

Value Reorientation and the Attainment of the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract

The National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy in Nigeria (NEEDS) envisions a prosperous country that is not only developed economically but infused with strong moral and ethical values. The aim was to re-instill in Nigerians the virtues of honesty, hard work, selfless service, moral rectitude, and patriotism. However, the post NEEDS implementation evaluation shows that the policy could not achieve most of its objectives, due to several factors. This paper considers the lack of ethical values and orientation as a key factor that affected the implementation of NEEDS in Nigeria. The paper is desk research. Data are obtained mainly from secondary sources. The data provides the basis for assessing the issues under discourse and making appropriate suggestions to improve the framework of policy design and implementation in Nigeria. Following a content analysis of the literature, the paper concludes and recommends the need to re-install the virtues of honesty, hard work, selfless service, moral rectitude, accountability, and patriotism in public service and social life. It maintains that promoting value orientation is an effective strategy for building a strong society and a panacea for economic development.

Keywords: *Value re-orientation, NEEDS, Corruption and Accountability*

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Background to the Study

Developing and implementing social and economic policies to improve the socio-economic well-being of citizens has been a concern of the Nigerian government since independence. Some of these policies included “Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Green Revolution, River Basin, Directorate for Food, Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), Agricultural Development Programme (ADP), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Peoples Bank of Nigeria (PBON), Community Bank (CB), Better Life Programme (BLP), Guinea Worm Eradication Task Force (GWETF), Family Support Programme (FSP), Primary Health Care (PHC), National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA), Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), Federal Assisted Mass Transit Programme (FAMTP), Oil Mineral Producing Area Development Commission (OMPADEC), Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF), Education Trust Fund (ETF), Roll Back Malaria, National Housing Fund Scheme (NHF), Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP), and National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP)” (Anam, 2016). These policies were established to address critical development issues such as poverty reduction and illiteracy, rural-urban drift, employment creation, and so on.

In furtherance to the above, on March 15, 2004, President Olusegun Obasanjo-led administration introduced a policy aimed at tackling poverty in the country. The policy was referred to as the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). NEEDS, a federal strategy was complemented by equivalent approaches at the state level and the local government (Obisanya, 2015). NEEDS was coordinated in collaboration with state and local governments (with their state Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (SEEDS). This effort was complemented by “stakeholders to consolidate on the earlier achievements of the democratic dispensation as well as building a solid formation for the attainment of Nigeria's long-term vision of becoming the largest and strongest Africa economy and a key player in the world economy” (NEEDS Document 2004).

NEEDS was a response to the development challenges of Nigeria. Obisanya (2015) maintained that this comprehensive policy framework was different from other economic policies, in that, “It seeks to facilitate the achievement of national goals like the generation of employment, the creation of wealth, reduction of poverty and re-orientation of values. NEEDS sets ambitious macroeconomic targets for Nigeria. Real Gross Domestic Product grew 8.6% in 2003; in 2004, it was expected to grow 5%, 6% for both 2005 and 2006 and 7% in 2007. From 2003 – 2007, 5% annual reductions were expected and a total of three million new jobs were projected. With the goals settled out, specific reforms programme was expected to pursue the NEEDS programme”. The reality is that most Nigerians are still poor. There is rising joblessness, over-indebtedness, economic dependence, lack of freedom, inability to provide the basic needs of life for self and family, lack of access to land and credit, and inability to save own assets. Anam (2016) said “Poor people tend to live in dirty localities that put significant pressure on the physical environment, contributing to environmental degradation. The poor, especially farmers, perceive their economic circumstances to be fraught with uncertainty, affected by events over which they have no control, such as primary commodity prices, the volume of rainfall, pest attacks, fire outbreaks, changes in soil conditions, and social

conflicts. Lack of food is the most critical dimension of poverty, reflected in the popular saying that —when hunger is excised from poverty, poverty is light” (Anam, 2016).

To achieve the broad objectives of NEEDS, four key strategies were identified to include, “reorienting values, reducing poverty, creating wealth, and generating employment. The interest of scholars has been drawn to the first strategy (Okafor, 2014; Njoku, 2015; Juliet, 2020; Shittu & Gamde, 2021). Values are important in achieving development goals in the country. Its principles permeate the fabric of social and economic life. Values affect the performance of the public service. Nakpodia (2010) defined values as those aspects of cultural practices that are cherished with high esteem in society. Ezegebe (2012) described values as attitudes an individual or society holds concerning worth or desirability. The absence of values leads to unwholesome practices like corruption, lack of integrity, and accountability in managing public affairs. Corruption and other social vices are a ban on development. In this regard, Okafor (2004) described values as what determines a whole lot of conduct, attitudes, and predispositions of human beings. He added that societal values influence and affect the total well-being of an individual and the nation.

