024) further elaborates that historical materialism applies the principles of dialectical materialism to human civilization, emphasizing that everyone must engage in economic activities to meet life's needs. This is a call to action for Nigeria's ruling class to not only participate but also engage the state in entrepreneurial activities. Such involvement would enable them to become effective resource managers,

steering the nation toward industrialization and away from a rentier economy. Since the economic base fundamentally determines a nation's organization and development, engaging in productive economic activities is crucial.

Ekekwe (2009, pp. 15–16) deepens our understanding of Marx and Engels' concept of historical materialism by highlighting its value in offering a more “objective and theoretical knowledge of the world”. According to him, this framework not only explains the transformation of economic, social, and political life but also lays the scientific foundation for meaningful change aimed at advancing the collective good of humanity. He further emphasized that to realize such a vision for the future of mankind, we must understand our history and its influence on shaping the world. It is widely acknowledged that the past exists within the present, just as the present contains the seeds of the future. Thus, political economy assists in making these connections, allowing us to analyze the present through the lens of its historical antecedents. It also helps us see how we can shape our future towards desirable ends. This study employs Marx and Engels' concept of historical materialism to enhance the understanding of governance and economic development dynamics in post-colonial Africa, with a particular focus on the prevailing governance system in Nigeria. It aims to provide a scientific basis for creating a better future for Nigeria.

Conceptualization: Governance

There are various definitions of governance, with some emphasizing the role of government, while others highlight interactions between different stakeholders and the importance of cooperation. Those who believe in the distinction between government and governance tend to look at the risk of an autonomous space of government, in contrast to the relationship often expected to be collaborative, inclusive, interactive and discursive in the case of democracies (Grote & Gbikpi 2002, p.15. Ekong & Allen, 2019. P.4). Governance refers to the processes and structures used to manage and regulate a society, organization, or group. According to World Bank Group (2010); Governance is defined as the way power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development. Governance means the state's ability to serve the citizens through the rules, processes, and behaviors by which interests are articulated, resources are managed and power is exercised in the society (<https://images.app.goo.gl>). From the above definitions, a constant; most definitions focus is on decision-making processes and their connection to the provision of public goods and services.

Traditionally, national governance was primarily associated with national governments and their structures. However, modern governance recognizes the involvement of various actors beyond the national

government, including sub-national authorities - regional, state, and local governments: Trans-national authorities - organizations and institutions that operate across national boundaries. E.g. the European Union (EU), the United Nations (UN), and the World Trade Organization (WTO): Private Entities - They facilitate cooperation between countries, manage international agreements, and address global issues such as climate change, trade, and security. Non-profit Organizations - non-governmental organizations (NGOs), advocacy groups, and charitable foundations. In this expanded view of governance, the interaction between these various actors creates a more dynamic and complex system. Sub-national authorities address localized needs and concerns, trans-national authorities tackle cross-border issues, and private entities contribute resources, expertise, and advocacy. Effective governance requires coordination and collaboration among all these actors to address the diverse challenges facing societies today.

Governance is how power is exercised and mediated through institutions. These institutions could be formal – constitution, laws, and regulations and informal – traditional or tribal hierarchies, mafia, family etc. Governance is intrinsically related to politics, especially when seen as the art of governance. Just like politics talks about government, institutions, power, order, and the ideals of justice, governance deals with the public sector, governance structures, equity, and ideals of public administration. Nevertheless, they are distinct from each other in the sense that politics is arguably broader than governance. (<https://www.scribd.com>). According to Khan (2013, p.32) governance is one of the critical factors determining the growth prospects of countries. There are several critical structural features of developing countries that prevent the achievement of significant progress on the good governance front. Hence, Fosu (2018, p. 9) avers; Political governance is measured by the following indicators of democracy: electoral competitiveness, constraint on the government executive, and polity (2). Also, employed as indicators of political governance are measures of political instability (PI). PI has been a major feature of the African political terrain since independence, whether as elite PI in the form of coups d'état or civil wars.

