

## Psychological Imperatives for Nigeria's Development: A Theoretical Perspective

**Vincent Tam Eremie**

*Department of Political Science,  
Faculty of Social Sciences,  
Ignatius Ajuru University of  
Education, Rumuolumeni,  
Port Harcourt*

### Abstract

Nigeria has had a quest for development for about seventy years, beginning from the early 1950s to date. In this quest several approaches to development have been devised and implemented, some imported, others home grown. Billions of dollars have been spent and some of the nation's best minds have been put to the task. The nation has however failed to move out of underdevelopment in spite of the best efforts of the government. Against the above background, this paper examines psychological factors with a view to finding out if they are responsible, at least in part, for the failure of development policies in Nigeria. Essentially the paper tries to answer the question: are there psychological imperatives for development in Nigeria? The objective of the paper was to locate the place of psychological factors in the development process. The paper argues that there are psychological imperatives for development, and that Nigeria's economic development would be fettered until these imperatives are met. The paper is a theoretical exposition and so adopts secondary data. The paper establishes that a certain mind set has to be evolved before economic development would occur. The paper therefore recommends that the Nigerian state should devote itself to the implanting of right mental set in the citizens as a precondition for national economic development.

### Keywords:

Psychological imperatives,  
Attitudinal reorientation,  
Development.

*Corresponding Author:*  
Vincent Tam Eremie

## **Background to the Study**

Nigeria, like other developing nations, has undertaken a quest for development. In this quest, she has evolved a plethora of development paradigms, policies and programmes. Bretton Woods institutions authored policies have competed with locally baked ones; and government have adopted and implemented development plans. Local and foreign development experts were engaged to ensure that the objectives of the development agenda were met. This process began in the early 1950s, even before the attainment of the country's independence in 1960. As part of the entire process, post-independence Nigeria has undertaken several painful structural adjustment programmes, including: Economic Stabilization Act of the Shehu Shagari administration; and the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of General Babangida. These policy measures dictated the execution of bitter economic remedies, such as: downsizing the public sector, economic liberalization; removal of subsidy on petroleum products; devaluation of the national currency; amongst others. Poor management of the national economy has also given impetus to military takeover of power. The country has witnessed both economic booms and recessions over time, yet the fundamentals of the nation's economy remain unresponsive to the treatment of the economic experts.

Nearly seventy years of this quest and Nigeria remains in the doldrums. Policies aimed at igniting development and putting the country on the map of developed nations have failed time and again to bring about the anticipated dividends. Corruption, inept leadership, monoculture, infrastructure deficit, frequent change in economic policies, unfriendly international business environment, and execution of white elephant projects have all been identified as culprits by scholars, policymakers and commentators. Several attempts at addressing these anomalies have been made, and the efforts have, like the original balms applied, failed to sooth Nigeria's economic aches. It therefore follows that there are issues not brought into the discussion in the first place.

In the light of the foregoing, this study attempts to navigate through the literature on development with a view to finding out the reason for the failure of development policy in Nigeria. Given that almost all components of the development quest have been examined by scholars and commentators alike, this study wishes to answer the following questions: are there psychological imperatives for development that are missing in Nigeria? Would meeting such psychological prerequisites change the development narrative in Nigeria? The study intends to locate the relevance and inevitability of psychological factors in the quest for development. The paper argues that certain psychological prerequisites would be met ab initio if development must be ignited and sustained in Nigeria. In addressing its objective, the study adopts a theoretical perspective. Thus secondary data was deployed; and the data so gathered was subjected to descriptive analysis.

## **Operationalization of Concepts**

1. Psychological imperatives: here refer to changes in beliefs, attitudes, feelings and emotions in the general population that precipitate economic development.

2. Attitudinal reorientation: reconditioning of the mind in such a way as to produce attitudes, emotions, beliefs and feelings conducive for economic development.
3. Development: is here also used as a synonym for economic transformation. It refers to “desired changes in an economy which enhance standard of living of the citizens now and in the foreseeable future” (Eremie, 2018).

