Tackling Emerging Societal Challenges for Nigeria's Sustainability: The Human Capital Connection

A Lead Paper

By

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Abstract

The need to deal with the challenges confronting Nigeria in the quest to achieve sustainable growth and development informs this paper. Through re-designing the framework on the workings of the economy, the paper exposes that attention needs to be focused on human capital development, which is the core resource in realizing any desired level of change. The paper believes that this is achievable through a re-designing of the training system to include the contribution of all stakeholders in the training from the family system to the conventional school system.

1. Introduction

Societal wellness plays a fundamental role in the developmental efforts of any nation. As a result, when emerging issues in the transformation trajectory of the society are trivialized, national growth and development efforts become truncated. Although Nigeria is addressed as the giant of Africa for its enormous resource endowment, influence, and population, its development efforts and plans have been fraught with crisis since independence in 1960. Environmental destruction, resource depletion, and a decadent societal system have become serious emerging problems in recent times requiring the deliberate and conscientious involvement of all stakeholders.

From the work of James Robertson (2005), it was made clear that modern society goes through a fundamental transformation, reflected in many signs including an institutional and cultural breakdown and a myriad of social innovations and experiments, which may be a signal of an underlying disorder. As identified by NISER (2000) and UNDP (2006), evidence of the failure of Nigerian developmental efforts is reflected in the pervasive cases of hunger, inflation, unemployment, poverty, debt overhang, street begging, prostitution, banditry, terrorist insurgency, the collapse of' manufacturing industries, corruption in public service and stagnation in entrepreneurial development.

As pointed out by Ian Bartle and Peter Vas (2006), the need for modern industrial society to be made sustainable is recognized worldwide. So as sustainable economic development becomes the major discourse in global interactions, there is a growing demand worldwide for a dynamic shift in the pattern of engagement in a way that will be people-centric and follow a bottom-top approach. Therefore, the need to identify how Nigeria could begin to travel effectively along this path, is what informed this paper, which attempts at providing a contemporary analysis of Nigeria's core societal challenges and thus uncovers a sustainable approach to economic development in Nigeria.

2. The Society & Sustainable Development: Nigeria's Struggle

Several efforts have been made at both national and subnational levels aimed at developing a roadmap that will continue to guide the country along a path where economic growth and development becomes inclusive and sustainable. However, while Nigeria continues to record improvements in its economic performance as observed in the national output levels, the country remains susceptible to perilous societal challenges, which have stalled and vitiated her progress ('or the last decades.

Nigeria has undertaken several development planning processes since its independence in 1960, which have guided the allocation of resources with priority given to some sectors of the economy. Unfortunately, the outcomes of these national economic activities galvanized by the plans have had varying degrees of the result. Nigeria at independence was perceived as a relatively stable and secured nation in the West African sub-region because of its consistent economic growth and forward leadership role in the Economic Community of West African States (ECO WAS). However, with the sudden discovery of crude oil, the nation's progressive drive towards sustainable development was hampered, largely perceived to have been caused by a shift of focus from agricultural exports to crude oil exploration and exploitation by the Federal government of Nigeria. But there are likely to be other reasons responsible for the stagnating and retrogressive state of the nation other than just switching from agriculture to oil. This is because despite that the oil dispensation gave massive revenues to the nation, it could not impact positively the living standard and the societal progress of Nigerians as pointed out by Docle (2011) and Adebakin (2012). So, the reason for the negative outcome is worth investigating.

The crux of Nigeria's Vision 20-20 plan was to be among the best 20 economies of the world by 2020. This ambitious aspiration became a herculean task as Nigeria was still ranked 152 out of 157 countries in the World Bank's Human Capital Index in terms of its Human Capital development effort, which remains weak due to under-investment. This is likely a pointer to the fact that no nation can achieve the feat of making it to the top without a stable and sustainable environment created through deliberate reforms in an inclusive development approach.

Nigeria is currently plagued with a lot of societal and developmental challenges such as a high rate of poverty, income inequality, unemployment, conflict, and violence among others with about 70% of its population living in poverty (Akhemonkhan et al., 2012). Despite its wealth, both in human capital and natural resources, Nigeria is on the verge of state failure and national disintegration. At the core, there is overdependence on the oil economy, increasing insecurity, high youth unemployment, mismanagement of public funds, and underdevelopment evidenced by poor infrastructure among several others. The unemployment rate in the second quarter of 2020 was 27.1%, a significant increase of 16.7% from the fourth quarter of 2015 which stood at 10.4% (NBS, 2016). According to Borgen Magazine (2020), Nigeria exceeded India with the largest rate of people living in extreme poverty. About 86.9 million people were said to live in extreme poverty which is about 50% of the entire population as reported in 2018 (Kazeem, 20] 8). These factors persist despite tremendous oil wealth.

In October2019, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) ranked Nigeria 55th out of the list of 191 poorest countries in the world based on GDP purchasing-power-parity (PPP) per capita. On the management of funds, about 85% of oil revenues earned overtime is shared among the influential political elites, who constitute only about 1% of the population, with the possibility that 40% or more of the national wealth accumulated over time might have been stolen by the ruling elites, technocrats and policy bureaucrats. Indeed, the picture of mismanagement of the nation's oil wealth as painted above justifies the assertion that Nigeria is experiencing economic growth, but no sustainable development (Orji, 2012). On security, the age-long peace and security that the nation enjoyed started declining due to the threats to national security orchestrated by terrorist groups and tribal factions.

