

## The Dynamics of Foreign Aid and The Dependency Theory: The Nigeria's Experience

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**Abstract.** This paper is a theoretical enquiry of the relationship between foreign aid and the dependency theory in Africa, and in particular, Nigeria. Dependency theory comprises of two sets of states described as dominant/dependent, centre/periphery, metropolitan/satellite. The dominant or core states are the developed states in the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) while the dependent states are those of Latin America, Asia and Africa. Dependency Theory is often associated with underdevelopment. The theory is predicated on the concept that reserves flow from a 'periphery' of poor and underdeveloped country to a 'core' of wealthy country. Most African scholars uphold the view that underdevelopment of Africa emanates from the forceful integration of Africa into the world capitalist system through the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, Produce trade, colonialism, imperialism and neo-colonialism. These theorists are of the notion that foreign aid, among several factors, is a key instigator of the underdevelopment of Africa. Analysts are of the view that foreign aid isn't working in Africa compared to the negligible percent of countries that are making progress. Statistics show that countries like Uganda, Ghana, Mozambique, Tanzania, Mali, Rwanda are making steady progress whereas the story is appalling in many others. No doubt, foreign aid has helped critical areas in infrastructure, education and healthcare

in Nigeria but a whole lot of it never gets utilized for the purpose for which it was intended. Some argue that aid is not working in Nigeria and should be discontinued while others opined that the argument should be targeted on how to make it work in Nigeria. This work concludes that foreign aid is not solely capable of inducing the needed transformation in Nigeria because real change would only take place when the bulk of contribution comes within Nigerian and not externals. Internal factors, especially bad governance, corruption, conflicts and inter-ethnic rivalry in Nigeria, still play a big role in the underdevelopment of Nigeria and not all about foreign aid and dependency.

**Keywords:** Dependency Theory, Foreign Aid, underdevelopment, periphery, core.

### 1. Introduction

Dependency Theory originates in the 1949 by Raul Prebisch and Hans Singer with the notion that resources flow from a 'periphery' of poor and underdeveloped states to a 'core' of wealthy states at the expense of the former. The dependency theorists are of the view that poor countries are impoverished and rich ones enriched by the way poor countries are integrated into the world capitalist system. In other words, the theory was a direct response to the inadequacies of the modernization theory

which held that all states progress through similar stages of development. The theory became popular in the 1960s and 1970s as a criticism of the modernization theory, which was falling increasingly because of continued widespread poverty in much of the world. Other theorists are Andre Gunder Frank, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Vladimir Lenin, Celso Furtado, Armando Cordova, Osvaldo Sunkel, Samir Amin, Immanuel Wallerstein, Walter Rodney, among several others. These scholars are of the view that modernism is synonymous with capitalism, and that the latter is synonymous with exploitation and underdevelopment. In Africa, these theorists answer the puzzle as to why Africa has been unable to perform in terms of economic growth and development. Unlike their counterparts, the proponents of the modernization theory, they quickly offer an exogenous cause for the underdevelopment of Africa, as they argue that the forceful integration and incorporation of Africa into the world capitalist system accounts largely for the underdevelopment of Africa. Gunder Frank explains that the only thing developing in Africa is underdevelopment which he capsulated as, 'The Development of Underdevelopment.'

According to the proponents of the dependency theory the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, the Produce Trade, Imperialism, Colonialism, and Neo-colonialism were and are all responsible for the underdevelopment of Africa. They argued these factors were responsible for the forceful and pre-mature incorporation of African territories into the world capitalist system. The incorporation of Africa into the world capitalist system created a dichotomy in economic relations in the international system. First, there was the Developed Countries (DC) also called 'Core' or 'Centre', which exploited or plundered African resources, including erstwhile colonial masters and newly emerged neo-colonialists. The core buys cheap raw materials from developing countries, refine them and export back to Africa as finished products whose prices Africa more or less does not determine. Second, the incorporation created the Less Developed Countries (LDC) also called, 'Periphery' or 'Satellite', which supplies the bulk of natural resources and labor needed to fuel the industrial

engines of Core countries. The consequence was that there was an endless cycle of parasitic inter-dependence between the two blocs while the core gained immensely from the cycle, the periphery languished in abject poverty.