### **Psychological Imperatives for Development**

Several scholars have posited that thought precedes action; in other words, things done by man are merely the physical manifestations of his thoughts and beliefs. Gleitman, Fridlund and Reisberg (2004) argue that in some cases “Common sense argued that attitudes cause behavior, that our actions stem from our feelings and our beliefs”. They go ahead to show that people in favour of a strong military would likely support a huge defense budget. This is a clear indication that people act in line with their thoughts and feelings. Machiavelli (1999) brings the link between thought and action. “Many have dreamed up republics and principalities which have never in truth been known to exist; the gulf between how one should live and how one does live is so wide that a man who neglects what is actually done for what should be done moves towards self-destruction rather than self-preservation”. Here one sees a call for balance between thought and action. What should be done is in the domain of the mind while what is done is in the domain of action. The mind precedes the action. The mind goes far into the inner most recesses of imagination and then evolves schemes to bring them into fruition.

Locke was one of the states of nature or social contract theorists. He, unlike the other scholars in this category, believed that there was actually a state of man in which human beings lived without a state or government. Man in the state of nature undertook economic activities, with each man engaged in a contest in which he was an arbiter. A situation arose in which man's further progress depended on his capacity to transcend the state of nature. A state of affairs which made men to explore the possibility of instituting a state to run their affairs. Vaughn (1980) shows that Locke attributed the decision to form government to man's experience. The same experience taught man to understand the laws of nature which enabled him to survive in the state of nature in the first place. Thus man's understanding of a situation prompted him to pursue a course of action. Until man acquired the mental capacity to take action, he remained in the chaotic state of nature.

In the same way, Antonio Gramsci, the Italian Marxist, upheld that the masses were incapable of revolutionary action without first evolving a conducive mental set. Ritzer (2012) reviewing the philosophy of Antonio Gramsci, states that “although Gramsci recognized the importance of structural factors, especially the economy, he did not believe that these structural factors led the masses to revolt. The masses needed to develop a revolutionary ideology, but they could not do that on their own”. Conventional Marxian thinking holds that the structure of society, particularly the economy, precipitates social action, including revolutions. However, Gramsci's position is that there would hardly be a revolution until the people come up with a mindset that is capable of propelling them

into revolutionary action. The inability of certain groups to evolve this mind set explains, if we can stretch Gramscian thinking a little further, their inability to transcend their material conditions no matter how harsh such conditions might be. As Rousseau (1968) puts it, "Man was born free, and he is everywhere in chains". Though living in chains is not a natural condition for man, men live under oppression because they met a society with a philosophical foundation that permitted such servitude. They act in line with their mental capacity. Rousseau (1968) explains further, "This common liberty is a consequence of man's nature. Man's first law is to watch over his own preservation; his first care he owes to himself; and as soon as he reaches the age of reason, he becomes only judge of the best means to preserve himself; he becomes his own master". The import of Rousseau's postulation is that even those things man is born with would remain dormant in him until he develops an appropriate mindset that gives vent to these natural inclinations. Though man is born with a natural inclination to preserve himself, he has to through reason come up with a mindset that would enable him do so.

The American colonies were under British sovereignty for over a hundred and fifty years, subjected to all sorts of economic and political restrictions. They lacked the mental capacity to challenge British hegemony for most of the period of colonial rule. However in 1776, they made a declaration: "We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" (The Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America, 1776). There is a temptation to ask why the American colonies remained under colonial exploitation for that long. The simple answer is that they did not develop the mental capacity to confront colonialism. Once the mental abilities came along they were unstoppable. They promptly declared independence and dealt with all the challenges that came with that declaration successfully. Until they got to that point they did not see the 'self-evident truths.' Colonial exploitation did not ignite a sense of revolt in them. Structure alone is incapable of provoking action. David McClelland is famous for his theory of need for achievement in which he contends that an inner desire for achievement is a propellant for hard work.