Nigeria presently is confronted with multi-dimensional security issues, ranging from the resilient Boko Haram Islamist insurgency in the north-east, the persistent discontent and militancy in the Niger Delta, increasing violence between Fulani herdsmen and farming communities spreading from the central belt southward, to the agitation posed by the Biafra proponents in the Igbo southeast. This multi-faceted violence has led to the wanton destruction of lives and properties at an alarming rate. This further depicts that Nigeria is in no way close to sustainable development.

3. The Asian Tigers and Nigeria's Development Trajectory

As recently as the early 1 960s South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Singapore, and Hong Kong (the Asian Tigers") were a part of the third world. Despite the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, the Tigers still stand as rare examples of states which have successfully 'developed" in a manner no one could have predicted 60 years ago — and at a considerably faster rate than any of our current efforts at the third-world developmental effort. Indeed, there appear to be some lessons that could be learned from the Asian Tigers in their ambitious path to development. They have made significant progress in ensuring better access to education as evidenced by improved literacy and ne enrolment rates and higher quality and more equitable distribution of education services.

Another cue can be gotten from China — though regarded as a first-world country at present, China experienced the most rapid growth of any large country in any part of the world during its period of economic reform because of its dogged attention towards human capital development. This eventually resulted in China's per capita income doubling in two consecutive decades— between 1978 and 1987 and then again between 1987 and 1996 (World Bank, 1997). Also, over 170 million of the 270 million Chinese living in absolute poverty in 1978 were raised above the poverty threshold making China move from an impoverished growth of 3.9% before the reforms to 9.5% after the reforms. Overall, studies have shown that a significant share of China's growth could be explained by the accumulation of human capital (World Bank, 1997).

Nigeria got her independence in 1960 and two years after, the first National Development Plan policy was formulated, which spanned between 1962 and 1968 with the objectives of development opportunities in health, education, and employment. The main thrust of the plan was improving access to these opportunities. This plan abruptly failed because about 50% of resources required to prosecute the plan were to come from external sources, and only 14% of the external finance was received (Ogwurnike, 1995). Also, the collapse of the First Republic and the commencement of civil war hampered the success of the plan.

The second national development plan was launched after the civil war in 1970 and lasted through 1974. The second plan was introduced during a period where Nigeria's sale of crude oil and other products was at an increase. This plan had priorities in agriculture, industry, transport, manpower, defense, electricity, communication, and water supply, and provision of social services (Ogwumike, 1995).

The third national development plan, which lasted between 1975 and 1980 was regarded as more ambitious than the previous plans because of its key focuses, which were rural development and revival of the agricultural sector. The plan succeeded in indigenizing the economy, established free education and other industrial projects. There was also an increase in the GDP growth rate, while the manufacturing, building and construction sectors were also performing relatively well in the transformation process (Ogwuniike, 1995).

The fourth plan, which spanned from 1981 to 1985 was directed at bringing about improvement in the living conditions of the people. The objectives of the plan were: to increase the real income of the average citizen, to enhance more even distribution of income among individuals and socio-economic groups, to foster increased dependence on the country's human and material resources, and to reduce the level of unemployment and underemployment (Ogwumike, 1995). The plan however failed to live to its dreams because, although Nigeria was still in its oil boom era, the enormous oil wealth was not invested to build a viable productive and industrial base for the country. For instance, the Green Revolution Programme launched by the Shehu Shagari administration in 1980 that replaced Operation Feed the Nation, which was to ensure self-sufficiency in food production and to introduce modern technology into the Nigerian agricultural sector had a poor success rate as it failed to generate enough food for the masses.

The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), followed the fourth plan with the aim of restructuring and diversifying the economy, leading to stability in the balance of payments over a stipulated period, and thus laying the foundation for non-inflationary growth considered necessary for enhancing the performance of the private sector.

Other national development plans such as Vision 20-20-10, National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS), Seven Point Agenda Vision 20-20-20 of late President Musa Shehu Yar'dua, and the Transformation Agenda of President Goodluck Jonathan have also been launched in recent times, as a response to the development challenges of Nigeria and a national plan for prosperity (National Planning Commission, 2004). However, these plans have lacked the clear methodological approach and blueprint required to achieve them, hence the nation continues a retrogressive trend, resulting in a huge deviation from sustainable development trajectory.

Despite all the development plans by the Nigerian government, a lot of setbacks have been encountered in the developmental process. Osakwe (2010) strongly noted that the nature of Nigeria's development strategy has been the reason behind the slow pace in achieving poverty and unemployment reduction in the country, which has culminated in the country not going through the normal process of structural transformation. This implies that the strategies employed by the Nigerian government have not led to the growth and development of productive capacities of human and materials resources inclusive, hence the leadership efficiency question, which is a derivative of a well-cultured and well-trained populace may be where the clue to unravelling the mystery lays. Consequentially, the efforts made by the national government have not been worthwhile as unemployment, poverty, and inequality among others are still on the increase.

3.1 Stylized Facts on the Asian Tigers and Nigeria

Stylized facts of some macroeconomic/development indicators with case studies on the Asian tigers and Nigeria are now presented.

3.1.1 Human Capital Index

As revealed by Figure 1, the productivity of the stock of human resources as measured using the human capital index (HCI) at different time frames revealed that the Asian tigers have increasingly been investing in human capital, thus performing on an average above 80% with China and Malaysia averaging above 60%. However, a keen inspection on Nigeria HCI asserts the fact that the commitment of the government towards developing its human capital has been very low as evidenced in the average HCI which is barely above 30%. This may be part of the explanation regarding why Nigeria is still tagged as a developing or a third-world country today despite the enormous human resource base in the country. This may also be the reason why resource management existences are fallen short of the acceptable minimum.