The quality of governance has significantly undermined economic development across Africa, with Nigeria being a prime example. Governance in Nigeria has often been characterized by weak institutional frameworks, lack of transparency, and poor accountability all of which have hindered the efficient mobilization and management of the nation's abundant human and natural resources. Corruption within governance structures remains a pervasive and deeply entrenched challenge. It not only diverts public funds meant for critical sectors like infrastructure, education, and healthcare but also distorts policy priorities, reduces investor confidence, and perpetuates inequality and

poverty. Thus, systemic corruption has led to a cycle where economic progress is routinely compromised by self-serving leadership practices and patronage networks.

Development / Economic Development

The concept of development is multifaceted and interdisciplinary, and it is also highly contested. The main points of contention arise from disagreements over agency and ideological approaches to development. As Toyo (2001, p.24); aptly avers, “development is one of the most frequently used and yet one of the least adequately understood”. Many scholars have offered various perspectives on development. According to Paulinus & Allen (2019, p. 3), economic growth is easily confused with development. Traditionally, development was often equated with increases in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or industrial output. However, contemporary development thinking emphasizes a more holistic approach that integrates economic, social, political, and environmental aspects. Development therefore refers to a multidimensional process that encompasses improvements in the quality of life, expansion of human capabilities, and the transformation of economic, social, and institutional structures to support sustained well-being. It is not limited to economic growth measured by GDP, but also includes access to education, healthcare, political freedom, and social justice. As Sen (1999) argues, true development is about enhancing individuals' freedoms and capabilities to lead lives they value, rather than merely increasing income or production. Todaro and Smith (2020) also define development as the process by which the quality of life and economic well-being of people improve, especially in low- and middle-income countries. They emphasize the importance of reducing poverty, inequality, and unemployment while ensuring sustainable and inclusive growth. Furthermore, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) frames development in terms of human development, which centers on enlarging people's choices and enabling them to lead long and healthy lives, acquire knowledge, and enjoy a decent standard of living (UNDP, 2020). Thus, development is now widely recognized as a dynamic and inclusive process that must be context-sensitive, participatory, and people-oriented, rather than being solely driven by macroeconomic indicators.

Economic development is a broad and evolving concept that transcends mere economic growth to include improvements in human welfare, institutional capacity, and social equity. It refers to the process through which a country or region improves the economic, political, and social well-being of its people. It involves a range of policy interventions and actions undertaken by governments and political leaders to foster economic growth, reduce poverty, and improve living standards. In essence, economic development

reflects how political systems and decisions shape the economic trajectories of societies, with the goal of fostering inclusive prosperity, reducing inequality, and ensuring long-term sustainability for all members of society.

Economic growth in a country is associated with and measured by Gross National product (GNP), Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and per capital income and associated economic indices. (Efemini, 2004. Mgba, 2019). Unfortunately, the prevailing notion of development as merely the expansion of physical infrastructure and public facilities represents a narrow and superficial understanding of progress. These visible markers, often regarded as symbols of advancement or artifacts, do not inherently translate into genuine or transformative development. Their existence alone does not guarantee meaningful or qualitative transformation. A nation may still be plagued by poverty, joblessness, and widespread hardship despite their presence. This flawed and uncritical perception of development has been notably embraced by many African leaders, particularly in Nigeria, where the emphasis remains on infrastructural and material growth rather than on the comprehensive well-being and empowerment of the people.

Governance Deficits and Their Impact on Nigeria's Economic Trajectory

The quality of governance has significantly undermined economic development across Africa, with Nigeria being a prime example where governance deficits have remained a longstanding impediment to national progress and prosperity. Africa's economic underperformance is closely linked to governance failures. Basically, one of the greatest challenges to sustainable economic growth in developing countries, like Nigeria is lack of effective institutions and good governance (Fayissa & Nsiah, 2013; Al Mamun et al., 2017. Adegboyega & Arikewuyo, 2020). According to Khan (2013), governance is one of the critical factors determining the growth prospects of countries. Effective governance creates the conditions necessary for development. It fundamentally shapes a nation's trajectory and the quality of development. Governance deficits remain a major impediment to Africa's economic transformation, undermining efforts to achieve inclusive growth and sustainable development. These deficits manifest through weak institutions, widespread corruption, lack of accountability, and poor policy implementation. Adejumbi (2006) emphasizes that governance in Africa often fails to promote the institutional frameworks necessary for poverty reduction, resulting in economic policies that are neither inclusive nor transformative. The continent's economic trajectory is also shaped by the failure of governments to foster enabling environments for private sector growth, technological innovation, and human capital development. Ezeani (2013) argues that governance

