

## Western Development Plans: A Re-Examination Of Post-Colonial British West Africa

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### Abstract

*This paper is an examination of Western Development Plan in Post-Colonial British West Africa. British colonial administration has been characterized by scholars based on their different views and examinations. It has been examined by African scholars within the context of self-interest and by European scholars within the context of imperialism. However, the result of the interaction and relationships which African states had with their European counterparts has adversely affected their economic sustainability and social acclimatization. Since independence, West African States have maintained close political and economic ties with their former colonial powers. During the colonial era, the colonial administrators successfully imposed and impressed their alien pattern and orientation on the economic affairs of West African countries. West African economic affairs were distorted to an extent that two decades after independence, most of the African countries are very much dependent*

*economically on their former colonial administrators. Post-colonial African economies are replete with the scars of uneven and exploitative nature of colonialism. Despite the abundant resources of Africa, African countries are among the least developed and industrialized nations in the world. Thus, it cannot be denied that the post-colonial African economies are, by and large, a function of their colonial experience. The colonial economies were directly linked to the economics of their respective metropolitan powers through an array of policies ranging from control of currency, trade policies and infrastructure. Hence, this paper examines the various development plans drafted after independence. This paper will benefit from both primary and secondary sources.*

Keywords: National Planning, Developmental Plans, and Post Colonial West Africa

## Introduction

One of the greatest problems that confronted the newly independent states of West Africa was the struggle to break the colonial economic system inherited. Under the colonial economy, these states remained predominantly producers of raw materials for the manufacturing industries of the colonial powers and dumping ground for finished products. Again, the imported and exported trade of these states was dominated by the big trading companies of the colonial powers.

However, the West African government are very aware of the problems arising from the underdeveloped nature of their economy and that is why since independence, they have made concrete programmes to transform the economy and improve the standard of living of the African independent States. This determination is the reflection in the various development plans that have been drawn up by some African Independent States. (Falola, 1996: 257)

## Conceptual Clarification

According to Diana Convey, National Planning is a continuous process which involves decisions or choice about alternative ways of using available resources with the aim of achieving particular goals at some time in future. It is a technique, a means to an end, being the realization of certain pre-determined and well-defined aims and objectives laid down by a central planning authority. The end may be to achieve economic, social, political or military goals. (Convey & Hills 1986: 3)

The concept of development is relative and as such, has many meanings. According to Falola, development can be through or as a

process of structural change and capital accumulation that moves a society closer to conditions in which the basic needs of the people are met. (Ihonvberé & Falola 1987, 200) To Mobagunje, development is essentially a human issue, a concern with the capacity of individuals to realize their inherent potentials and effectively cope with the changing circumstances of their lives. (Mabogunje 1980: 45)

This view was corroborated by Walter Rodney who tends to draw a distinction between the perceptions of development, as it relates to the individual, and as it relates to the larger society. Rodney explains that development, at the level of the individual, implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. In his explanation, Rodney has identified the key qualities by which human potentials are judged. (Rodney, 1972: 1) However, he goes on to state the achievement of any of those aspects of human development is very much tied in with the state of the society as a whole. This implies that any society that intends to develop would naturally hinge the success of its development on meeting these basic needs of those within its confines.

Development plan, on the other hand, has in practice been used to describe a wide range of documents or verbal statements of a government's long term and short term objectives towards the development of its country. □

For the purpose of this paper, development is looked at within the context of the nation-state and what national development plan entails. Scholars like M. L. Jhingan have noted that national

development plan connotes the preparation of a process through which set goals for development are intended to be achieved. The development plan of a region or nation is usually considered in conjunction with the development of social needs. The development of any nation is multi-purpose and the process towards achieving this involves different criteria. He opines that the contents of the country can vary greatly and that the development of different nations and its content are very different, and this difference is due not only to the initial level of development, but also the characteristics of each nation, its industrial structure, geographical location, economic structure and many other factors. (Jhingan 2007, 167)

The need of planning in underdeveloped countries is further stressed by the necessity of removing widespread unemployment and ensuring human capital development. In the absence of sufficient enterprise and initiative, a centralized planning authority is the only institution for planning the development of the economy.