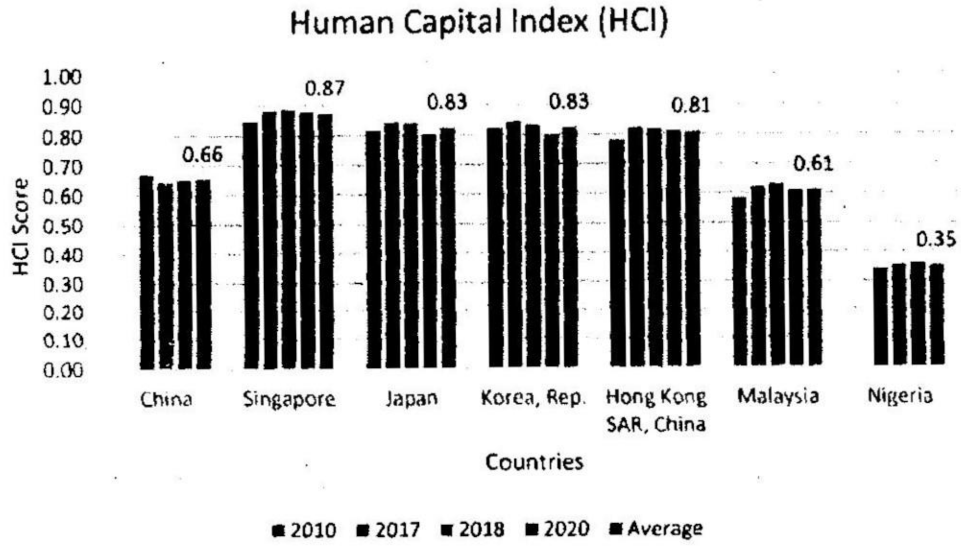

Fig. I: Human Capital Index

Source: World Bank Development Indicators, 2020

3.1.2 GDP Growth Rate

The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rates, as plotted in Figure 2 showed that Nigeria alongside the Asian countries has had its fair share of economic low points and high points. China in the last decade experienced its highest growth in 2010, which was followed by a downward but stable trend in the growth rate. Singapore went up to above 14% in the last decade but had a steeper downward trend in 2011, which was followed by a relatively stable downward trend in its growth rate and came down as low as 2% in 2019. Hong Kong, in the same vein, had its highest point in 2010 above 6% over the last decade, following with a steep downward movement up till 2012 before an upward movement which lasted till 2018, then a steeper fall in 2019 which recorded negative growth. South Korea, like China, experienced a downward but stable trend in its growth after reaching its zenith above 6% over the last decade. Japan had more fluctuations in its growth after reaching its zenith above 4% by 2010 in the last decade averaging below 2%.

On the other hand, Nigeria experienced its maximum of 8% over the last decade by 2010, Following with slight fall in 2011 and 2012 before a major fall in 2015 and 2016 when the country was plunged into recession. Afterward, Nigeria has recorded a rise in its growth up to 2.2% in 2019.

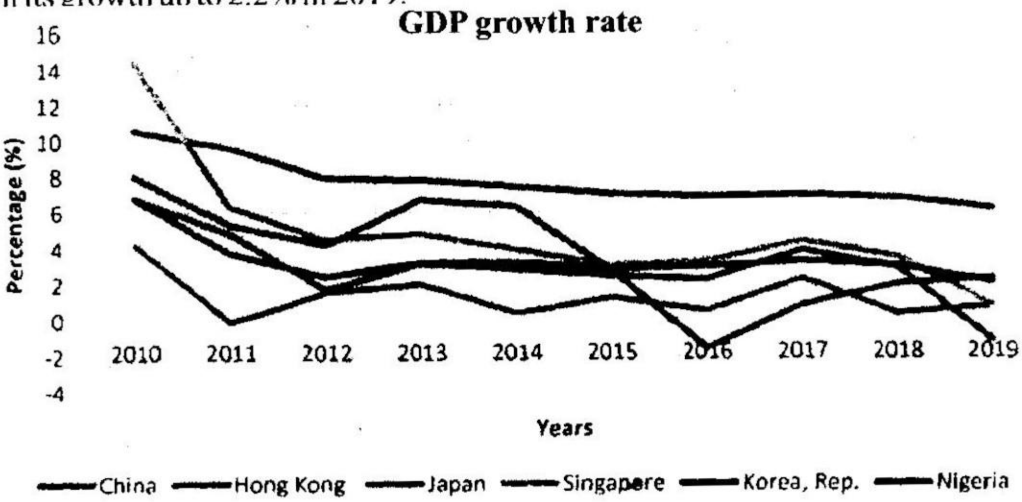

Fig. 2: Trend Analysis of GDP

Source: World Bank Development Indicators, 2020

Notably, from the analysis, Nigeria as of 2019 outperformed the Asian Tigers with a growth rate of 2.2% while the latter witnessed a 2% (South Korea) and less than 2% (Hong Kong, Japan, and Singapore). However, despite this performance profile, Nigeria still ranked 169 out of 1 89 countries in 2019 in the United Nations Development Report 2020. This unfortunate situation is only evidence that the growth Nigeria is experiencing is not internalized and inclusive to bring about the change required in the societal indicators for sustainable development.