deficits limit policy continuity, resulting in fragmented and poorly coordinated development strategies. Consequently, macroeconomic stability is often short-lived, and gains in poverty reduction or infrastructural development remain uneven. Furthermore, leadership failures and lack of political will have stagnated meaningful reform. As Omotola and Saliu (2009) observe, despite the initial optimism at independence, Africa's trajectory has been marred by military dictatorships, authoritarianism, and elite capture of state resources. These patterns have not only weakened governance but also undermined the legitimacy of development agendas.

As Okolo (2022) notes, the absence of strong governance structures continues to constrain the continent's capacity to harness its vast human and natural resources effectively. Some studies have established that since 1960, resource – abundant countries have experienced significantly slower growth than resource poor countries. (Lai and Myint, 1996. Sachs and Warne, 1995. Ross, 1999. Auty, 2000). This underscores the fact that the issue of poor governance is not unique to Nigeria but is also prevalent in other resource- abundant African countries. The quality of governance in African nations particularly Nigeria has profoundly but adversely influenced economic development.

In affirmation, Auty (2000 p. 347) argues

That variations in economic performance are caused by differences in the quality of governance that are linked through the type of political state and the pattern of structural change to the natural resource endowment.

To demonstrate how countries with comparable starting points can experience divergent economic outcomes due to variations in their political structures and governance quality, he cited the case of Ghana and Malaysia. Both nations gained independence in 1957 and shared similar colonial legacies, levels of resource endowment, and development potential at the time. However, their post-independence trajectories diverged significantly. While Malaysia experienced relatively stable governance, consistent policy implementation, and strong institutional frameworks that spurred rapid economic growth, Ghana's development was hindered by frequent political instability, military interventions, poor policy choices and governance challenges. This contrast underscores the critical role of political systems and the quality of governance in shaping national development outcomes. Andoh, DeGannes-Scott and Ofori-abebrese (2020), stated

When the two countries were very similarly situated, with Ghana slightly better off than Malaysia and believed to have a better chance of developing rapidly than Malaysia, Some sixty years later, Malaysia is close to being

classified as a developed country, with a per capital GDP nearly six times greater than Ghana's.

While Ghana and Malaysia share similarities in their colonial past and initial conditions of resource abundance, their developmental trajectories have diverged significantly. Both countries were former British colonies. Ghana gained independence in 1957, while Malaysia achieved it in 1957 (Malaya) and 1963 (Malaysia). Both countries are rich in natural resources. Ghana has significant gold, cocoa, and oil reserves, while Malaysia is known for its tin, rubber, palm oil, and oil and gas resources. Both nations undertook significant economic reforms to modernize their economies. Ghana implemented structural adjustment programs in the 1980s, while Malaysia focused on export-oriented industrialization and economic diversification strategies. Malaysia has successfully diversified its economy and developed a strong manufacturing sector, particularly in electronics and machinery, boasts a well-developed infrastructure, including roads, ports, airports, and telecommunications which has facilitated trade and attracted foreign investment. Ghana, on the other hand, has continued to rely heavily on the export of primary commodities such as cocoa, gold, and more recently, crude oil. This dependence has limited the country's ability to diversify its economy and build a resilient manufacturing base. As a result, Ghana's economic structure remains vulnerable to global commodity price fluctuations, thereby constraining its industrial growth, weakening economic efficiency, and slowing long-term development prospects. This chasm in their development paths reflects the consequences of weak governance and suboptimal policy decisions.

This draws attention to Nigeria's current economic realities and governance framework, which mirror many of Ghana's challenges. However, the adverse effects of poor leadership and governance are even more deeply entrenched in Nigeria, posing a significant barrier to its developmental progress. Governance in Nigeria has long been marked by overreliance on oil revenues, a deficiency in entrepreneurial innovation, rampant corruption and financial mismanagement, policy misalignment, institutional inefficiency, and perhaps most critically a glaring absence of visionary leadership among the political elite. According to Okoi and Iwara (2021, p. 1)

The failure of governance in Nigeria manifests in the declining capacity of political leaders to recognize systemic risks such as election fraud, terrorist attacks, herder-farmer conflict, armed banditry, and police brutality and put in place the necessary measures to navigate these challenges.

