

Evaluating the Historical and Contemporary Experiences of Development Plan Implementation in Nigeria: Successes, Challenges, and Lessons Learned

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<p>Corresponding Author Tyodzer Patrick PILLAH, Ph.D</p> <p>Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management Sciences, Veritas University Abuja</p> <p>Article History</p> <p>Received: 07 / 02 / 2025 Accepted: 19 / 02 / 2025 Published: 21 / 02 / 2025</p>	<p>Abstract: The planning of development involves procedures to ensure that national policies and strategies are achieved and that development issues at all levels are fully incorporated into the overall national development goals, which is a continual global concern. In Nigeria, there have been development planning initiatives and programs, but these efforts do not appear to yield tangible developmental outcomes based on all indicators. This research, which relied on valuable secondary data sources, thoroughly examined the challenges of development planning in Nigeria. It also argued that development planning in Nigeria has been hindered over the years by the failure of Nigerian leadership to envision true development and prioritize it. Furthermore, it contended that various factors such as misplaced priorities, poor adherence to plans, inadequate executive capacity and public sector inefficiency, technology transfer challenges, systemic corruption, and ineffective public-private partnerships have made a genuine development path somewhat elusive. The study concluded with valuable comments and recommendations, including the need for a genuine development plan, enhanced public sector efficiency and adherence, improved collaboration between the public and private sectors, and a change in attitude to create a conducive environment for the desired development in Nigeria.</p> <p>Keywords: : Developmental plan, Development Strategies, Government Intervention, Implementation Challenges.</p>
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1. Introduction

Development planning, designed as a long-term strategy to induce permanent structural changes in the economy, necessitates government involvement in economic activities. The government establishes goals for future economic development and takes action to achieve these goals. Planning for development is crucial because it does not occur randomly, naturally, or rapidly. It must be deliberately planned. Successive Nigerian governments have employed development plans to tackle the nation's developmental challenges. There is a consensus that a "development plan" serves as both the diagnosis and solution for development issues (Emmanuel, 2019). Likewise, Nigeria's economic goals since independence are best illustrated by its various development plans (Arkebe et al., 2021). Over the past forty years, Nigeria has implemented numerous development plans to spur economic growth and enhance living standards.

First National Development Plan (1962), Second National Development Plan (1970-74), Third National Development Plan (1975-80), and Fourth National Development Plan (1981-85) are the four national development plans Nigeria has had since gaining its independence (a fifth plan was never implemented). In its continuous search for successful developmental techniques, the Federal Government also implemented long-term perspective planning and three-year rolling plans from 1990 to 1998. The

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government implemented the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) from 2003 to 2007, emphasizing value orientation, wealth building, employment creation, and poverty reduction (Ibietan & Ekhousuehi, 2013). A perspective plan called Vision 20:2020 was introduced more recently with the goal of making Nigeria's economy completely developed by 2020. Development planning has been used consistently in Nigerian administration, however the results of these plans have fallen short of expectations. This is demonstrated by the nation's high unemployment rate, low capacity utilization, failing infrastructure, widespread poverty, short life expectancy, urban congestion, large debt load, environmental degradation, and high illness prevalence (Abubakar & Yushua, 2021).

Nevertheless, Nigeria remains underdeveloped and ranks very low among the world's poorest nations despite its abundant natural and human resources. Obikeze & Obi (2004) observe that a review of the various plans clearly shows that the country is still far from its envisioned state. This is due to flawed implementation, distortions, or even non-implementation of the plans. Therefore, this study critically examines the various development plans and visions since independence to assess the extent to which they have achieved their objectives. The study also seeks to identify the issues hindering the effective implementation of development

plans in Nigeria and proposes solutions to enhance their effectiveness.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Development Plan

Development is a multifaceted process that encompasses changes in structures, attitudes, and institutions, as well as promoting economic growth, reducing inequality, and eradicating absolute poverty (Todaro & Smith, 2020). It involves transforming a society from traditional to modern, a process often referred to as modernization (Temple, 2017). Additionally, development is characterized by the ability to achieve sustained growth and adapt to continuous changes, aiming to fulfill progressive political, economic, and societal goals (Jamil et al., 2019). Essentially, development focuses on improving individual welfare, often measured through infrastructure that enhances quality of life. Key aspects of development include raising living standards, advancing education and health, and creating equitable opportunities for a more diverse and enriched life. The overarching aim is to improve both individuals and their environment (Iheanacho, 2012).