3.1.3 Manufacturing Exports

The manufacturing exports, which is a percentage of manufacturing exports are presented in Figure 3. Between 2010 and 2016, the economy of Hong Kong experienced a relative decline in its manufacturing exports, which came down to below 20% in 2016. However, the turning point came for Hong Kong when manufacturing exports (both goods and services) grew briskly from the moderate decline in 201 6 to a sustained global expansion throughout 2017 and the years following. Singapore has maintained a stable level of manufacturing exports in the last decade averaging above 60% while China, Japan, and South Korea have also performed positively averaging above 80% in their manufacturing exports. Unfortunately, this is not the case in Nigeria as we accounted for less than 20% over the last decade in our manufacturing exports. This implies that Nigeria's industrial base is weak and not capable of driving the sustained growth and development desired. Generally, industries in Nigeria are struggling given the poor funding of industrial-driven infrastructure in the country. This impedes Nigeria's capacity and makes her unable to command an increasing global demand for locally manufactured goods and services other than just the oil.

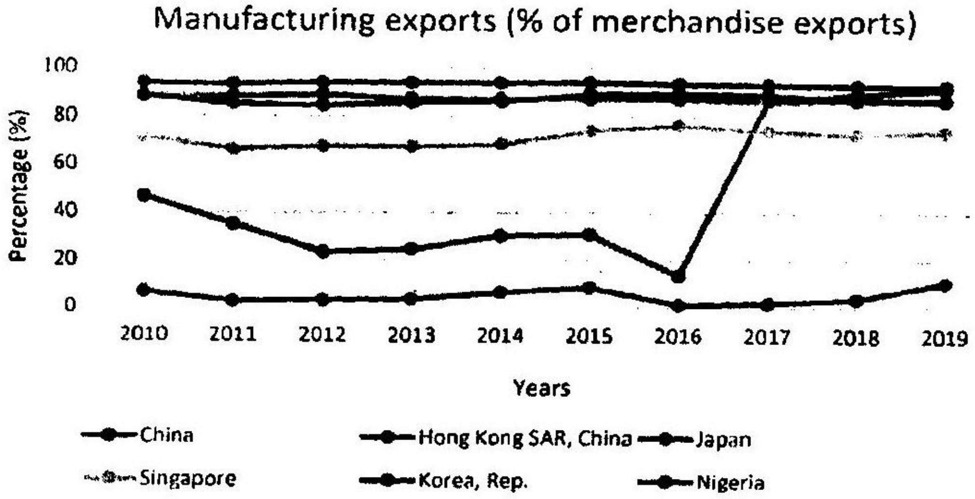

Fig. 3: Manufacturing Exports

Source: World Bank Development Indicators, 2020

3.1.4 Mortality Rate

On mortality rate, Nigeria is attributed to having a very high infant mortality rate, though the rate has been steadily declining, it remains high when compared to the Asian Tigers who are averaging below 10 deaths per 1,000 births (see Fig. 4). The infant mortality rate is an important indicator of health for a country's whole population because it reflects the intuition that structural factors affecting the health of the entire population will have an impact on the mortality rate of infants. These high rates of infant mortality in Nigeria depict the poorly funded health sector in the country, which over time have been receiving an inadequate allocation of funds for modern life-saving health facilities.

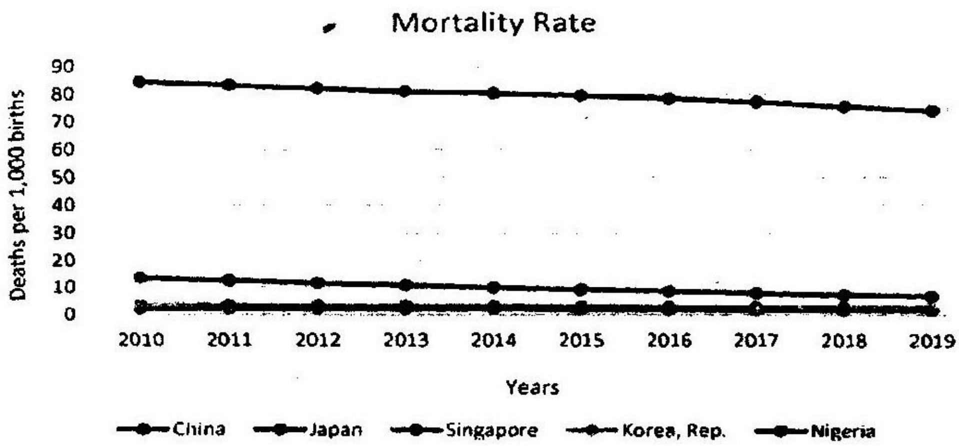

Fig. 4: Mortality Rate

Source: World Bank Development Indicators, 2020

Health is one of the variables which affects a country's human resource and productivity. Thus, a country that trivializes the health system by underfunding it, is ultimately charting a course away from sustainable development and economic productivity.

3.1.5 Research and Development (R&D) Funding

The average expenditure of government as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is presented in Figure 5. China on average spends approximately 2% of its GDP on R&D. While Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, and South Korea expend approximately 1%, 3%, 2%.and 4% respectively. Nigeria only spends on average about 0.02% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on research and development. This can explain the reason behind the technological backwardness of the country despite growth in its output over time. It further implies that Nigeria is not ready when it comes to immersing investment in research, science, and technology. No country can progress without investment in research and development and human capital all of which are central to economic success and prosperity.