In contrast, the current system, where leadership is often achieved through bribery,

intimidation, and violence, leaves political leaders without the courage to address these issues, as many of these tactics are their own tools used during election periods. It further suggests that our leaders are not effective in managing emerging issues due to a lack of expertise and capacity. For example, up until now, the Nigerian government has not provided a sustainable solution to the insecurity that has plagued the nation since the return to democracy in 1999, and the situation continues to worsen. For an economy to thrive, leaders must foster a 'developmental' political state that possesses both the autonomy to implement coherent and prudent economic policies and the goal of maximizing social welfare. Unfortunately, Nigerian have arguably been saddled with 'visionless' and 'clueless' leaders who are so disconnected from the realities of the people while they depend on state patronage for acquisition of wealth. Their key interest lies in the acquisition and retention of political power by all means possible which was allegedly, how insurgency emanated with the emergence of Boko Haram. Some scholars have described the Boko Haram insurgency as primarily politically motivated, though with a religious and ideological garb (Muzan 2014, p.12).

Governance has long been suspected to be a major impediment to African economic development. This suspicion came to the fore in the late 1970s when African economies suffered major setbacks after independence. In a 1981 report commissioned by the Bretton Woods Institutions, - 'Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Agenda for Action', one which came to be known simply as the "Berg Report," poor governance was highlighted as a major culprit responsible for Africa's poor state of economic health. Fosu (2018, p. 2). According to Ake (1996); it is worse as those within the ruling faction, see no need to engage in entrepreneurial activities, as they could more easily and safely acquire surplus wealth through the use of state power. Nigeria's political landscape is dominated by career politicians whose primary focus is retaining power through a cycle of recycled appointments and elected positions. Lacking the entrepreneurial mindset and innovative drive necessary for transformative leadership, they are ill-equipped to steer the country toward meaningful industrialization and sustainable economic growth. To this effect, Ake further stated that;

The elite responded to this dilemma by making token gestures to development while trying to pass on the responsibility for development to foreign patrons they eagerly embraced economic dependence. In time, this frame of mind led to the conception of development as something to be achieved through changes in the vertical relations between Africa and the wealthy countries. In this spirit, African governments expected a large portion of their development budget to be financed externally. (1996, pp 7-8)

Thus, like Ghana, Nigeria opted for development through structural adjustments with a dependent mindset due to their lack of vision and critical thinking. They traded their sovereignty and dignity for economic support and aid for structural development, becoming economically dependent and politically weak as their economy was effectively taken over in exchange for aids which facilitated a leash hold on the economy. This aid has continued to entrench underdevelopment in Nigeria by crippling domestic markets which is integral to fostering economic growth, stability, and resilience. Domestic market supports job creation within a local economy. Businesses catering to local demand tend to employ local workers, contributing to lower unemployment rates. A robust domestic market encourages entrepreneurship and innovation, as businesses compete to meet the needs and preferences of local consumers, which in turn fosters industrialization. All these linkages are hindered by external orientation of a local economy.

Nexus between Corruption and Governance in Nigeria

Historically, Nigeria's Fourth Republic began on May 29th, 1999, following a prolonged period of military rule. The transition to democracy was met with widespread optimism, as many hoped that democratic governance would bring stability, economic growth, and social development. However, over the past 25 years, reality has often fallen short of these expectations. Governance in Nigeria has been characterized by corruption, insecurity, economic instability, ineffective policies etc. Nigeria has constantly faced the challenges of corruption and high cost of governance, which has hindered her developmental drive. According to Robinson (2012, p. 1); Corruption undermines development by siphoning off resources for infrastructure and public services and by weakening the legitimacy of the State. Corruption in Nigeria transcends mere unethical conduct; it is a deeply entrenched systemic problem that permeates nearly every facet of governance, public service, and even civil society. Conceptually, corruption refers to the abuse of entrusted power for private gain, whether through bribery, embezzlement, nepotism, or manipulation of public processes (Transparency International, 2023). In the Nigerian context, corruption has become both a norm and a culture, sustained by weak institutions, lack of political will, and societal complicity. According to Olayiwola and Aluko (2018, p. 95), corruption in Nigeria is not limited to public officials misappropriating funds but also involves a complex network of actors including political elites, civil servants, private sector players, and even community stakeholders who facilitate or benefit from illicit practices. The consequences of corruption are far-reaching, as stolen wealth deprives millions of access to essential services like healthcare, education, and infrastructure, thereby undermining development and deepening poverty.

