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A Brief Assessment of the Impact of Generals Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida and Sani Abacha's Regimes on the Growth of Nigeria's Economy

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Abstract

Corruption ridden exploitation of the natural resources, especially oil deposit, due to visionary leadership has been the major cause of colossal economic loss in the country. This was more glaring during the General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida and General Sanni Abacha's military dictatorship. This accounts for why, particularly, economic development in the well-endowed Eastern Niger Delta area has left not much to be desired. It is not only these case with the Eastern Niger Delta area, but with the entire nation because corruption has seemingly become our national life. The phenomenon has, indeed, imposed a lot of challenges and impediments to the growth and development of the economic sector as well as almost all other sectors of governance. The thrust of this paper is therefore to examine the rate at which the menace of corruption has truncated the economic growth and development of the Eastern Niger Delta area and Nigeria at large. The paper examines the level of economic mismanagement in Nigeria during General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida and General Sanni Abacha's regimes. The paper argues that there are new grounds to give more thoughts to the internal factors to the current economic predicament of Nigeria. The paper concludes that economic mismanagement by the indigenous leaders results from incompetence, lack of vision, mediocrity, quest for power at all cost. The pronged military dictatorship, especially under Babaginda and Abacha, marked the beginning of institutionalisation of corruption in Nigeria because it was difficult to challenge military impunity. Both historical and multi-disciplinary approaches have been explored for data collection.

Keywords: Economic, indigenous, exploitation, development, military.

Introduction

There are grounds to describe the economic history of Nigeria as a history of gross mismanagement of the national resources and public funds of Nigerian communities by fellow Nigerians. This is dated back to the early trans-Saharan trade era and assumed an extra dimension following Africa's contact with Europe, from the 15th century to 1960 when Nigeria got her political independence. Sadly, since then, the pillage of the area's enormous wealth has continued with impunity into the 21st century.

Foreign economic exploitation of Nigeria, and indeed Africa, has received considerable attention in literature, for very good reasons. However, the pillage of Nigeria by Nigerians, since independence, has not been accorded appreciable attention by historians. This explains why most often, or even conventionally, Nigeria's development predicament is laid squarely at the door-steps of the West.

However, it is fair to say that the tendency of some scholars to lay the onus of Nigeria's current nightmare squarely at the door-steps of foreigners is a carry-over from the nationalist brand of African historiography of the 1950s-60s¹. This paper argues that there are new grounds to give more thoughts to the indigenous dimension of the current economic predicament of Nigeria specifically and Africa generally. After all, there are many things which our indigenous ruler-exploiters are doing to their peoples which they

did not learn from their colonial masters. Similarly, there are many good norms and traditions that the colonial masters instituted which current indigenous rulers have jettisoned, to the chagrin of their people².

Exploitation is still very much in vogue in Africa, especially Nigeria, because of the unholy alliance between leaders and local exploiters or compradors³. As the saying goes, "It is the rat inside the house that invites the one outside to join it". Without the government or people directly in governance and indigenous collaborators going into an unholy alliance as it were, exploiters and corrupt politicians would have a difficult task gaining entry into the massive corruption clique⁴.

The concept of indigenous imperialism or exploitation in Nigeria cannot be over emphasised, because it could be argued that they collaborated with external influences to create havoc on the economy. Indigenous imperialism could be said to be the root cause of the various kinds of exploitation that have engulfed the Eastern Niger Delta as well as Nigeria.

Since Nigeria got her independence in 1960, bad leadership has been identified as the mechanism through which the country's resources are being diverted into private use. Nigerian leaders have continued to be involved in a systematic form of diverting government funds into their private accounts because of inordinate ambition, greed and avarice⁵. This phenomenon has contributed immensely to the epileptic economic development of the Eastern Niger Delta area and Nigeria at large⁶.

Some of the factors responsible for the diversion of public funds to individual accounts or indigenous exploitation are corruption, lack of patriotism, ethnicity, nepotism and tribalism, among others⁷. In Nigeria, poor leadership has been a major problem resulting in poor governance which has impacted negatively on almost all spheres of life of the people.

Corruption as the vehicle that drives corrupt practices in Nigeria, and the Eastern Niger Delta region in particular.

Corruption has been one of the major factors that drives the diversion of the resources of the Nigerian State at large. Corruption has become an all pervading phenomenon in Nigeria not only among Nigerian leaders, but in all arms of government, most disturbingly the judiciary. It is important to note, however, that at the initial stage after independence, corruption was not really a national problem. It was the era of the second civilian administration in Nigeria that marked the institutionalisation of corruption in the country. Apart from the era marking the beginning of the diversion of huge resources into private use, public buildings were ridiculously set on fire to destroy incriminating important documents and evidence. Many have argued that the military regimes of General Ibrahim Babangida and General Sanni Abacha seemingly institutionalised and legalised corruption due to the unbridled corrupt practices at all levels of our national life⁸.

