

Improving Critical Infrastructure for Sustainable Development in Nigeria Towards the Realization of Vision 20:2020

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ABSTRACT

Good quality infrastructure is a key ingredient for sustainable development. All countries need efficient transport, sanitation, energy and communication systems if they are to prosper and provide a decent standard of living for their population. In Nigeria, poor infrastructure has been responsible for increased poverty, joblessness, insecurity, low investments, low human capacity utilization, poor basic needs, etc., which cannot sustain the economy. This paper examines the importance and effects of infrastructure in Nigeria's effort towards development. Improved infrastructure accelerates growth and sustains human development, but in Nigeria, the nation cannot boast of any infrastructure that is readily available. The government is also not helping matters, because no meaningful plan or policy has been implemented to show that the remedy is in sight. Therefore, the paper looks at the ways and means of improving infrastructural provision and how it will improve the standards of living, enhance growth, and sustain human and material development. It concludes with the recommendations on how to move Nigeria to the next level of realizing the vision 20:2020 socio-economic objectives.

Keywords: *Infrastructure, Sustainable development, Poverty, Basic needs.*

INTRODUCTION

Infrastructure is inevitable for the socio-economic development of a nation including Nigeria. A country that lacks infrastructure (Critical, Social and Capital) will remain underdeveloped and dependent on other economies for its survival. Therefore, it is a catalyst that accelerates economic growth, reduces poverty and unemployment, empowers and makes people to be self-reliant. According to the World Bank (1994), infrastructure is the umbrella term for any activities referred to as “social overhead capital” and characterized by peculiar technical and economic features. Therefore, this discourse will focus more on the import

of critical infrastructure like roads, electricity, water, basic needs, security and other enabling infrastructure and the extent they have retarded growth and sustainable development in Nigeria. To Meier (1995), infrastructure is made up of public utilities such as: power, pipe borne water supply, telecommunications, sanitation and sewage, solid waste collection and disposal, piped gas, while public works include roads, major dams, canal works for irrigation and drainage. More infrastructure are in the transport sector, such as: urban and inter urban railways, urban transport, water ways and airports. The characteristics of infrastructural facilities are: heavy capital outlay with respect to investment, invisible, low variable cost and long gestation period.

These are what Meier (1975) called “social and capital” infrastructure. Sustainable development has been the subject of diverse definitions from a number of commentators (Pearce, Markandya and Barbier, 1989). As a result, it has come to mean very different things to ecologists, economists, planners and politicians. In its favour is the positive connotation implicit in the term. It is unlikely that any sane person or organization would willingly endorse unsustainable development or sustainable improvement if that is not an oxymoron. Therefore, sustainable development means improvement that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

“Needs” is defined as the essential requirements particularly of the world’s poor, and “development” is vaguely defined as the “progressive transformation of economy and society” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). It can also be defined as the right that ensures everybody “the right to improvement and advancement of economic, social, political and cultural conditions”. It is not only the improvement and advancement of every person’s life of dignity but also the eradication and alleviation of poverty, unemployment and inequitable social conditions.

Sustainable development ensures the well-being of the human person by integrating social development, economic development and environmental conservation and protection. Social development includes basic needs of human beings, such as: access to education, health services, food, housing, employment, fairly distribution of income. While economic development includes industry, sustainable agriculture, integration and full participation in the global economy. In a nutshell, human beings are at the centre of concern for sustainable development. This paper focuses on the importance and effects of improving critical infrastructure for sustainable development in Nigeria towards the realization of Vision 20:2020.

The Importance of Infrastructure in Economic Growth and Sustainable Development

Infrastructural facilities are not demanded for their own sake, but for what they will help in producing. In all aspects, whether in a developed or less developed country, the capacity and capability necessary for business growth stem from the acquisition of science and technology, culture and the availability of enabling infrastructure. The enabling infrastructure are the major factors which must exist to allow private enterprises to operate and grow. Available infrastructure will make people to be creative, innovative, gainfully employed, self-reliant, wealth creators and will ensure security. It is saddening to note that the entire infrastructure in Nigeria is insufficient and poorly maintained by both the government and the governed.