This unfortunate phenomenon is apparent across all sectors of the economy and particularly plagues the oil sector, leading to massive revenue losses under the watch of the ruling class. A headline from The Guardian newspaper on June 23, 2014, reads; "Corruption wrecks Nigeria's ports, shrinks GDP by \$204M yearly - MACN." This illustrates the profound extent of corruption in the system, which shows no signs of abating. According to report from the Maritime Anti-corruption Network; Widespread corruption in the maritime sector has been described by stakeholders as a major stumbling block within the nation's port sector, as it chokes domestic trade and inflicts high cost of goods on citizens. Corruption is not only an impediment to infrastructural reforms in Nigeria rather it has exacerbated hardship and high cost of living for the citizens. The study further reveals that corruption adds about 15% to the cost of importing food and bulk products into Nigeria. The importation of petrol is also affected, incurring an additional cost of over \$187,000 per shipment. Regrettably, given the pivotal role the oil sector plays in Nigeria's economy, any negative impact within the industry inevitably translates into severe hardships for the general population.

Political corruption in Nigeria often takes the form of patron-client relationships, where public positions and contracts are distributed not on merit, but as rewards for political loyalty. This system, rooted in prebendal politics, facilitates embezzlement, nepotism, and favoritism. Joseph (1987) coined the term "prebendalism" to describe this Nigerian phenomenon where public offices are viewed as opportunities for personal enrichment and distribution of state resources to ethnic or partisan allies. Thus public officials connive with contractors to inflate budgets and divert funds. As Uzochukwu (2022, p. 118) notes, "ghost projects and contract inflation are sophisticated mechanisms by which billions are siphoned from public coffers under the guise of development".

From the above analysis, it is evident that corruption within governance structures remains a critical concern, as it not only hampers economic development but also perpetuates the cycle of ineffective governance in Nigeria. *In its September 2023 report, an NGO, the Open Society Foundations, traced the failings of democracy in Nigeria to pervasive corruption. This aligns with a global consensus that corruption in Nigeria is endemic and hinders its development. (Punch Newspaper).* Corruption obviously continues to ravage the Nigerian economy to the detriment of the citizens even after decades of political independence. "Corruption leaves a negative effect on the economic growth of the country and lessens the budget for important sectors of the government such as education, health and employment opportunities" (Panda, 2023, p. 1). Despite Nigeria's resource wealth, systemic issues such as corruption, ineptitude, economic

mismangement, and social inequality which are all boarded on poor governance have prevented the country from harnessing its resources for the benefit of all its citizens. The current level of corrupt practices has continued to hinder development in the country, diminishing the hope and aspirations of Nigerians since independence. The effects of corruption on Nigerian citizens are profound and far-reaching, impacting various aspects of daily life and overall societal well-being. According to World Bank report (1996); 'Nigeria presents a paradox; the paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty'. The country is rich and the people are poor'. The citizens are immersed in Economic Hardship, unemployment, high cost of living, poor public services etc. Thus, Aziz (2002, p. 2) seems completely incongruence as he posits that:

Corruption continues to deny the poor, the marginalized and the least educated members of the society, the social, economic and political benefits that should accrue to them, benefits that are taken for granted in societies that have managed to shake off the yoke of corruption.