George and Jones (1996) put David McClelland theory's in proper perspective "Individuals with a high need for achievement have a special desire to perform challenging tasks well and to meet their own personal standards for excellence. They like to be in situations in which they are personally responsible for what happens, like to set clear goals for themselves, are willing to take personal responsibility for outcomes, and like to receive performance feedback". This contrasts strongly with what happens with Nigerians. They are hardly ready to take responsibility for anything. Even where their personal businesses fail they find a way to blame the government while they exonerate themselves. Success for the ordinary Nigerian has to come from the government or other external sources, not themselves. Such a disposition guarantees unmitigated failure of policies, including blueprints for development. The commonly observed traits among Nigerians, such as corruption, acquisition of chieftaincy titles, endless partying, and other outlets for frivolous expenditure are serviced by a particular mind set. That mental orientation needs to change as a precondition for economic development.

Hagen looked at economic growth from a purely sociological angle. In stating the position of Hagen, Okowa (1996) posits that “There is high need-conformity. Here, the typical individual is said to place a high value on conformity, creating the high need to conform. The second is high need-dependency which defines a high need to depend on someone. Thirdly, there is a high need-affiliation, i.e. a high need to please friends to belong”. Many Nigerians are conformists. Once a few Nigerians sent their children abroad for higher education, it quickly became the new norm; many Nigerians now send their children and wards abroad, even to countries with educational systems far below that of Nigeria. The same is true of seeking medical treatment abroad: even ailments that could easily be handled in Nigeria are taken abroad. Medical tourism and sending young Nigerians abroad for education have helped to drain the foreign exchange of the country. Many of these young people engage in endless partying abroad and come back home without the academic laurels they were sent to acquire. Once one has the means he considers certain made in Nigeria goods and services an abomination. This kind of mind set produces negative consequences for development. Besides, the reliance on external education and health systems has shifted attention from the nation's education and health sectors. Since the children and wards of members of the ruling class are no longer in the local hospitals and schools, government plays little or no attention to what happens in those sectors. That explains why striking teachers and doctors are these days abandoned to their fate. Here too there is a prevalence of a mindset. The ruling class believes that there is nothing the masses can do against them, that they would always have their way with the people.

### **Changing the Development Narrative in Nigeria**

As already stated elsewhere in this study, Nigeria has been in the quest for development for about seventy years. When Nigeria became an amalgamated British possession in 1914, Britain encouraged the cultivation of cocoa, groundnuts, palm produce, and other agricultural produce. Nigerian producers were encouraged further to export these commodities without adding value to them. Value addition or processing was an exclusive preserve of factories in Britain. Nigeria was assigned the role of exporting unprocessed agricultural produce and importing finished products. This was the nature of the quest at the time. When Nigerians were scaffolded into the colonial political architecture, the emerging Nigerian indigenous ruling class continued the trajectory put in place by the colonial authorities. They however placed a high premium on the provision of basic infrastructure such as roads, tertiary education, television stations, befitting office and residential buildings, air and sea ports, and so on. They also relied on the cultivation and export of agricultural produce. The narrative began to change with the discovery, exploitation and exportation of petroleum in the last quarter of the 1950s. The economy gradually moved from dependence on unprocessed agricultural produce to dependence on unprocessed petroleum products. As in the days of agricultural produce, Nigeria exports unprocessed petroleum products and imports processed petroleum products. Halfhearted attempts at economic diversification are made periodically as a way of tackling price volatility of petroleum products. Nigerians are cajoled into going along with the economic dictates of government without being convinced of their role.

There is a particular mindset that oils this kind of economic activity. The multi-headed, intractable corruption monster is sustained by the mindset that Nigerians should get involved in scooping resources from their fatherland and siphons same to the developed countries of the world. They run down to those countries where they have money to get the good life while the rest of their country men and women suffer. This mind set has hoisted double tragedy on Nigeria. Corruption is one problem, but investing the proceeds of corruption abroad is another issue all together. Investing the proceeds of corruption at home would generate employment and provide revenue for government. Though this does not demean the anti-social character of corruption, it helps to cushion some of the effects of the phenomenon. However, investing the proceeds abroad denies the country both the capital and the interest on corruptly acquired wealth. It is easy to see how this mind set constitutes fetters to development in the country. The few Nigerians who get involved in the development process engage in corruption while the bulk of Nigerians are effectively kept outside the development spectrum.