Dibie and Okonkwo (2000) reaffirm that Nigerians need a healthy business environment, one that would enable them to plan for the future, that rewards achievement, and that encourages entrepreneurs to invest in themselves and their enterprises. Improved infrastructure will enhance productivity, income growth, economic growth and sustainable development at all levels of the economy. Olaloku (1979) argues that with improved infrastructure, there will be improved industrial and economic transformation; technological development and business growth. For instance, there is improvement in service delivery from the latest round of Global Mobile telephone service (GSM), through the Information Technology (IT) sector, Nigeria has witnessed growth and exposure over the last decade or so, to an increasingly sophisticated market and set of opportunities (Nnadi, 2007). Improved infrastructure enhances a country's industrialization process and competitiveness. According to Europe Aid (2002), investment in infrastructure can contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, as it leads to improved access to services like health and education, generates employment and enhances a country's ability to trade while reducing the costs of goods and services.

Good infrastructure also makes it easier for economic actors to do business and helps to improve environmental conditions. Infrastructure is important because it enhances human life, standard of living, thereby accelerating human development. Human beings are at the centre of concern for sustainable development. The presence of critical infrastructure like electricity and roads will reduce the cost of production in a country. To the World Bank (1994), the adequacy of infrastructure helps determine one country's success and another's failure in diversifying production, expanding trade, coping with population growth, reducing poverty or improving environmental conditions. Good infrastructure raises productivity and lowers production costs. Absence of basic infrastructure perpetuates poverty, underdevelopment, etc. One of the common

features of the Nigerian rural landscape is that of poor and in some cases lack of basic infrastructure and amenities (Ladele, 2005 and Popoola, 2006). Socio-economic infrastructural facilities, which include electricity, potable water, road network, transportation, education and health facilities are highly deficient in the rural areas (Dauda, 2002). Other neglected critical infrastructure that will enhance sustainable development in Nigeria are education, health and security.

When Nigerians are educated, the social infrastructure like electricity, water, roads, and transportation systems will be well managed. However, the type and level of education presently in Nigeria cannot sustain development. According to Nnaji (2009) the present generation of students trained at various tertiary institutions in Nigeria cannot be relied upon to drive the development vision of our people in the 21st Century. Their technical capacity euphemistically is suspect. When there is security, there is stability, economic growth, increased investment and national development.

No investor will go for business in an environment that is unsecured. Therefore, security is a critical infrastructure that is *sine qua non* for sustainable development. The healthy living of the citizens will promote increased productivity growth and economic stability, which will be realizable through the provision of basic needs. Nwosu (2000) posits that basic needs as mainly biophysical requirements for maintaining survival, namely, the amount of food, clean water, adequate shelter, access to health services, educational opportunity etc, to which every person is entitled to by virtue of being born. Without adequate infrastructure, no nation can be self-reliant, industrialized, and competitive and actualize sustainable development. Nigeria is backward presently, because none of the critical infrastructure is adequately supplied. Therefore, for socio-economic transformation to be positive in Nigeria, adequate infrastructure must not only be available regularly but must also maintain industrial growth and sustainable development. Without these, the realization of the vision 20:2020 in Nigeria will be a mirage.

Inadequate Infrastructure and Economic Growth and Sustainable Development

For a country with huge population like Nigeria, Africa's largest democracy, and bedeviled with poor networks such as roads, air, waterways and road system, it is ridiculous that we do not have an efficient, effective and available means of telecommunication across the country. Whereas, mobile phones are cheaper and readily available in other countries even in West Africa, the high tariff rates and service provisioning cost here in Nigeria makes them unaffordable. Due to inadequacies in infrastructure, Global System Mobile Communications (GSM) telephone must improve on the quality of their services,

interconnectivity and reduction in charges. Nigerian business growth has been badly affected by grossly inadequate infrastructure and lack of technological development. These are mainly in the areas of access roads, power supply, water supply and telecommunication.