To accomplish organizational objectives, planning entails deciding on future courses of action. It necessitates planning, starting and sticking to a strategy, and figuring out ahead of time what needs to be done, how, when, and by whom. Without preparation, the operations of institutions, organizations, cultures, and countries could devolve into a sequence of haphazard acts with no clear goals (Datta, 2010). Decisions on goals, methods, behavior, and outcomes are all part of planning (Bueno & Salapa, 2022). It entails deciding what needs to be done, how, and by whom (Hussain et al., 2019). Planning encompasses determining control, direction, and methods for achieving the overall objectives of an organization or nation (Chigboo & Okonkwo, 2023). Plans must be directed and controlled to achieve desired objectives. Development planning is conceptualized as the deliberate government effort to influence, direct, and sometimes control changes in a country's key economic variables over time to achieve set objectives (Todaro & Smith, 2021). Thus, meaningful development requires adequate planning. Development planning is a long-term strategy aimed at inducing permanent structural changes in the economy, involving government intervention to set and achieve development objectives (UNDP, 2008). It comprises procedures to guarantee the implementation of national plans and strategies as well as the complete integration of development issues at all levels into the national development agenda as a whole (Datta, 2010).

While establishing criteria for evaluating development plans is complex, Lewis (1959) outlined five standards for assessment:

- The plan's influence on policy creation
- The scale and main focuses of the plan
 - The plan's approach
 - The execution of the plan

2.2 National Development Planning in Nigeria

It has been recognized that development plans are useful tools for tackling Nigeria's development issues. Thus, it is crucial to look at the many development strategies that Nigeria has put into place since gaining its independence. These plans have been adopted as strategic solutions to confront development issues, making it crucial to evaluate their implementation and impact over time.

- Pre-Independence Plan (1945-1956)

Nigeria's journey into development planning began with the colonial government's introduction of the Ten-Year Plan of

Development and Welfare for Nigeria in 1946 (1945-1956). This followed a directive from the Secretary of State for the Colonies to all British colonies, instructing them to establish a Central Development Board (Onah, 2010). However, the Ten-Year Plan of Development and Welfare for Nigeria was not a true development plan; it was essentially an uncoordinated list of projects across various regions. Although not stated clearly, the plan's goal was to appease the colonial government's perceived demands rather than purposefully affecting the situation of the Nigerian economy at the time (Allan & Edward, 2021). The colonial government's primary focus was on the production of agricultural products like groundnuts, palm oil, and cocoa, which were needed by British factories. There was no effort to align the development plan's objectives and priorities with the needs and interests of the Nigerian people (Alexander et al., 2022). It was noted that the program "suffered from the non-specialized approach of colonial administrators to development planning, inadequate planning machinery, and the absence of clearly defined national objectives" (Abubakar & Yushua, 2021). Despite its weaknesses, this plan laid the groundwork for subsequent development plans in Nigeria. These include:

- First National Development Plan (1962-1968)

The First National Development Plan (1962-1968) was initiated by Tafawa Balewa shortly after Nigeria's independence in 1960. The plan set ambitious goals, including equitable distribution of national income, rapid economic growth, reduced reliance on external capital, manpower development, and improved living standards for the population (Nnadozie, 2004; Onyenwigwe, 2009). Despite challenges such as political instability and a civil war, several significant projects were completed during this period. These included the Port Harcourt Refinery, the Niger Dam, the Niger Bridge, the Nigerian Security and Minting Plant, the Jebba Paper Mill, and the Sugar Mill.