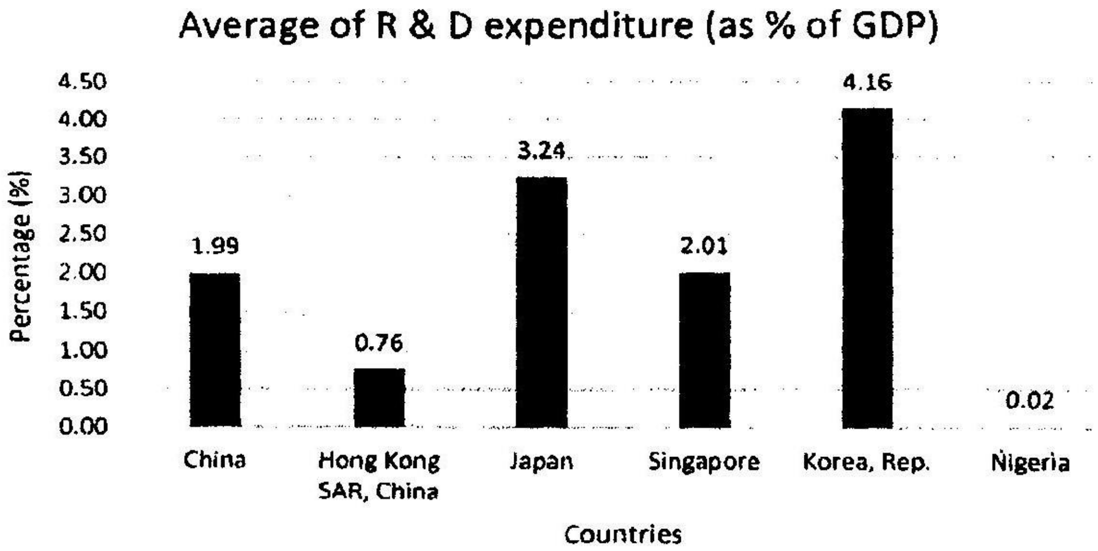

Fig. 5: Funding of R & D
Source: World Bank Development Indieators, 2020 and Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN)

3.1.6 Unemployment Rate

The unemployment rate over the last decades for our countries of reference is presented in Figure 6. As may beobserved, while the unemployment rate is controlled below the rate of 5% for the Asian Tigers, Nigeria has been experiencing a sporadic annual increase in its unemployment rate. For instance, the unemployment rate in Nigeria increased from 10.6 % in 2012 to 22.6 % in 2018 growing at an average annual rate of 16.02%. Unemployment constitutes one of the biggest societal problems in Nigeria because it breeds crime and societal disorder and ills such as theft, kidnapping, insurgency, and cybercrimes. This explains why Nigeria is currently ranked 16 out of 135 countries by Crimes Index with a high score of 63.86 and ranks 6 out of the top ten countries where cyber-crime originates. The country continues to be one of the primary origins of scams and phishing emails. However, in addition to these scams, groups of young, disenchanted, unemployed, and relatively tech-savvy individuals spend significant amounts of time establishing online fraud schemes.

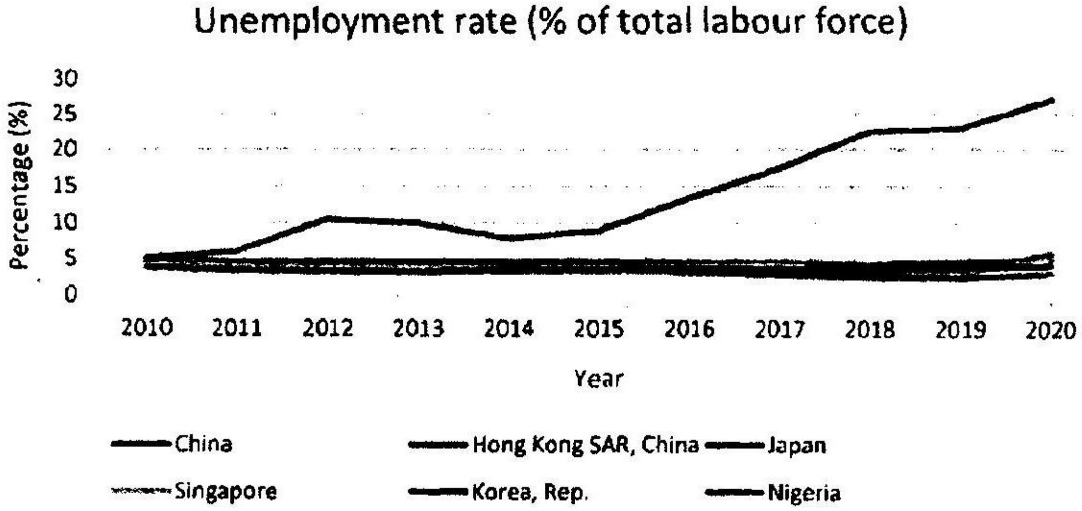

Fig. 6: Unemployment Rate

Source: World Bank Development Indicators, 2020 and National Bureau of Statistics (NBS)

3.1.7 Terrorism Situation Ranking

The ranking of countries by Global Terrorism Index for 2020 is presented in Figure 7. From the bar chart, Nigeria occupied the third position in the ranking with an index of 8.31. Terrorism and insurgency have been one of the recurring societal challenges plaguing Nigeria despite the country's huge expenditure on national defence and security. Nigeria presently is confronted with broad-based security challenges ranging from the resilient Boko Haram Islamist insurgency in the north-east, the persistent discontent and militancy in the Niger Delta, increasing violence between Fulani herdsmen and farming communities spreading from the central belt southward, to the agitation posed by the Biafra proponents in the Igbo southeast. This multi-dimensional violence has led to the wanton destruction of lives and properties at an alarming rate. This further depicts that Nigeria is in no way close to sustainable development.