For rapid economic development, underdeveloped countries require the development of the agricultural and the industrial sectors, the establishment of social and economic overheads and the expansion of the domestic and foreign trade sectors in a harmonious way. All this requires simultaneous investment in different sectors which is only possible under a well economic planning. (Jhingan 2007, 168)

### **Historical Background of British West African Countries**

Africa is a blessed content with natural, mineral, national and human resources and

could have been one of the most developed continents in the world, but the present underdeveloped nature of the continent is alarming. The reason for its underdevelopment is deeply rooted in its colonial experience. This explains why scholars like Michael Crowder are of the view that British colonial rule in West Africa was purely driven by economic interest and whatever kind of development that accrued to Africa at this time was by accident, not design. (Crowder, 1976: 167) Thus, till date, there is a natural tendency in newly independent African countries to blame colonialism for their difficulties and to see neo-colonialism as an obstacle in the way of further advance.

During the early years of colonial rule, there was considerable debate as to what type of colonial rule was suitable for the administration of West Africa. There was, furthermore, growing concern as to how the people of diverse origins and cultures could be integrated for administrative convenience. Consequently, Britain adopted the policy of indirect rule. The policy was first introduced in Northern Nigeria under the authority of Lord Lugard. Although it had been practiced before in India. Indirect rule was inspired by the belief that the European and the African were culturally distinct though not necessarily unequal, and that the institutions of government most suited to the latter were those which he had devised for himself. (Crowder, 1976: 168)

However, the first attempt at development planning in British West Africa was the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1945. A ten-year plan initiated after the Second World War. The ten-year plans were however partial plans in that they

consisted only of public sector capital expenditure programmes, mostly for expanding educational, health, transportation and communication facilities and modernizing the administrative framework and strengthening agricultural support services. (Livingston, 1987: 540-543) □

The general short-falls of this plan are immediately evidenced in its time span especially as this was an initial effort by a country which hardly had a development plan. In addition, the emphasis was on transportation which received the largest share in order to facilitate the extraction and export of agricultural products as well as promote the systematic penetration of the hinterland by British merchant firms and other business interest. In Nigeria for instance, even though the majority of its population lived in the rural areas in 1946, the plan allocated more money to the urban center. (Ihonvbere, 1987: 204)

It is important to note that after the Second World War, there emerged the two superpowers, namely; USA and USSR which brought about a new world order that foster the principle of national self-determinism and racial equality. A development that turned West Africa into a strategic staging point for the allied forces and the allied propaganda which emphasized democracy and the right of all people to choose whatsoever forms of government they would like to be under. This stimulated considerably political awakening in the country. As a result, British policies and practices were subject to critical scrutiny and virulent criticism. (Tamuno, 1980: 524) At this time, the imperial power, Britain, had been weakened by the war. Therefore, African

nationalists, using the mass party and the mass meeting, awaken their docile peoples to press for independence. (Cornwell 1969: 242)

This internal and external heat led Britain to begin the policy of decolonization. Britain began to grant her colonies independence and this led to the birth of modern-day Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone and The Gambia. Nigeria gained independence in 1960, Sierra Leone was self-governing by 1958 and gained independence in 1960, The Gambia gained independence in 1965, the British Gold Coast was allowed by Britain to self-government and consequently independence in 1957; she was given independence under the name Ghana. (Cornwell 1969: 243)

### **The Dilemma of Western Development Models in British West African States**

The West African economies during the colonial period were dependent economies. This is further expounded by a theory called 'dependency theory'. The theory is predicated on the notion that resources flow from a periphery of the poor and underdeveloped states to the core or center of the wealthy states, enriching the latter at the expenses of the former. (Jhingan 2007, 169) It is important to know that the ten-year plan of the colonial era was channeled towards the actualization of this motive. According to Olatunbosun's comment on the motive behind the introduction of the plan, she argued that after the Second World War, the colonial government realized that only by interfering in the organization of the primary and other activities in the colonies could be the only remedy for the acute

shortage of export crops badly needed by its home markets.

This was manifested in the activities of the colonial banks as the banks were developing monopolies to control competition at the expenses of British West African people. There were only two major banks that operated in British West Africa; Barclays and the Bank of West Africa. They had great economic and financial influence over all of British West Africa from 1916-1960. From a dependency theory point of view, these banks took advantage through price fixing and certain unfair regulations. (Jhingan 2007)

From the above premise, it is obvious that the plan was hardly aimed at developing West Africa either economically or otherwise. It did not show any intention of establishing popular and democratic institutions or a preparedness to involve the majority of the people in the planning of their lives and society. Its conceptualization and implementation were highly static, elitist, discriminatory and undisciplined. The projects had no linkages with one another and rather than improve the living standards of the people, the plan had an opposite effect on the people.