Walter Rodney (1973) posits that colonialism had only one hand- it was a one-armed bandit and hardly anything was done which could be termed a service to the African people. The foregoing is corroborated by other dependency scholars who states that anything good that came out of colonialism was only a fringe benefit and had nothing much to contribute to the well-being of the African population. For instance, the construction of railway running from Enugu to Port Harcourt was not primarily targeted to ease transportation in the defunct Eastern region of Nigeria but was principally intended to facilitate the transportation of coal from Enugu to the port in Port Harcourt.

So, what effects did colonialism produce in Africa? Colonialism disrupted the pre-existing social system that guaranteed relative peace and steady growth in Africa. Colonialism, in the mind of the Berlin West African Conference of 1884/85 balkanized African territories into pockets of territories for the administrative and economic convenience of the West. It led to the creation of miniscule states and territories in Africa, through the principle of divide and rule. Psychologically, colonialism instilled and installed the illusory notion of white man's superiority and the 'white man's burden' in the psyches of most Africans. The incorporation led and still leads to brain drain from Africa to Europe and North America. Economically, the incorporation more or less perpetuated the position of Africa as producers of primary products or raw materials in the international system. According to the proponents of the dependency theory, the infeasibility of creating an effective customs union and the difficulty associated with the practice of the comparative advantage in Africa are all situated on the foundations of the rivalry created by colonialism between Francophone and Anglophone countries.

## **2. Underdevelopment and the Dependency Theory in Nigeria**

Nigeria which is a part of the Third World is not left out in the prevalent condition of poverty and underdevelopment in the Third World countries. Dependency scholars keep blaming the developed countries as the culprit of Nigeria's plight since they forcefully integrated rudimentary African economies (of which Nigeria is a part of) into the world capitalist market in which Africans were cheated and exploited as a result of the unequal exchange which saw to the siphoning of resources from Nigeria to the core countries. This ipso facto brought about the 'development of under development' in the region.

Clearly, the prevailing Nigerian scenario shares strongly and striking similarities with the postulations of dependency theory. This is apparent in the unparalleled addiction to foreign made goods which has created a circle of dependence. This is very obvious in Nigeria as the country import virtually everything, ranging from toothpick to matches, and it goes on. The dependence on foreign made goods was begun by the incorporation of Africa in the world capitalist market. The incorporation which was perpetuated by colonialism left devastating effects in Nigeria and Africa. Walter Rodney described colonialism as 'a one armed bandit that steals and never returns.'

The colonial masters left their countries in search of raw materials, markets and cheap labor supply. To sell their goods, they had to discourage local craft and craftsmanship. This they accomplished by selling their goods at relatively cheap prices and packaging them well. This, according to Ake (1981) brought about the dearth of local craft and craftsmanship in Nigeria. This is what the dependency theory is all about, structural inter-dependence brought about the development of underdevelopment in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the dominant instruments employed by neo-colonialist are foreign aid and multinational corporations. The saying, that 'he who goes borrowing, goes sorrowing' becomes glaring in Nigeria as she depends on foreign aid to finance certain projects. Foreign aid makes Nigeria and other African countries poor and dependent on developed countries. Foreign aid

as noted is a death trap set up by countries of the west to keep Africa dependent on the west. Nigeria and other African countries 'entered' this trap as a result of the dynamics colonialism which consolidated the forceful incorporation of African rudimentary economies to the global capitalist economy. Again, some scholars also argued that Multinational Corporations (MNCs) are also mechanisms used by imperialist nations to keep African countries like Nigeria in perpetual poverty and underdeveloped. The activities of multinational companies, especially the IOCs have been noted as vicious to the development of the country, taking into account the crises in the areas they are operate, the environmental degradation especially in the Niger Delta area through the introduction of toxic and chemical substances into both the air and into water bodies. Consequently, the life expectancy and the livelihood of the people are greatly distorted. For instance, in Bodo, Ogoni land, Rivers State, the pre-existing fish industry is in colossal collapse as the result of the oil spillage, and diseases as a result of unchecked gas flaring.