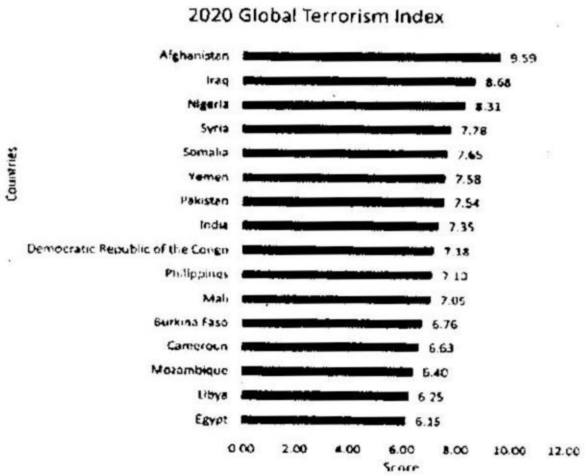

Fig. 7: Terrorism Situation Ranking
Source: Institute for Economics & Peace (2020)

4. Unmasking the Challenges

There are myriads of challenges confronting Nigeria today and they are
Falling education standard and its attendant risks
Leadership incompetency
Increasing youth unemployment
Corruption
National insecurity/rising of insurgencies
Weak institutions
Absence of industrial-driving infrastructure

5. Human Capital Development as a Way Out

Developing society begins with developing the people. Therefore, human capital development becomes the key in every effort aimed at the societal transformation. It was on this note that Becker (1964) and Rosen (1976) underscores the importance of human capital in enhancing the economic growth of nations and individual wellbeing. The human capital theory proposed and developed by them has its foundation on the tenet that individuals pursue their development not only for present gains but also for anticipated future wellbeing (Blaug, 1976).

Consequently, as the global economy accelerates towards more knowledge-based sectors, human capital development, which ensures that relevant and adequate skills required for growth and development are acquired, becomes a central issue for policymakers and practitioners engaged in economic development, both at the national and regional levels (see OECD, 1996).

The human capital theory views schooling and training as an investment in skills and competencies (Schultz, 1960 and 1961). It is argued that based on the national expectation of return on investment, individuals make decisions on the education and training they receive as a way of augmenting their productivity. A similar strand of studies focuses on the interaction between the educational/skills levels of the workforce and measurements of technological activities (Nelson and Phelps, 1966). According to this theory, a more educated/skilled workforce makes it easier for a firm to develop, adopt and implement new technologies, thus reinforcing returns on education and training.

5.1 Family Development as a Precursor to Human Capital and Societal Development. Whatever level of training that is achievable begins from the family unit, which forms the foundation of the society. This was the submission in Orebiyi (2016) when the working of the society was traced from the simple model of the economy, that is the two-sector model, to the societal emergence model. So, we began with the two-sector model as presented in Figure 1 where the entire operation within an economy is captured by the activities transpiring between the household and the business sector.

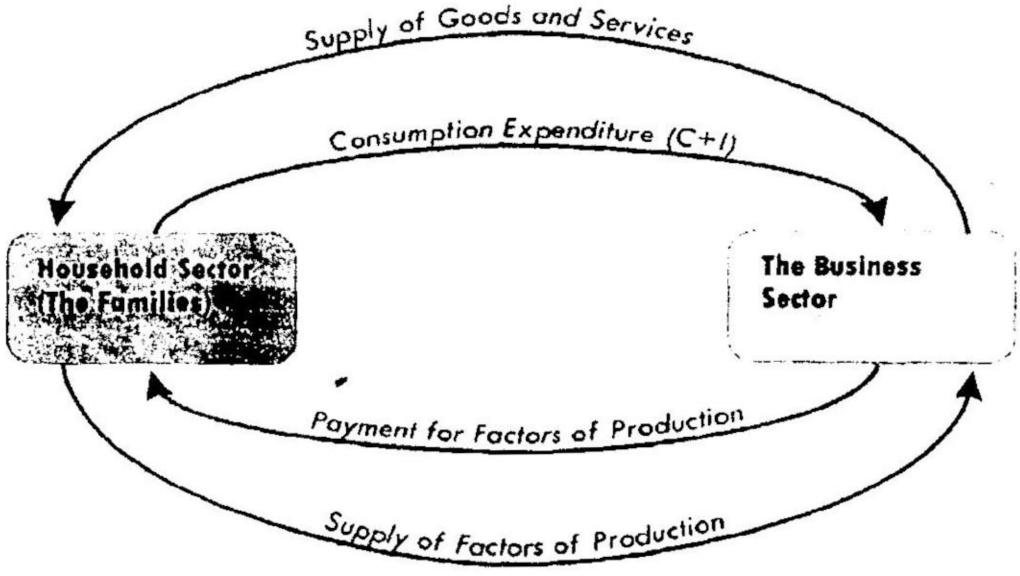

Fig. 1: The Flow of Income (two sector model)

When the model is expanded, with more room created for other sectors, we have the three-sector and the four-sector models as presented in Figures 2 and Figure 3. While the government sector entered the picture in the three-sector model as presented in Figure 2, the external sector entered in Figure 3.