- The Second National Plan (1970-1974)

The Second National Plan (1970-1974) was launched by Yakubu Gowon, to focus on national reconstruction and rehabilitation. It aimed to ensure equitable distribution of national income and foster the growth of the national economy. This plan was the first truly national and fully integrated plan, involving all twelve states in the development process (Utietiang, 2015). It also emphasized indigenization as a means towards economic independence. Despite facing challenges in the implementation, the plan achieved notable advancements in industry and agriculture (Onah, 2006). Notwithstanding, both plans laid the groundwork for Nigeria's development, and their objectives and projects have significantly contributed to the nation's progress.

- The Third National Development Plan (1975-1980)

Launched by Murtala/Obasanjo, the Third National Development Plan marked a significant milestone in Nigeria's development planning. Initially projected at N30 billion, the investment was later increased to N43.3 billion, reflecting substantial growth compared to previous plans (Obi, 2006). The plan's objectives included increasing per capita income, achieving more equitable income distribution, reducing unemployment, boosting higher-level manpower, diversifying the economy, ensuring balanced development, and indigenizing economic activities (Forrest, 2019). Despite its focus on projects benefiting rural areas, inadequate allocations to agriculture and social development highlighted a lack of focus on achieving these goals (Olayiwola & Adeleye, 2005).

- The Fourth National Development Plan (1981-1985)

The Fourth National Development Plan, introduced by Alhaji Shehu Shagari, aimed to enhance real income, distribute income more evenly, reduce unemployment, increase skilled manpower, reduce economic dependence, promote self-reliance, develop technology, increase productivity, and foster a new national orientation (Obi, 2006). Despite an ambitious investment of N82 billion, the plan faced challenges such as lower-than-expected export revenues, leading to debt service issues, balance of payment problems, and inflation. Consequently, many projects remained incomplete, and the economy experienced setbacks (Noah, 2020).

While both the Third and Fourth Plans had their shortcomings, they also achieved some successes. The Third Plan saw significant growth in the manufacturing sector, with an average annual growth rate of 18.1 percent, while the Fourth Plan aimed to lay a foundation for self-sustaining growth. Despite the challenges, these plans represented important steps toward national development.

- The Fifth National Development Plan (1986)

Introduced by Ibrahim Babangida, the Fifth National Development Plan aimed to address Nigeria's economic challenges. Its focus included diversifying the economy, revitalizing agriculture, promoting domestic production of raw materials, and creating employment opportunities (Onyenwigwe, 2009). The plan sought to correct structural economic defects and promote self-reliance, emphasizing the link between agriculture and manufacturing. However, it was eventually incorporated into the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), marking the end of the five-year planning model in Nigeria. Consequently, the Federal government transitioned to a three-year rolling plan (Abubakar & Yushua, 2021).

- The Perspective Plan and Rolling Plans (1990-1998)

During the preparation of the fifth development plan, a new planning approach was introduced, moving away from fixed five-year development plans. The Babangida government implemented two types of national plans: a long-term perspective plan covering 15-20 years to provide a realistic view of the country's issues, and a three-year rolling plan, reviewed annually to assess economic progress (Adegboyega, 2006). Although the perspective plan was scheduled to start in 1990, it was delayed until 1996 when Abacha established the Vision 2010 Committee. The Vision 2010 report, submitted in September 1997, recommended that this vision guide all plans, including long-term, medium-term (rolling), and annual plans (budgets) (Nwala et al., 2020). However, the Vision did not advance beyond Abacha's death in 1998.

The three-year rolling plan began with the First National Rolling Plan (1990-1992), aiming to allow revisions in response to socio-political and economic uncertainties (Ikeanyibe, 2009). However, these medium-term plans turned into almost annual budgets. Despite ten rolling plans from 1990 to 1999, there was no significant improvement compared to the years of fixed medium-term planning (Anugwom, 2020).