Similarly, the seeming corrupt practices of Nigerian legislators right from the national to the state and local government levels have taken corruption to a very disturbing dimension. Despite the fact that Nigerian legislators are about the most highest paid in the world, they have continued to aid and abet the inflation of our national budgetary allocations at all levels for the purpose of attracting huge personal gains built into corrupt subheads such as constituency allocations, housing allowances, allowance to personal

aid, among many other scrupulous subheads. All these obnoxious allocations, especially constituency allocations, are not accounted for.¹⁰

Other forms of corrupt allocations accrue to corrupt subheads such as security votes or budgets to chief executives at the three tiers of government, that is, the president, Governors and Local Government Chairmen. Strangely, even though security votes amount to several billions of naira yearly, the constitution does not require such chief executives to give account of how such votes are expended. All these are avenues public funds are being diverted into private use. This is equally the case with the huge revenue being derived from the natural resources being exploited from the rich Eastern Niger Delta region.

Nigeria's Economy under Generals Badamasi Ibrahim Babangida and Sanni Abacha

General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida became Nigeria's military head of state and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces in 1985. He was the key player in several coups in Nigeria he was succeeded by General Sani Abacha, who ousted the Interim Regime head by Chief Ernest Shonekan. Both played roles in institutionalising corruption in Nigeria.

Nigeria's economy prior to the emergence of both Generals Babangida and Abacha had been a fairly flourishing economy based on agricultural produce such as, cocoa, cassava and rubber among others¹¹. Some of these crops hitherto served as Nigeria's major export products. However, with the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta region, agriculture and solid minerals eventually became relegated to the background, particularly for external trade. Generally, the coming of both heads of states brought about economic strangulation and a major disruption of the economic sector¹².

General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida's Regime.

Under General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida's administration, Nigeria's was not managed well, and devoid of glaring corrupt practices. Consequently, the regime left nothing to prove beyond any reasonable doubt that the nation economy ever boomed. Rather, stagnation set in very alarmingly. This accounted for while even though the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was a means to improve the economy and the standard of living of the ordinary people, the programme could not achieve its desired aim. Instead, the administration got involved with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank and entangled in their conditionalities, which at the end impoverished the country. Apart from the bottlenecks leading to the devaluation of the naira drastically¹³, public funds were diverted by public functionaries. Similarly, the programme resulted in the deregulation of the Agricultural sector as well as the privatisation of government enterprises, among others. These, and among other factors, accounted for why the objectives of the Structural Adjustment Programme could not be realised. Rather, it caused a lot of economic hardship to the citizens. The regime also recorded foreign debts to the tune of 30.2 billion United States dollars and the naira devaluation which resulted in hyper-inflation, which contributed to the fall of the economy.

Other agencies like the National Directorate of Employment, the Community Banks, Better Life for Rural Women Programme, Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure, put in place by the Babangida and successive military regimes to enhance

the economy of the nation, including that of the Niger Delta area failed to achieve the desired objectives, due to massive corruption; the results which were poverty, hunger and unemployment¹⁴. There was drastic reduction of export of agricultural produce crops because the Nigerian government relied heavily on oil. Unfortunately, the eventual reduction in foreign exchange declined because the world-wide oil glut at that period worsened matters¹⁵. There was the value of the low National Domestic Production (NDP) as well as Gross Domestic product (GDP).

Notwithstanding the seeming dismal failure of programmes under General Babagida and successive military leaders, Mass Mobilization for Self Reliance, Social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) was one of the achievements of the Babangida administration. He established Mass Mobilization for Self Reliance, Social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) in 25th July, 1987, to promote public awareness of citizens' rights and social responsibilities. The series of mobilisation programmes launched by the Babangida's regime led to the re-orientation and re-awakening of the people's patriotism. Mass Mobilization for Self Reliance, Social Justice and Economic Recovery was planned or conceptualised as a programme whereby human beings were made aware of the resources at their disposal and also motivated and encouraged to collectively utilise such resources for the improvement of their living condition. These programmes could not however achieve their optimal aims as a result of massive corruption perpetrated by highly placed military officers¹⁷.

Under the various military regimes corruption was rife, because there were no accountability and military officers only reported to their commanders¹⁶. This was the beginning of the era of institutionalisation of corruption in the use of our oil wealth because it was difficult to challenge the military administration¹⁸.

For instance, it was during Babangida's regime that the nomenclature of the Supreme Military Council was changed to the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC). He also changed his ministers at random and gave more powers to the military¹⁹.

Nigeria under General Sanni Abacha

General Sanni Abacha's administration followed the footsteps of his predecessor, General Ibrahim Babaginda. Superficially, the beginning of his regime gave Nigerians some measure of hope. For instance, at the beginning of his regime, foreign exchange earnings increased from 494 million in 1993 to 9.6 billion by the middle of 1997. Similarly, he also reduced external debts from 36million in 1993 to 27million in 1997. The inflation rate that was 54% during the regime of General Ibrahim Babangida was reduced to 8.5%.

On the contrary, in the face of the foregoing positive developments, official corruption thrived. There was also gruesome mismanagement of the economy. During the regime of General Sanni Abacha, public funds were looted and deposited in overseas bank accounts. It is pertinent to note that at this time the Nigerian currency kept on depreciating as the country largely depended on exportation of crude oil without building and maintaining refineries. The recklessness of the administration in the use of public funds resulted in the banning of the country from many international organisations such as the Common Wealth of Nations, among others.²⁰ Gross violation of human rights was another dominant feature of the administration.

Within the short time Sani Abacha's regime lasted, it plunged Nigeria into huge borrowing of funds from International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. This led to some of the

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