Onimode (1983:137) corroborates the fact that 'since independence in 1960 multinational corporations have emerged as the powerful catalysts of multilateral imperialism in Nigeria. They are the Trojan horses whose monopoly capital and advanced technology backed by enormous political pressures from their home governments constitute the dominant mechanism of integration into the international system of capitalist domination which dependency theorists have held accountable for conditions of poverty and underdevelopment in Nigeria.

From the above, the dependency perspective painted a graphic picture of the conditions of poverty and underdevelopment in Nigeria and third world countries. Be that as it may, Nigeria's under development can also be looked from the prism of internal factors as it is only a cursory glance that will reveal only external factors of underdevelopment. A careful look will reveal internal constraints like bribery and corruption, looting and embezzlement of public funds, enthronement of mediocrity, emergence of leaders from rigged elections.

With all these critiques facing the dependency theory, there is however no denying the fact that this perspective has clearly presented the plight of the third world which 'is held in the iron embrace of monopoly capitalism'. Nwaorgu (2006:29) explained 'the social relations between the industrialized west and the third world in terms of control, domination and exploitation'. Through 'capital flights from the third world, capital accumulates and is easily made available or put to use in the industrialized exploiter nations. From the excessive profit, they simply dole out to these dependent economies some financial aid to marginally sustain their poor industrial base and agricultural sector. Of course, the agricultural sector produces the primary produce which sustains the 'gigantic industrial concerns of the capitalist west.'

The low level technology and lack of capital have impeded efforts at delinking from the capitalist system. No reasonable development or transformation of the Afro-Asian and Latin America nations' economies will take place in the face of a weak or non-existent technological back-drop. The very shallow capital base which by extension explains among other things the huge debt burden these countries have come under cannot support meaningful 'home groomed developments'. This therefore has conditioned Nigeria's and third world's developments thereby presenting dependency as a reasonable way of coping with the problem. In this respect, dependency according to Nwaorgu (2006) can be seen as an apology or explanation for the various reasons for the level of underdevelopment and condition of poverty in Nigeria and third world at large. It is therefore a 'reflection of these countries' perspective and perception of their unequal relationship with the metropole. Even though their experiences and growth trends may differ, the theory has carefully shown a uniform trend both in depth of extraction and spread of exploitation and should not be thrown into the waste bin of history as hinted by critics.

But the question we should ask ourselves is how long are we going to keep blaming the DCs for our woes? It is high time we stop looking elsewhere for the causes of and the solution to

underdevelopment in Nigeria, and started looking within Nigeria for the solutions to the problems affecting the country. Like some of the critics have pointed out, the dependency theory is an excuse for the slow pace of development in Africa. Objectively, Nigerians are the architects of their present predicament. Tails of bribery and corruption, embezzlement of public funds, mediocrity and looting of public funds is prevalent in Nigeria. Corruption has become institutionalized in the country, as can be seen, the only thing that has been developing is corruption, assuming new dimensions every day. In the light of the above argument, we can conclude that inasmuch as external factors are responsible for the current underdevelopment in Nigeria, internal factors have sustained and revamped the foundations created for underdevelopment in Nigeria. What is happening in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, India and elsewhere where colonialism took place should be a clear lesson for us. Today, it is evident that the west cannot exploit Nigeria without collaborators and assistance from Nigeria.

### 3. Foreign Aid

Foreign aid may be defined as the military, technical, educational, scientific and monetary assistance given to a country by another. Foreign aid is not a new thing in the international system. Aptly, whenever foreign aid is mentioned, Truman's Doctrine, Marshall Plan, and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance come handy.