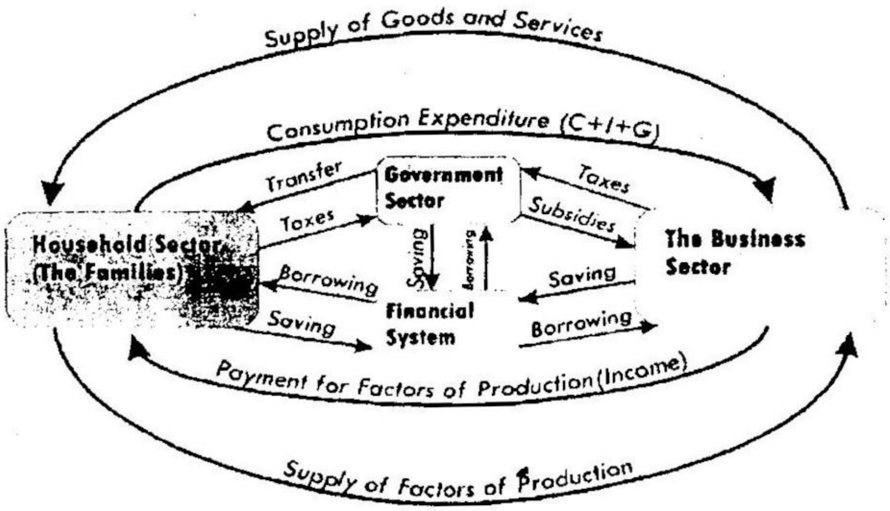

Fig. 2: The Flow of Income (three sector model)

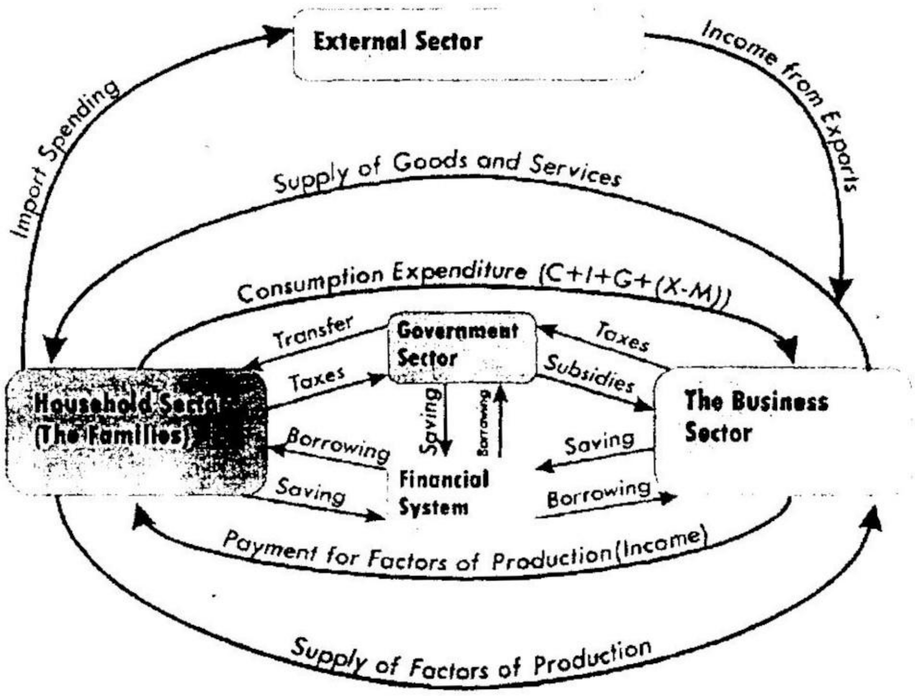

Fig 3: The Flow of Income (four sector model)

But a very important piece of information revealed from the work is the fact that the life of every economy is dependent on the household/family system. This is because it is the family that produces both the business actors and the government officials. As depicted in Figure 4. This is what exposes the foundation of society as the family system. Hence, any society that desires a good system must strive for a good family system.