Most roads in the country are death traps rootled by gullies. Nigeria's extensive network of roads is in very poor state of disrepair particularly in the rural areas. Port facilities are inefficient causing delays due to long clearing procedures and customs. Idachaba (2006) adds that both urban and rural infrastructure have witnessed monumental decay in Nigeria. Several rural communities have been cut off due to poor and inaccessible roads, electricity and good water are now luxuries. Kuye and Sulaimon (2007) reiterate that power generation and supply has been erratic in Nigeria and has done little or nothing yet to support business and economic growth. Infrastructural deficiency causes socio-economic problems such as unemployment, high cost of production, increased crime rate, poverty, etc. for instance, electricity supply from the state owned Power Holdings Company of Nigeria (PHCN) is very limited and unreliable. Even small companies are forced to rely on private generators raising their operating cost significantly. Things are still bad with power supply, forcing large manufacturing companies to disconnect their facilities from the national grid (Njemanze, 2001). Water which is a basic need is not available to many Nigerians.

The World Bank Report (2001) says that less than 50% of household have access to safe water, with the rural areas being the worst hit. Most business organizations have to provide for alternative water supply or boreholes. The educational sector is in shambles and cannot support sustainable development. Presently, Nigeria does not have the trained skills and experienced manpower to take her to the next level of development. Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) is not what it should have been when other state-owned petroleum companies like Petrobras of Brazil and Petronas of Malaysia are World class? These underscore the importance of management science or education. Again, because of the poor state of transmission and generation infrastructure, the PHCN could generate only 5000MW of electricity for 140Million Nigerians in 2008, against the estimated capacity of 6000MW in 2009, but South Africa with a population of 50million generates 43000MW within the period under review (Nnaji, 2009).

The "Nigerian environment" or lack of adequate infrastructure in most of the relevant areas and policy inconsistencies by the government are responsible for low economic growth and sustainable development in Nigeria. There is a nexus between infrastructural facilities and basic needs. Hence, the absence of the former brings about the non-availability of the later. When

basic needs are unavailable, sustainable development cannot be guaranteed. As well, the presence of critical infrastructure is an assurance of basic needs. The regular minimum requirement of food, housing and clothing for the individual and his family, and also vital public services, especially drinking water, sanitary installations, public transport, health and educational facilities are the basic needs. Nnaji (2009) in addition, says that of all the basic infrastructural facilities required for modern existence in Nigeria, public electricity supply is probably the most challenging when this critical infrastructure is under supplied, the consequences are closure of industries, shifting of businesses, escalation of the unemployment crisis, damage of costly machines such as: heavy industrial machines, hospital equipment and rising cost of business, etc. Nigerians go through frustration because of the inefficient power supply they experience daily. The Power situation in the South East geopolitical zone is the worst in the country, according to Nnaji (2009), not minding that it is the region holding the technological development of Nigeria. Specifically, due to collapsed infrastructure and erratic power supply, small and medium scale businesses are fast giving way, while real sector, which is one of the largest employers of labour, is near comatose.

The cumulative effect of this industrial migration is the massively growing unemployment and social tension racking the country (Fanimu and Olayinka, 2009). Many factories have found better options in the West African Coast, thus leaving Nigeria to establish businesses in Ghana, Togo and other relatively small countries. Inadequate infrastructure has affected the value orientation of Nigerians whereby people who do not engage in meaningful production, but primitively amass wealth and are publicly recognized. Most of those who get rich do not acquire their wealth out of the process of creating wealth.

Hence, a system of value is enthroned where the SPIV, the speculator, the tax evader, the land grabber, the fraudster, etc and exalted and sycophantically revered, and the truly socially useful people on whom the welfare, the well-being and the real progress of the nation depends are treated as second class citizens in their own native land. Non availability of infrastructure is the bane of Nigeria's socio-economic development in all facets. It is responsible for the nation's poverty, unemployment, low standard of living, low capacity utilization of resources, reduced entrepreneurial skills and high mortality and morbidity rate, including high level of illiteracy.