At the dawn of Harry Truman's administration in the US, he was confronted by the fast growing tension between the Eastern bloc spearheaded by the Soviet Union, and the Western bloc spearheaded by the USA. The tension culminated into what was known as Cold War. The war was basically an ideological struggle employed the following instruments as instruments of warfare: propaganda, economic and scientific competition, military subversion, espionage, among others.

Consequently, considering the swift incursion of pro-communist sentiments overseas, and in other

for the USA to compete favorably in the on-going struggle, Truman declared, that:

*It must be the policy of the United States to support free people who are resisting the attempted subjugation by armed minorities or pressures.*

Having declared his speech at a session of Congress, Truman sought and received \$400 million in military and economic aid for countries which were in dire need of it, and which wanted the USA to act as a bulwark against communist expansion. Significantly, it went long in quelling the expansion of the Soviet Union to some countries.

Soon after of the Truman's Doctrine was tinkered with in March 1947, the USA, considering the great extent to which World War II wrecked Europe, the USA launched the Marshall Plan alternatively called the European Economic Recovery Programme in June, 1947, which provided \$13 billion in aid to European countries, including the ones under the auspices of the Soviet Union. The plan was successful at restoring infrastructure, bringing political stability, rejuvenating economies, and reinstating hope to a destroyed Europe, all while thrusting USA into the forefronts of the world stage. (Cheng, 2014:4).

However, the action of the USA is calculated in bad faith by the Soviet Union. So, as an alternative to the Truman's Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, between January 5 and 8, 1949, the latter incorporated foreign aid as a part and parcel of its foreign policy when she launched the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON). The council was joined by Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia.

#### **4. Nigeria and Foreign Aid**

Having considered the meaning and historical trajectory of foreign Aid in the international system, it becomes imperative to question the relevance of foreign aid to Nigeria. The foreign aid that helped in no small way in provoking the remission of infrastructural decay in Europe, is it potent enough in inducing economic

development in Nigeria? Are there some centrifugal forces inherent in the foreign aid that makes it (foreign aid) incapable of provoking the changes they are intended to? Is foreign aid basically a bullet loaded in the gun of the Washington Consensus and shot by the western countries into developing countries so as to either perpetuate their underdevelopment or get them linked up with the neo-liberal ideology?

The analysis and critique must begin on the note that there is no free meal or nothing goes for free in international relations. Every country gives foreign aid more often than not do so to achieve an interest. Such interests cut across military, economic, educational, religious, socio-cultural and ideological. For instance, the decision of the European Union to extend a level of partnership and foreign aid to African Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries is viewed as a calculated attempt by the Union to entrench the neo-liberal ideology in those countries.

The truth is, that the Marshall plan achieved its purpose of revivifying war-torn Europe. But from the Nigerian context, foreign aid is not potent enough to cause economic transformation as it did in Europe. The foregoing is premised on the fact, that the foreign aid that was issued by the USA did not build Europe from the scratch, it only revived pre-existing social and economic systems that were before their collapse or partial death prosperous and buoyant. The case is largely different from the Nigerian context, which has never experienced growth and development relative to pre-World War II Europe.

But on another note, no country is an island, and even if there are countries that choose to isolate themselves from other countries in the international system, such countries cannot boast of meaningful development. North Korea is one country that buttresses the foregoing point. This, thus, brings us to the point, that no country exists in autarky, every country would have to make up to its deficit in either natural or human resources from other countries, or else be put in the jeopardy of becoming extinct. This is true for developing countries as it is for developed ones. It would startle many for one to state the fact

that the USA, Japan, China receive aid from other countries, including Africa in general and Nigeria in Particular. How? China is partially if not totally resource-poor. The country (China) is able to develop to the extent it has on the premise of the assistance she gets from African Countries, in terms of the supply of natural resources like crude oil, gold, tin, iron ore, etc. This brings us to the point where we re-emphasize that foreign aid in the real sense of the word is not necessarily and solely a monetary thing, its application is quite profound. So, the question comes, considering the fact that all countries receive aid from other countries, and some out of the many countries that receive them are able to use them for the transformation and development of their societies, why is foreign aid not potent enough in Nigeria? The closest and most cogent answer to the foregoing is the corruption inherent in the Nigerian system.