In contrast to the above assumption, the adverse effects of corruption in Nigeria have become increasingly indiscriminate, sparing only the political elite. Today, even the affluent, once perceived as insulated, are beginning to feel the sting of a failing system, as economic hardship and systemic decay cut across all social strata. Despite mounting public complaints and repeated calls for fiscal prudence, the cost of governance in Nigeria remains excessively high. Efforts to curb these extravagant expenditures have yielded little result, as the burden of governance continues to escalate without restraint. A 2023 AP News report detailed the national outrage when lawmakers allocated to themselves over \$38 million for official vehicles and residences while critical sectors like health and education remained underfunded. <https://apnews.com/hub/africa>. Nigeria, supposedly a developing country, actively seeking loans and aid from their Western partners, paradoxically, maintains an ostentatious and wasteful leadership culture that starkly contradicts its economic realities. A striking example is President Tinubu's arrival at the COP28 climate change summit in Dubai with an excessively large entourage of 1,411 delegates: far surpassing the fit-for-purpose delegations of other world leaders (Business Day, 2023). The Nigerian presidency appears to be on an aggressive borrowing spree; however, these loans have regrettably failed to translate into tangible improvements in the economy or the living conditions of the populace. Of particular concern is the recent development in which President Tinubu formally requested the National Assembly's approval for a \$21.5 billion loan alongside a ₦758 billion pension bond (Channels News, 2025). This is amid Nigeria's already staggering debt profile reportedly exceeding ₦101 trillion from the World Bank.

Governance in Nigeria has, in multiple dimensions, undermined the nation's economic development, plunging the country into a level of hardship that many describe as unparalleled in its history, comparable to a wartime reality. While citizens are urged by the president to "tighten their belts" in the face of soaring inflation and economic distress, the stomachs of public officials protrude with abundance from public funds. The ruling elite, rather than prioritizing meaningful reforms, are preoccupied with commissioning lavish buildings, unveiling oversized portraits of the president, and embarking on frequent international trips aboard with newly acquired, state-of-the-art presidential jets while the everyday living conditions of the masses continue to deteriorate at an alarming rate.

Institutional Frameworks and Developmental Policy Implementation

The implementation of developmental policies in any nation is significantly influenced by the strength and functionality of its institutional frameworks. In Nigeria, however, institutional weaknesses have consistently hindered the translation of well-crafted development policies into measurable progress. Institutions are not merely structures; they encompass the rules, norms, and enforcement mechanisms that govern political, economic, and social interactions (North, 1990). When these frameworks are dysfunctional or compromised, even the most ambitious policies become ineffective. According to Omotola and Salju (2009, p. 54), institutions serve as "the engine rooms of policy articulation and execution," and without stable institutional base, policy implementation becomes a chaotic exercise marred by corruption, duplication of roles, and poor coordination. This is evident in Nigeria's repeated failure to actualize national development plans such as the Vision 2020 or the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP), which were undermined by weak institutional synergy, politicization, and lack of continuity across regimes.

The prevalence of weak institutions and poor corporate governance as well as poor ethical standards in most public and private organizations, hinder the attainment of the goals of economic policies in the country. Ineffective governance has significantly compromised the quality of institutions, leading to their exploitation for personal gain, and rendering regulation and law enforcement ineffective. Many government institutions do not adequately engage with citizens or the private sector and lack the capacity to carry out their mandates. (USAID). The failure of institutions to effectively fulfill their mandates affects all major entities in Nigeria, as politicians frequently exploit these institutions as instruments of harassment and terror. This incapacity to meet mandates presents significant challenges to the efficient operation of crucial institutions in Nigeria. The problem is often worsened by

the fraudulent use of these institutions by politicians for their personal or political agendas. At this point, it is essential to briefly review the activities of some institutions in Nigeria.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), established in 1999 with the mandate to conduct elections across political offices in Nigeria, has repeatedly fallen short of its constitutional responsibility. Rather than serving as a neutral arbiter of the electoral process, INEC has often been co-opted by political actors to subvert the democratic will of the people. Through widespread electoral malpractice, irregularities, and manipulation, the commission has struggled to deliver elections that are genuinely free, fair, and transparent. Consequently, it has become an instrument through which certain political interests are preserved at the expense of the people's right to choose their leaders. In its review of the 2023 election, Punch newspaper (2024) reported that:

The worst damage from the 2023 polls is the failure of INEC to upload the result from the polling units to the INEC result portal in real-time. After pre-election promises to do so, this affected the integrity of INEC, casting doubts on the entire process. That the IREV portal worked during the other polls renders defenses weak.