To maintain sustainable development is to banish poverty in Nigeria. Nwosu (2000) submits that poverty is antithetical to human dignity, it is a great slur, indeed an outrage on human decency and social justice. More so, if a few who are rich live in the same community with the majority who are poor, often very poor. Thus, severe poverty persists because basic human needs and basic

human rights remain largely unmet (Aguda, 1989). Education should be given priority for the country to realize the objective of vision 20:2020. Meier (1975) posits that increased educational opportunities may possibly increase the long run productivity of the people, thus, may be regarded as an improvement in the social infrastructure in the first sense. Another way is to sustain development by social security scheme through the sustenance of minimum levels of income and income security during periods of interruptions or cessation of earnings, namely, unemployment benefits, public education, free education at certain levels, medical care, old age pensions, family allowances, etc.

These measures are building houses to let at rents that ordinary families can afford (affordable rents). Nigeria should feel challenged by the giant strides which nations and territories like India, Singapore, Malaysia, China, Thailand, Brazil, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Indonesia, among others, have been making. The way forward is the provision of the people's basic needs by improving on the infrastructure. Basic needs are the minimum standard of living which a society should set for the poorest groups of its people, meaning that each person available for and willing to work should have an adequately remunerated job. It should further imply the satisfaction of needs of a more qualitative nature: a healthy, humane and satisfactory environment, and popular participation in the making of decisions that affect the lives and livelihood of the people and individual freedom (ILO, 1997). No nation can thrive in an atmosphere of dilapidated and inefficient infrastructure.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The functional state of infrastructural facilities and the availability of suitable technology reduce cost of production, increase capacity utilization of resources, enhance the expected profit of business, which will finally bring sustainable development thereby realizing the vision 20:2020 objectives in Nigeria. From the foregoing, it is obvious to suggest ways that will improve the provision of critical infrastructure in Nigeria as well as sustain development. The bane of this country is large scale corruption, which hampers economic growth and sustainable development. Therefore, if the embezzlement of public fund is reduced and the recovered loots used judiciously in providing the necessary infrastructure, Nigeria will be a great nation.

Since one of the challenges facing Nigeria is poor economic and social infrastructure, to ensure long-term growth and prosperity, Nigeria must invest in advanced technology and rebuild the infrastructure without which the economy will not gain from the "power of productivity". Because a nation enjoys higher standard of living if the workers can produce large quantities of goods and services for local consumption and extra for export. The government

should as a matter of urgency, re-order the annual budget in a manner that capital expenditure and recurrent expenditure will be 70 percent and 30 percent respectively. The present trend where recurrent expenditure takes a lion share of the budget does not encourage sustainable development. The development of the social sectors mainly education and health is the best way of encouraging human capital development, social infrastructure and sustainable development. The government of the day in Nigeria is paying lip service to education, because the 26% approved for education by UNESCO (United Nation's Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization) is not adhered to. To make the economy grow, emphasis should be placed on entrepreneurship and skills development. This will encourage not only job creation, self-reliance, improved standard of living but also sustain development. These will only be possible if the government exhibits the political will through the creation of enabling environment. Security is an indispensable infrastructure for the socio-economic development.

Hence, the government has to provide security which will enhance investment, improved income and basic needs provision. If the government guarantees adequate infrastructure to Nigerians the level of absolute and relative poverty will be reduced. Since the government cannot provide everything, it should encourage Public Private Partnership (PPP) in the provision of some infrastructure like electricity, transportation, medicare, communications, etc. This will put the country on the right path of economic growth and sustainable development. Finally, the cost of governance in Nigeria is very high. The government has to show sincerity, honesty and transparency by reducing the expenditure in this area and channeling it towards the provision of infrastructure.

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