Nigeria receives millions of dollars on aid yearly, but such does not trickle down to the social masses. Whether one is talking about aid on education, in form of educational grants, scholarship, etc., a good number of them never gets to the common man on the street. Foreign aid can also be in the form of loans (both soft and hard). Nigeria keeps on receiving loans and grants overseas, and they are unfortunately laundered out of the country into foreign banks, like the Swiss bank at Switzerland. The foregoing has been termed, the recycling of petrol dollar. As big as the USA, she borrows money from other countries: for example, the USA owes China over \$1trillion dollars, out of over \$19 trillion national debt, but the country is faring well. This is because loans gotten from other countries are highly utilized to people-oriented projects. This is not obtainable in Nigeria. The country uses a bulk of her wealth on social rendezvous, deepen inter-ethnic rivalry, sponsor pilgrimage for both the Cross and the Crescent, and a good portion find its way into the bottomless pockets of kleptocratic politicians. For instance, under President Goodluck Jonathan's regime, Stella Oduah, the then minister of aviation, squandered 225 million naira in procuring two personal armored vehicles; the despot, Sani Abacha, who looted Nigeria's money to the extent the wife was

quoted as saying, that even if government confiscates all of Abacha's loots, the family would never be poorer than Dangote, who is considered as the richest man in Africa; what of the money plundered by James Ibori, the ex-governor of Delta state who embezzled \$250 million when he was a governor; Sambo Dasuki (former National Security Adviser to President Goodluck Jonathan) alleged to have collected \$2.1b; Alison Madueke (minister of Petroleum Resources under Goodluck Jonathan) alleged to have looted over \$20b and the Ikoyigate cash of about \$43.4m linked to ex-NIA boss, Amb. Ayodele Oke and his wife, Mrs. Folasade Oke.

From the dependency standpoint, foreign aid (especially when it has to do with loans) is nothing but a hammer used to break in shads everything that does not conform to neo-liberal ideology in gullible recipient countries. Before Nigeria receives loans from international donor agencies (for instance, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) and countries or consortia of them (for instance, Paris Club), she must, first and foremost, drink the capsules prescribed by those donor-countries or agencies. The IMF has what it calls, the IMF Conditionality. The conditionality is a set of criteria that are attached to the loan demanded by a country, and of which that country must satisfactorily fulfil. Those conditions include: the liberalization of foreign trade through the reduction of tariff and non-tariff barriers, price liberalization and deregulation, privatization, and devaluation of national currency, among others. The conditionality is viewed to as the 'modern procedure of colonization.' By contracting a government's capacity to organize and censor its internal economy, pathways are created for transnational companies to enter the country (Nigeria) and plunder her natural resources. Trade liberalization also exposes the infant industries in the country to the unhealthy competition emanating from transnational companies.

In recent times, Dambisa Moyo, the author of the book, *Dead Aid*, considered as one of the most important critiques of Foreign Aid, has argued, that aid has and is not working in Africa (Nigeria) and, that over the last few decades,

donors have pumped billions of dollars in aid into Africa. Meanwhile, the number of poor people in the region has continued to rise exponentially. Dambisa asked, 'Why has so much aid done so little good?' He presents the answer, that aid chokes-off economic growth, sponsors corruption, and fosters financial dependence on foreign donors. Why bother taxing your citizens when you have access to easy money in the form of aid? She goes further to say, that:

*Aid is the disease of which it pretends to cure. Since the 1940's, approximating \$1 trillion USD of aid has been transferred from rich countries to Africa. This is neatly \$1000 USD for every man, women, and child on the planet today.*