- The New Democratic Dispensation (1999-2010)

National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) (2003-2007). The re-election of Obasanjo's government in 2003 underscored the necessity for extensive socio-political and economic reforms in Nigeria. To address the country's development challenges, the National Economic Empowerment

and Development Strategy (NEEDS) was introduced, focusing on empowerment, wealth creation, employment generation, poverty reduction, and value reorientation. Despite the ambitious objectives, several areas revealed shortcomings. For example, although the annual budget increased substantially, per capita income remained low, indicating the need for more effective economic policies (Paul, 2016).

Additionally, while the number of educational institutions grew, the cost of education also rose significantly, limiting access to higher education for many citizens. The goal of creating seven million jobs faced obstacles as some government policies negatively impacted employment (CBN, 2005). In terms of infrastructure, particularly electricity, supply actually declined rather than improved (Ikeanyibe, 2009). By the end of Obasanjo's administration in 2007, it was clear that many of the goals outlined in NEEDS had not been fully achieved. Although NEEDS represented a comprehensive development plan, its challenges in achieving tangible results provide valuable lessons for future policy-making and development planning in Nigeria (Adegboyega, 2006).

➤ **Yar Adua/Jonathan Administration (2007-2011)**

In 2007, President Musa Yar Adua's administration introduced the "Seven Point Agenda," targeting critical infrastructure, land reform, human capital development, law and order, food security, wealth creation, and the Niger Delta (Paul, 2016). Following President Yar Adua's death, Vice President Goodluck Jonathan committed to continuing his predecessor's policies, although the future of the Seven Point Agenda remained uncertain (Gyong, 2012; Christian, 2022).

➤ **Nigeria Vision 20:2020 (NV 20:2020)**

During President Olusegun Obasanjo's tenure, Nigeria adopted Vision 20:2020, aiming to become one of the world's top 20 economies by 2020. This ambitious vision sought to significantly increase Nigeria's GDP per capita and elevate various sectors to international standards. However, achieving Vision 20:2020 has been elusive, with ongoing challenges such as poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and insecurity (Eneh, 2011).

➤ **Buhari's Economic Policies within the Context of the Change Mantra (2015 - 2023)**

In 2015, General Muhammadu Buhari became president, pledging to address critical issues like terrorism, poverty, unemployment, electricity shortages, and corruption. His economic policies prioritized national security, agricultural development, mining, power generation, water management, job creation, and anti-corruption efforts. While significant funds were allocated to these initiatives, there are calls for the government to intensify its efforts. It is crucial for the Buhari administration to effectively address these challenges to steer Nigeria towards stability and prosperity. The success of these initiatives will play a vital role in shaping Nigeria's future and its international standing (Paul, 2016).

2.3 The Challenges of National Development in Nigeria

Despite numerous well-intentioned development strategies by past administrations, significant progress remains elusive. This raises important questions: Were the previous development plans inadequate, or were they misapplied? If the plans were sound, why is meaningful development still a challenge despite ample resources? The answers are clear and multifaceted.

Firstly, the capacity for effective execution is often lacking. Instead of empowered individuals, positions are frequently filled by officials without substantial executive authority. Many plans failed due to insufficient public consultation (Obikeze & Obi, 2004). Effective planning should include input from rural communities and local officials, not just technocrats (Bala & Tar, 2021). Moreover, poor governance is a major barrier. Development is unattainable without good leadership. Many leaders prioritize power and privileges over genuine development, perpetuating a neo-colonial economy instead of fostering progress (Ozohu-Suleiman, 2016).

Corruption and indiscipline also impede development. Nigeria's leaders have often used their positions for personal gain rather than public interest. Effective development plans are unlikely to succeed in a corrupt environment, as corruption and development are mutually exclusive. Additionally, Nigeria's reliance on crude oil has led to the neglect of other economic sectors, such as agriculture, which was once the backbone of the economy (Ologbenia, 2007; Keith, 2023). The lack of economic diversification hampers sustainable development (Bala & Tar, 2021).