The 2023 election was notable as many registered and voted in large numbers hoping for a change in Nigeria's declining political system. Unfortunately, their hopes were dashed as INEC manipulated the process, resulting in an undesired outcome for the people. The devastating consequences of their actions have further plunged Nigeria and its economy into an unprecedented crisis in the nation's history, as we have disaster succeeding calamity. In a similar vein, the National Assembly has increasingly operated as a mere rubber stamp, routinely endorsing the executive's endless loan requests with minimal scrutiny or debate. Rather than safeguarding the interests of the citizens they were elected to represent, lawmakers appear more aligned with political convenience than with democratic accountability. Meanwhile, the judiciary, once regarded as the last hope of the common man has not been spared from political interference. It is now widely perceived as captured/compromised, where judicial outcomes are often determined by the influence of the highest bidder, thereby eroding public trust in the rule of law and justice system. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) establishment Act was first enacted in 2002 and amended in 2004. The Act commissions the EFCC to combat economic and financial crimes thereby enabling the commission to prevent, investigate, prosecute and penalize economic and financial crimes. Sadly, the EFCC is being used as an *attack dog* by the executive, functioning as a tool to criminalize political dissent. This is evident in their selective cases and judgments. Data from the Probe

Monitor portal, developed by the Centre for Fiscal Transparency and Public Integrity, reveals that many cases involving prominent Nigerians are in limbo. This situation highlights a significant accountability gap and raises serious questions about the effectiveness and commitment of public institutions in pursuing transparency and justice.

The Nigerian Police Force (NPF) is the primary law enforcement agency in Nigeria. It is constitutionally empowered to maintain internal security, prevent and detect crime, and enforce laws. Established under Section 214 of the 1999 Constitution, the NPF is a central institution responsible for public safety and order across the federation. Despite its strategic importance, the Nigerian Police Force has long faced criticism for inefficiency, systemic corruption, abuse of power, and a general disconnect from the communities it is meant to serve. According to Alemika (2013), the NPF has historically functioned more as an instrument of state coercion than a people-centered service, inherited from colonial structures designed to suppress dissent rather than protect citizens. The issue of institutional corruption within the NPF cannot be overstated. Officers are frequently accused of demanding bribes, falsifying evidence, and engaging in extra-judicial killings. The infamous Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) unit became a symbol of such abuses, culminating in the nationwide #EndSARS protests in 2020, where citizens demanded an overhaul of the policing system. According to Amnesty International (2020), SARS operated “as a criminal gang in uniform,” with widespread cases of torture, illegal detention, and extortion documented. The Nigerian Police Force remains a crucial institution for national security and governance. However, its effectiveness is severely undermined by structural deficiencies, corruption, and disconnect from democratic and human rights principles and practices.

Civil Society as a Watchdog of Government Accountability

Civil society in Nigeria has emerged as a crucial player in promoting transparency, democratic governance, and public accountability. Broadly defined, civil society encompasses a diverse range of non-state actors, - including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), faith-based groups, professional associations, labor unions, and the media - whose collective mission is to advocate for the public good and hold the state accountable (Ikelegbe, 2013). In a political environment often marred by corruption, impunity, and weak institutional checks, civil society serves as indispensable watchdog and as agents often fill the gaps left by state failure. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) play crucial roles in the governance and economic development of African nations, including Nigeria. These entities are mandated to uphold human rights, promote transparency, accountability, and combat corruption. Their influence

span various dimensions, actively shaping Nigeria's economic development trajectory. Civil societies often act as advocates for policy changes, pushing for reforms that promote good governance, transparency, and accountability. According to Olowu (2011, p.103); “civil society is vital to democratic consolidation in Nigeria because it fills the gap created by ineffective formal accountability institutions”. For instance, organizations like the Budget Foundation have pioneered public access to simplified budget data, thereby empowering citizens to question how public funds are allocated and spent. Similarly, SERAP (Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project) has gained national and international attention for using legal and advocacy tools to challenge cases of high-level corruption and rights violations. Through court actions, media campaigns, and coalition building, SERAP has held public officials accountable on issues ranging from misappropriation of education funds to lack of transparency in security spending (SERAP, 2022).