Furthermore, the challenge with the aid-dependence model, as Dambisa Moyo calls it, is that instead of insisting on the development of Nigeria sponsored by the Nigerian peoples, the model puts the development of Nigeria in the hands of outsiders- international financial institutions and western countries. At this point, it becomes important to state that no country has ever achieved and can ever achieve development, when the social masses are alienated from the processes of development. Development has been highly problematic in Nigeria because most development plans in the country only adopt a top-bottom instead of a bottom-top approach to development, and thus the isolation of the people who are expected to be at the vanguard of development in the country becomes inevitable. What foreign aid does to a country, such as Nigeria, is that it creates room for the unaccountability of political leaders to the led, and also makes the people more or less indifferent of how revenue in the country is utilized. Consequently, because the government's financial dependence on its citizens has been reduced, it owes its people nothing, Dambisa (2009:58). In that case, the only obligation the government has is to measure up to the standards prescribed by the donors of aid.

Nigeria has been blindfolded by the little incentives that arise from the sales of crude oil in the international market, and foreign aid, and so, is indifferent about generating revenues from

taxes, and diversifying the economy for a greater productivity and income.

From the donor's angle, the 'tying of aid, which involves giving out loan or grant to the recipient country, and dictating what the grant should be spent on, is a major factor inhibiting the effectiveness of foreign aid in Nigeria. More often than not, aid recipients do not have the arbitrary power to decide what to do with the grant they received overseas. The interest of the donor country is a factor preventing the effectiveness of foreign aid.

The interests of the donor country more often than not tell on the volume of aid issued out. This is based on the fact that in international relations there is no permanent friend nor enemy but permanent interest. The removal of the aid donor's interests from any assistance it is giving makes aid totally infeasible. This is true for China as it is for the USA and Britain. Currently, China has adopted a new approach of soliciting for the repay of its aid: it can be termed the Resource-for-Aid Approach. In tinkering with that approach, she helps in constructing bridges, roads, among other things in return for the recipients' natural resources.

On the other hand, from the Nigerian (recipient) angle, corruption, weak institutions, conflict, and bureaucratic failures militate against the effectiveness of foreign aid in Nigeria. Again, associated with foreign aid is the issue of aid dependency, which reasonably prevents growth and development. Aid encourages the dumping of obsolete machines and technologies in Nigeria, and contributes its quota to capital flight in Nigeria.

## 5. Recommendations

Recently, there has been a paradigm shift from the advocates of dependency theorists as manifested in the works of Walter Rodney's 'How Europe Underdeveloped Africa' to Igwe's and Ghanaian Chronicles' 'How Africa underdeveloped Africa' and Ogbu-Agbe's 'How Nigeria undeveloped Nigeria' which all articulates Africa's problems as self-inflicted. Though not totally discarding the effect of

colonialism, Neo-colonialism and imperialism, the reality of the matter they argued is that the major culprits of the destruction of Africa today, are Africans themselves. This they alluded to as poverty, hunger, war, environmental/ecological degradation, religious and ethnic conflicts, political instability, leadership inertia and bad governance, among others (Nnadozie, 2010).

In the light of the above, this paper adopts the recommendations of Emeh (2013):

- African leaders and scholars should accept responsibility and try to fix her problems than shifting blame.
- African leaders should invest in their home countries because without which unemployment, poverty and infrastructural dearth will continue.
- A total revamp of Africa's political landscape where democratic institutions and culture will be entrenched.
- Education, enlightenment and peaceful co-existence should thrive.

## 6. Conclusion

There is no iota of doubt to the fact that external factors contributed and still contribute their quota to the development of underdevelopment in Nigeria, but just like Stanley Igwe (2012) suggests: internal factors such as corruption, inter-ethnic rivalry contribute their quota to the continued geometrical underdevelopment in Nigeria.

The major contention or argument against foreign aid, especially from the Nigerian context, is that it encourages corruption and prevents recipient countries from using their initiatives as well as the potentials of their people to achieve a better standard of living in their countries. Another major argument against foreign aid is that it makes the people lack the moral obligation to question their politicians on how national treasury was mismanaged. This explains that they were not the people that generated the revenue.

This means both side of the divide have their fair share of the blame. The West and Africans, and off course, Nigerians are all culpable.

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