As such, any claim that the British colonial government developed West Africa either in terms of laying the foundation of achieving concrete development on behalf of the people must be illusory. It is clear that the peripheral role and location of the West Africa formation today in the international division of labour, existence of a weak and largely unproductive bourgeoisie, the co-existence of production (capital models), the existence of an

unstable state and the generally low standards of living were the direct consequences of the colonial planning and policies which were been reproduced in the contemporary period. The outward orientation of the West African economy, the absence of a technological base, the neo-colonial content of the educational system, the viciousness of the armed and security forces and the existence of inefficient and ineffective institutions are also products of colonial rule which deliberately emphasized the interests of the metropolis at the expense of the colonized people. (Ihonvbere, 1987: 205)

It was in this unhealthy relationship that West African states gained independence. Thus, after independence, British West African states had to confront the challenges of development through various development plans.

Since independence; Nigeria has had four development plans; 1962-1968, 1970-1974, 1975-1980, 1981-1985, Ghana; 1959-1964, 1968-1970, 1970-1971, 1975-1976, 1979-1980, Sierra Leone; 1962-1963, 1971-1972, 1974-1975, 1978-1979, The Gambia; 1967-1968, 1970-1971, 1974-1975. (Anyanwu 1997: 399)

While some of these plans are short-range and medium-range plans, others are perspective and rolling plan. Although to an extent, there have been some signs of progress; these attempts have been fraught with difficulties that have emerged from the continued reliance on adopted western models inherited from their former colonial powers. These development models have been rooted in the colonial development plans drawn up during the colonial period. (Anyanwu 1997: 395)



It has been observed that the development plans of the post-colonial government of British West Africa were focused on the development set by the previous colonial powers. In British West Africa, this has manifested itself in the unequal trade relations and the dependency structure in the area of the economy. This view is supported by Professor Adedeji, he opines that the post-colonial development plans have remained largely dependent on external trade, foreign technology, foreign enterprise and other stimuli. He added that the very strategies of development which African governments have been pursuing since independent have come from theories derived from economic development which have been developed by the colonial pattern of production in Africa. (Adedeji, 1989: 93) For instance, the second plan of Nigeria was criticized as the type of plan whose document was produced largely by an expatriate team without much local involvement and therefore less effective as a means of mobilizing domestic efforts. Even as a technical exercise, the database for planning was so defective that the principal architect of the plan, W. F. Stolper described the experience as 'planning without facts'. (Livingstone 1969: 530)

It is important to note that, the post-colonial elites of West African states accepted and absorbed a number of mythical notions about development and planning which were to influence thinking in post-colonial era and consequently, these mythical notions and models laid down by the colonial powers were adopted by the newly independent states of West Africa. These are: □

1. Planning had to be elitist in initiation and implementation; there was no need to involve the masses whose lives and future was been planned. □
2. Planning had to be heavily centralized and kept secret from the people because the decentralization of decision making and executing institutions demands a level of political and power decentralization.
3. For a plan to be successful, it must involve huge expenditure on all sorts of projects whether co-ordinate or not was a secondary matter and
4. Planners must rely on foreign aid capital, technology, and manpower. (Ihonvbere, 1987: 205)

The problem of development planning in West Africa is also compounded by the practice of mixed economy system, a model which they do not fully understand. A mixed economy is a compromise between the two economic systems; capitalism and socialism. It divides the economy into public and private sectors for the purpose of economic development. The primary aim of such planning in underdeveloped countries is to increase the growth rate of the economy, given the various limiting factors in such countries. For this, planning in a mixed economy envisage a high rate of capital formation through various monetary, fiscal and physical control measures; through foreign aid, exchange control, and protective tariffs and through public and private investments so that the economy develops in a balanced way. Unfortunately, the reverse is the case as these economic

policies are dictated by the metropolis. (Jhingan, 1966: 522)

This could be the reason why African states are unequally integrated into the world economic system. To start with, West African states are economically weak due to the lack of domestic economic capacity and weak social infrastructure following the colonial experience. As such, they are not fit to compete with developed states of the world. They are even made weaker by low export prices and significant terms of trade decline as well as the debt crisis and the burden of debt servicing. (Khor, 2005: 13)