The general population stays outside the nucleus of the economic development quest. As Eremie (2004) observes, Nigerians were made dormant recipients of policies of both the colonial state and its successor post-colonial state. The alienation of the citizen in the quest for development has created in the citizen a mindset that impacts negatively on development engineering. The citizen feels he has no way of changing anything. There is no attempt at preparing the citizen for economic role besides the normal educational system. In the United States of America people talk of the American dream (a psychological orientation), and this serves as a battle cry which energizes the citizens into action. In Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy, as well as the defunct socialist states of Eastern Europe, the state placed a very high premium on the conditioning of the human mind as a precondition for the enunciation and execution of development policy. Citizens in those societies were made to believe that they were capable of changing their world. So they worked hard to achieve personal successes that helped to propel their countries to greater heights. The socialization process provided a mental set that buoyed citizens up for economic development.

The kind of socialization which predisposes the citizen for economic creativity is lacking in Nigeria. What has happened is for government to evolve halfhearted, omnibus, poorly implemented mobilization programmes; they are ineffective and incapable of propelling citizens into productive activities. The National Orientation Agency, a federal government agency for social mobilization, conducts its affairs primarily to condition citizens to accept otherwise unacceptable government policies and abuses. The same is true of all past social mobilization programmes pursued in the country, including the Mass Mobilization for Self Reliance, Social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER). That explains why Nigerians stay at home on election day, watch from the sidelines every government development programme and believe that such programmes are new ploys for siphoning public resources by ruling class members. There is an urgent and inevitable need to change this narrative.

### **Conclusion: Generating the Psychological Imperatives**

The Nigerian state has to vigorously pursue the cultivation of a mindset among the citizens that would ignite and sustain economic development. A vigorous attitudinal reorientation, a 'de-radicalization' of sorts is an imperative if the development ethos must be cultivated. Such a policy should be seen as a precursor to economic development. The minds of Nigerians need to be deliberately adjusted to accommodate modern techniques of economic management, encourage them to go into economically uncharted territory. The adjustment process should:

1. Make Nigerians to throw away the negative attitudes they have towards economic development;
2. Make them acquire right psychology that would enable them become active and constructive in economic matters;
3. Inculcate in them a spirit of 'I Can', a spirit that would enhance their capacity to break new grounds.

This socialization process would make the hearts of Nigerian a fertile ground for the cultivation of economic policies; and this is a psychological imperative for economic development. It would also make them to take the initiative in economic matters. Economic development does not need to depend on the government. Elsewhere private individuals take the lead in economic transformation as a result of the kind of socialization in place. The Bill Gates and Mark Zuckerbergs of this world would not have made it but for the kind of socialization they went through. The Nigerian state needs to create those psychological imperatives that would not only create confidence in the citizens, but would also make them to venture on their own into areas that would generate and sustain economic development.

## References

- Eremie, V. T. (2004). *The comprador and African underdevelopment: The case of Nigeria*. Unpublished MSc Thesis submitted to the Department of Political and Administrative Studies, University of Port Harcourt, Choba, Nigeria.
- Eremie, V. T. (2018). Self-reliance and sectoral complementarity: Recipes for Nigeria's economic transformation. *International Journal of Advanced Research in Public Policy, Social Development and Enterprise Studies*, 3 (2) (25-31).
- George, J. M. & Jones, G. R. (1996). *Understanding and managing organizational behavior*, New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.
- Gleitman, H., Fridlund, A. J. & Reisberg, D. (2004). *Psychology (6<sup>th</sup> Ed)*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.
- Machiavelli, N. (1999). *The Prince*. Translated by George Bull. London: Penguin Books.
- Okowa, W. J. (1996). *How the tropics underdeveloped the negro: a questioning theory of development*. Port Harcourt: Paragraphics.
- Ritzer, G. (2012). *Sociological theory. 8<sup>th</sup> Ed*. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.
- Rousseau, J. J. (1968). *The social contract: Translated by Maurice Cranston*. New York: Penguin Books.
- The Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America, 4 July, 1776.
- Vaughn, K. I. (1980). *John Locke: economist and social scientist*. London: The Athlone Press.