Highlighting the significance of CSOs and NGOs in Nigeria's political economy, “the federal government has announced its intention to introduce corporate governance codes for both public sector entities and non-governmental organizations. According to a statement from the Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Investment, this initiative aims to enhance public trust and investor confidence in the Nigerian economy. A Federal Government spokesperson emphasized that the code will also promote transparency in the management of government resources and foster the long-term sustainability of government-owned entities. Punch (2023). Nevertheless, this appears to be an impracticable assurance given that these entities have consistently faced stifling and marginalization due to the poor quality of governance in Nigeria. According to a Premium Times newspaper article dated February 2024, “Amidst worsening insecurity and economic challenges, Nigerian lawmakers are directing their attention towards regulating NGOs” The bill sponsored by Sada Soli (APC, Katsina) seeks to establish legislative framework to regulate the activities of NGOs and Civil Societies Organizations (CSOs). Imposing restrictions on CSOs activities, clearly limit their ability to operate freely. On that note, Activists have described the bill as an attempt to gag the civil space. In another development, the judiciary's role in marginalizing CSOs is evident, as seen in the case of CBN vs. SERAP. Court Rules that NGOs “Cannot Call Itself Pressure Group”. Naira Metrics (2024). The court ruled that NGOs lack the legal standing to initiate legal actions, rejecting their classification as pressure groups (Naira Metrics, 2024). However, it is pertinent to acknowledge the fact that; CSOs are vital for Nigeria's economic recovery, given their substantial contributions to the nation's development. With adequate funding and minimal restrictions, they have the potential to reform governance in Nigeria.

In conclusion, Nigeria's development journey has been consistently hindered by entrenched challenges, including pervasive corruption, weak institutional capacity, misplaced priorities, and gross mismanagement of public funds. These governance deficits have severely impeded its ability to achieve sustainable economic growth. For Nigeria to attain inclusive and resilient economic development, its elite must commit to genuine internal reforms, led by visionary and accountable leadership, and supported by robust civic engagement. The imperative for institutional reforms in Nigeria cannot be overstated, as they are crucial for fostering transparency and promoting a governance model that prioritizes sustainable development. Achieving such transformative change requires strategic interventions, particularly through the active involvement of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). These organizations play a pivotal role in holding power to account, advocating for policy reforms, and ensuring that governance structures align with the broader goals of national progress and inclusive economic growth.

Recommendation

1. The Nigerian Federal government must take deliberate steps to empower and create an enabling environment for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to function effectively as partners in governance. By so doing, the government will foster a vibrant civic space where CSOs can monitor public institutions, advocate for transparency, and amplify citizens' voices. This is a strategic imperative for promoting responsive, inclusive, and sustainable governance in Nigeria.
2. To effectively tackle corruption and drive economic development in Nigeria, policymakers must work collaboratively with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to reinforce governance frameworks and reshape the perception of public office. A vital strategy is to reduce the allure of public positions by cutting down the undue benefits and privileges attached to them. This approach will help deter individuals who pursue political office solely for self-enrichment, promoting a more accountable and service-driven leadership culture.
3. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) must actively advocate for the enactment and enforcement of robust legislation that imposes strict penalties on public officials who engage in the mismanagement of public resources. It is imperative that such laws guarantee non-partisan and consistent accountability, ensuring that officeholders face appropriate consequences for financial misconduct during and after their tenure. Establishing a clear framework of unavoidable sanctions will serve as a strong deterrent, discouraging corrupt and unethical behavior within the public sector and fostering a culture of responsibility and transparency in governance.
4. The Nigerian government should prioritize institutional reform rooted in capacity enhancement as a critical driver for sustainable national transformation. This involves investing in continuous training and leveraging digital innovation to strengthen institutional effectiveness. Also, to ensure transparency and autonomy, institutions must be adequately empowered, well-monitored, and insulated from political interference thereby promoting a culture of accountability and long-term developmental impact.

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