As a result of this, since independence, British West African states have faced the challenges of building a united, strong and self-reliant nation. Thus, her core objectives since the drafting of development plans have centered on:

1. Economic growth and the provision of infrastructure,
2. Increase in productivity and in the level of agricultural exports
3. Increase in per-capita income
4. Reduction in the level of unemployment and increase in the supply of high-level manpower □
5. Balanced development
6. Diversification of the economy and promotion of national economic independence in terms of creation of effective links between sectors of the economy so that development becomes mutually reinforcing. (Nwosu 1977: 114)

To achieve these objectives, it was necessary for West African states to be integrated economically.

### **Failure of the Development Plans**

The adoption of the Western Models could not tackle the problems of development in British West Africa because the environment and circumstances of Britain and the colonized people are very difficult. □

The limitations of the development plans are quite enormous. To start with, in the immediate post-colonial era, the major challenges were that of political instability. The civil wars, coups and counter-coups, military take-over and political rivalries drastically affected the proper planning of West African states. Also, the fostering of despotic government and military regimes that manifested in personal interpretations of development agendas also ensured that programmes suffered epileptic attention. These challenges have greatly stalled the implementation of development plans. Development is not possible except in an environment of tranquility and stability. □

In addition, these plans were poorly implemented. The greatest weakness of many plans in Africa has been the failure to translate the plan from paper into operational planning. Aside from this, the common error in development planning is to project an impossibly high growth and have a wrong priority. Failure to achieve the target, in this case, will no doubt be due to the failure of one or more sectors to develop as planned and this will, in turn, imply that consistency with other sectors has been lost, resulting in the imbalances that the plan was partly designed to avoid. The success of a development programme rests ultimately on the availability of productive projects which determine the immediate scope for development. □

Other impediments are the lack of manpower skills or the availability of the

necessary technical know-how, the non-existence of appropriate policies to integrate the development plans and lack of accurate or detailed information on the economy as a whole. □

Furthermore, the rate of borrowing and debt servicing is alarming for a developing nation. The neglect of rural development which is the major reason for the rural-urban migration is also another factor. The most crucial set back of development plans in West Africa is the corrupt nature and practices of its leaders. The corrupt practices of West Africa leaders bring about inefficiency, bitterness, and frustration which have an unsettling effect upon society in the new nations. □

It has been stressed that the existence of a good plan is not enough as the basis for achieving development. There must be, in addition, a political leadership that has the vision, education, the will, the credibility, and capacity to manage the process of change. □

Also, the lackadaisical attitude of the people is a contributing factor to the stagnation of the economy. People are both the means and ends of development and for a nation to develop; both the people and leaders must work towards it. Thus, the more people develop themselves, the more they would become instruments for further change. According to Walter Rodney, Africans are saddled with the responsibility to understand the system for development and they should work towards its actualization and not against it.

### **Conclusion**

It has been established from the foregoing, that there is no doubt that the purpose of colonization was purely for the economic prosperity of the metropolis and the

subjugation of the subjects. Thus, after independence, the major challenge of the modern states was to break the colonial economic system inherited at independence. Under the colonial economy, these states remained predominantly producers of raw materials for the manufacturing industries of the colonial powers and consumers of their finished goods. These unequal trade and fiscal policies dictated by the metropole led to the balance of payment deficit by the African states and consequently, depended on the economy of the western world to survive. The consequence of this in modern time is that West Africa states are unequally integrated into the world system and are currently the losers of globalization.

To get out from this dilemma, West Africa countries came up with different development plans which now seem like a mirage, working against that which it was created for.

Hopefully, ECOWAS was formed to mitigate these problems but obviously, the body was incapable of solving the problem as it was itself confronted with several problems and its functionality began to wane.

Apart from the adoption of Western models, other reasons for the failure of development plans are political instability in the immediate post-colonial era, lack of proper implantation of plans, lack of manpower, heavy borrowing and debt servicing, rural neglect, lackadaisical attitude of the people and lastly, the corrupt practices of leaders. □

It is however recommended that for the success of any development plan and for proper use of resources, there is a need for



discipline in leadership. Also, the attitude of the people to their environment must change; there is the need to develop a national ethos. In addition to this, West African states should devise plans suitable for their environment and capable of solving their peculiar problems. □

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