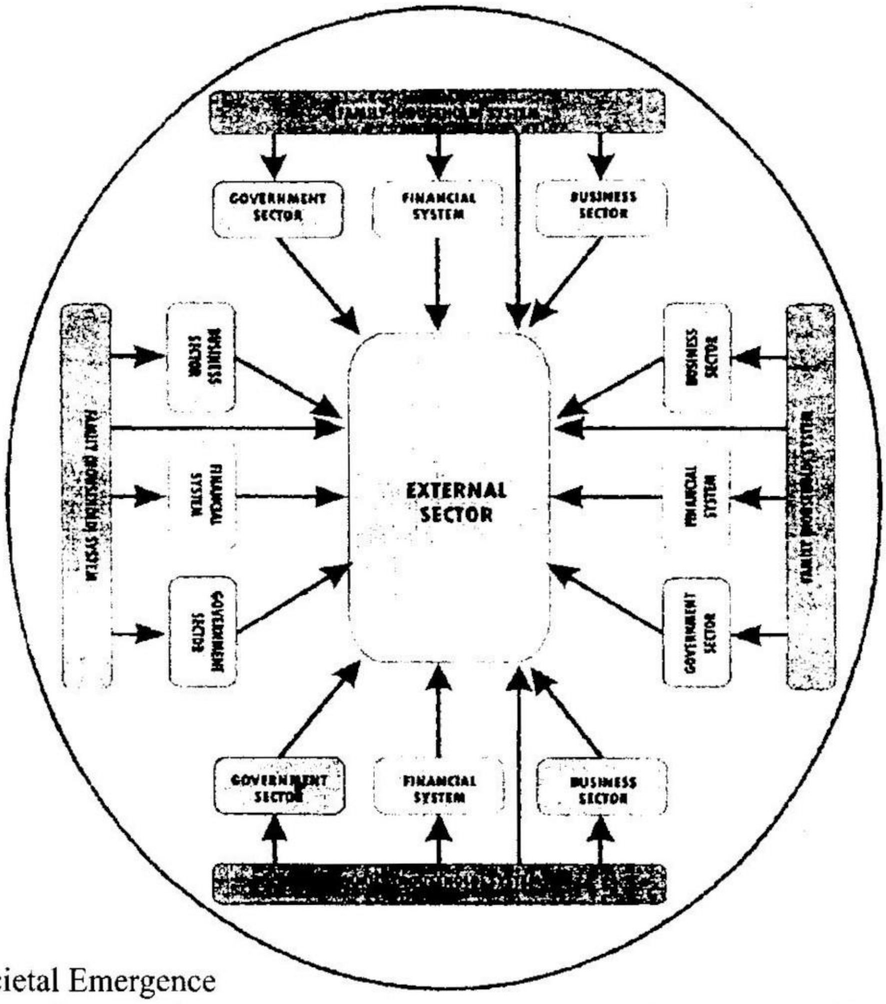

Fig. 4: Societal Emergence

As may be seen from Figure 4, all other sectors of the economy (the business sector, which includes the financial system; the government sector; and the international hub where nations interact to exchange the surplus of their output to acquire what they could either not produce at all or in the right quantity) grows from the family system. It is therefore obvious from that diagrammatic expression that the strength of the family system would determine the strength of the societal systems, which include the social, political and the economic systems. Thus, concentrating on delivering a strong family system would by direct linkage result in the birthing of a strong society with all its systems being very strong. This is very crucial because whatever those involved at different segments of societal development can contribute is a direct function of the contribution of each man, whose individual contribution is a direct function of what he is drawing from his family platform and the larger society. From this standpoint, therefore, two basic factors determine man's disposition, and they are:

- The home factor, and
- The societal factor

So mathematically, we may present the model of man's contribution to society as

$$M_{out} = g(H_f, S_f) \text{ - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - } (1)$$

Where:

M_{out} = Man's disposition

H_f = Home Factor

S_f = Societal Factor

While the home factor is a function of his source family (parental background) and his found family (which is principally about the wife he is married to); the societal factor is a function of the type of friends he keeps whose disposition is a function of the home they came from, their schooling and works environment. This may also be presented in a model form as:

$$H_f = g(SC_{fy}, UD_{fy}) \text{ - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - } (2)$$

$$S_f = g(FR_e, SCH_e, WRK_e) \text{ - - - - - - - - - - - - - } (3)$$

Where:

SC_{fy} = Source family

UD_{fy} = Found family

$FR_e = Type\ of\ Friends$

SCH_e = Schooling environment

WRK_e = Work environment

For a country with high rates of inequality and poverty like Nigeria, as presented in Tables 1, 2, and 3, urgent attention on the part of those in leadership is required to bridge the poverty gap and ensure that Nigerian children are raised in the right environment, acquire the right education, which should position them appropriately to contribute meaningfully to the growth and development process

Table 1: Nigeria: Population for Selected Years

Year	Population (in millions)
1980	73.42
1985	83.56
1992	100.2
1996	110.7
2004	135.3
2010	158.5
2015	181.14
2016	185.95
2017	190.87
2018	195.87
2019	200.94
2020	206.14

Source: Statistica (2021), Population of Nigeria in Selected Years between 1950 and 2020

Table 2: Nigeria: Population in Poverty

Year	Population in Poverty (in millions)	Percentage of Population in Poverty*
1980	17.1	23.29
1985	34.7	41.53
1992	39.2	39.12
1996	67.1	60.61
2004	68.7	50.78
2010	112.47	70.96

Source: NBS (2016), Annual Abstract of Statistics

Note: *Computed by Author

Table 3: Nigeria: Inequality (GINI Index)

Year	GINI Index
2003/2004	0.3898
2009/2010	0.4161

Source: NBS (2016), Annual Abstract of Statistics

The data presented in the Table showed that the percentage of the population in poverty has been on the rise perpetually up to 70.96% in 2010, based on the National Bureau of Statistics publication in 2016. Also, the Gini index, which is a measure of inequality revealed also that the gap between the rich and the poor has been widening from 0.3898 in 2003/2004 to 0.4 161 in 2009/20 10.

Therefore, with a Gini Index of 0.4 161 in 2010, the disparity between two random groups selected in the economy is 83.22%, following the 2G interpretation of the Gini Index. This implies that the few in the rich group controls a larger share of the national resources and wealth.

Recommended Action Lines for Change

The experience from history as supported by the stylized facts presented earlier revealed that Nigeria will only be able to make meaningful progress as a nation if it reconsiders human capacity building to be a national priority of utmost importance. Neither the West nor the East will take this responsibility for us. All that we need to stop the tide of the ills and begin to take delivery of the goods are deposited in Nigerian children, hidden in those poor population that is spread across the country, who could not afford quality education because of the cost it exerts. It has therefore become extremely mandatory for those in a leadership position to take responsibility for stopping the sliding of the nation into extinction. Achieving this would require:

1. Bridging the inequality gap by instituting workable social compensation programmes
2. Bridging the poverty gap by remodeling the wage structure to ensure Nigerian workers are paid living wages
3. Achieving points I and2 should re-position the household system to perform their role most reasonably as first teachers in the development of the Nigerian child, thereby adequately equipping them to participate in the national growth and development process.
4. Remodeling the education system towards creating a conducive and internationally competing learning environment. This should include mandatory upgrading of learning infrastructure and a motivational rewarding system for teachers at all levels. In the new dispensation, teachers should be equipped to identify and harvest talents for incubation and further development into products.
5. An aggressive national commitment to funding research and development.
6. Investment in industrial driven infrastructures.

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