Accurate data is crucial for development planning, yet it is often lacking. Problems within the Federal Office of Statistics, reluctance to disclose information, and data manipulation hinder effective planning. Uncertainty about the population size exemplifies this issue. Without reliable data, planning, implementation, and monitoring are severely compromised (Ejumudo, 2013).

Overly ambitious development plans also pose a problem. These plans often aim to achieve too many objectives simultaneously without considering conflicting priorities. They are grand in design but lack the specific policies needed to achieve their goals (Onah, 2010). Additionally, conflicting policy objectives are common.

Lastly, the lack of continuity in government programs undermines development efforts. New administrations frequently abandon the plans of their predecessors, leading to numerous unfinished projects. Political instability, especially during military regimes, exacerbates this issue, creating uncertainty and slowing down the development process (Odunola & Ajilore, 2012; Oladapo, 2004).

2.4 Approaches for National Development

The successful implementation of development plans is essential for national progress. New strategies, such as the Seven Points Agenda and Vision 2020, have been established to address previous implementation challenges. To achieve development, committed leadership, discipline, honesty, and a strong will to pursue economic goals are necessary. While some support full liberalization, state involvement remains crucial for development, with guaranteed private property rights to encourage investment (Francis, 2020).

Policy stability and continuity are key to fostering investment, and revitalizing the agricultural sector, as demonstrated by Japan, is important. Human resource development is equally vital, as evidenced by the experiences of Japan and Korea (Yong & Robert, 2020). High-quality education and training aligned with the country's development needs are necessary for national progress. Additionally, an attitudinal shift is needed to reduce pessimism and

encourage internal initiatives for development, rather than relying solely on external influences (Abubakar & Yushua, 2021).

Promoting citizenship over indigeneity will enhance cooperation and participation in the development process. The constitution should be revised to foster unity and patriotism among all Nigerians, cultivating a sense of national pride and collective responsibility for the country's development (Omotoso, 2008).

3. Conclusion

In summary, the various development strategies adopted by successive Nigerian governments since independence have been examined, along with the challenges that have prevented these strategies from being effective tools for sustainable growth. The shortcomings of National Development Plans in Nigeria are evident in the numerous problems facing the economy. Economic and social indicators show that the economy is struggling, with severe unemployment, widespread poverty, low literacy levels, deteriorating infrastructure, technological lag, urban overcrowding, excessive debt, poor agricultural growth, and high disease rates being common issues.

Recommendations

Therefore, it is crucial to address all the issues that afflict Nigerian Development Plans for them to effectively facilitate national transformation among which are:

- Government should ensure transparent leadership by implementing robust anti-corruption measures to ensure public resources are used effectively, and strengthen institutions to enhance accountability and the rule of law.
- Improve public participation by involving local communities, including rural areas and local government officials, in the planning process to ensure plans reflect the needs and priorities of the populace.
- Maintain policy continuity across different administrations to prevent disruption of development plans, and foster greater public engagement and transparency in the development and implementation of development plans.
- Develop a framework that ensures subsequent governments uphold and build on previous development plans and promote value-added industries and local production to enhance economic resilience and growth.
- Focus on improving education, health care and vocational training to align with the country's development needs so as to improve life expectancy and productivity.
- Strengthen the Federal Office of Statistics to provide accurate and reliable data for informed decision-making and encourage transparency and accuracy in data collection and reporting.
- Amend the constitution to foster a sense of national pride and unity among Nigerians, promoting citizenship over indigeneity. They may give rise to implementing programs that encourage national cohesion and collective responsibility for development.
- Promote a positive mindset towards self-reliance and internal development initiatives by launching campaigns to reduce cynicism and encourage innovation and entrepreneurship.

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