The place value of value in the development process is therefore critical to development and this was considered the first strategy in achieving NEEDS as an economic strategy in Nigeria. Years after NEEDS was implemented, the attention of scholars (2014; Njoku, 2015; Juliet, 2020; Shittu & Gamde, 2021) was drawn to assess the impact of values on achieving the broad objective of NEEDS in Nigeria. Especially, given the rising level of poverty in Nigeria, it presupposes that the objective of the policy wasn't fully achieved, and part of the challenges may be the absence of values in the public service. This study seeks to establish this claim and identify an effective strategy for value re-orientation in Nigeria. It reiterates the important role of promoting value orientation, as a viable strategy for building a strong society and achieving set economic policies and development agenda at present and in the future. The paper is desk research. Data are obtained mainly from secondary sources. The data provides the basis for assessing the issues under discourse and making appropriate suggestions to improve the framework of policy design and implementation in Nigeria.

Objective of the Study

The study aims to examine the challenges and prospects of value orientation in the achievement of NEEDS in Nigeria.

Literature Review

National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS) is a development strategy to consolidate on gains of the previous years, unlock Nigeria's dormant potentials, and provide the basis for the sustained development of the country. Obasanjo's reform in the 1999 constitution anchored on NEEDS. According to the NEEDS document (March 2004) NEEDS, an acronym for National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy is Nigeria's homegrown poverty-reduction strategy (PRSP). NEEDS is not just a plan on paper, it is a plan on the ground and founded on a clear vision, sound values, and enduring principles. It is a medium-term strategy (2003 – 2007) that derives from the country's long-term goals of

poverty reduction, wealth creation' employment generation, and value re-orientation. NEEDS is a nationally coordinated framework of action in close collaboration with the state and local governments. (With their state – Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy- SEEDS) and other stakeholders to consolidate on the achievements of the last four years (1999 – 2003) and build a solid foundation for the attainment of Nigeria's long-term vision of becoming one of the largest and strongest African Economies and a key player in the world economy. NEEDS goals of poverty reduction, wealth creation, employment generation, and values reorientation rest on four key strategies, namely:

- a. Reforming government and institutions.
- b. Growing the private sector.
- c. Implementing a social character; and
- d. Values re-orientation.

Through NEEDS, “the government recognized the importance of empowering people to design and manage their development activities. The strategy for the production and strengthening of poor rural people should include access to credit and land; participation in decision-making; access to agriculture extension services; access to improved seeds and planting materials; farm inputs and tools; and traditional thrift, savings, and insurance schemes” (NEEDS Doc, 2004).

Reforming Government & Institutions

This means, according to the NEEDS document “to restructure, right-size, professionalise and strengthen government and public institutions to deliver effective services to the people”. It also aims to “eliminate waste and inefficiency”, and “free up resources for investment in infrastructure and social services by government”. A key aspect of this reform is the fight against corruption to ensure “greater transparency, promote the rule of law and stricter enforcement of contracts”. NEEDS should be commanded by bringing once more to the fore a checklist of woes that have long conspired to obstruct governance, reminiscent of the weak state thesis of Susan, Ackerman (in Obianyo, 2004) and other World Bank reform programme apologists. He noted that “The discourse of institutional reform is capable of great mystification and obscurantism”. It tends to elevate symptoms to the realm of causes and thus suffers the limitation of the wrong diagnosis.

The diagnosis overlooks the political content of malfunctioning of the public service or even the historical specificity of public services in Nigeria, as rooted in the colonial and neo-colonial processes of capital accumulation. “Thus the 'right-sizing' formula of this reform complements the bank's thesis of the 'effective state' as against the 'minimalist state' considered to be less generally acceptable because of its neo-liberal ideological bent. Thus, the effective state should bring about reforms, which could establish a foundation of law, and maintain micro-economic stability as well as the capacity to invest in basic social services and infrastructure” (NEEDS Doc, 2005). The effective state could also protect the vulnerable groups in society and protect the environment. In these wise states should establish 'effective roles and restraints, foster competition and increase the citizen's role and partnership with the private sector.

Growing the Private Sectors

NEEDS is a development strategy anchored on the private sector as the engine of development ...for “wealth- creation”, “employment generation” and “poverty reduction”. The government is “the enabler, the facilitator, and the regulator”. “The private sector is the executor, the direct investor, and manager of businesses”. Key elements of this strategy include renewed privatization, deregulation, and liberalization programme (to shrink the domain of the public sector and buoy up the private sector), (NEEDS Doc, 2004). This shows that NEEDS and SAP share the same logic – the logic of the 'minimal' state espoused by the World Bank. This logic is expressed in the privatization, liberalization, and deregulation policies of market reform. This strategy usually referred to as “adjustment' is needed to create favorable conditions for a new invasion of foreign capital to take over former state enterprises (Nabudere, 2000:35). It helps to open the state to new areas of investment hitherto monopolized by the state. For this to happen the state must be portrayed as ineffective, and inefficient in the delivery of services, and so can best operate as a 'facilitator', 'regulator', and 'enabler' for private capital. But Amadi (2004:30) contends that “there is nothing unusual about giving the private sector the prominent role in economic development”, however, “even where the state intends a greater role for the private sector, the state must be able and willing to make enormous public investment in social services apart from investment infrastructure, if real and sustained growth is to be possible.

Implementing a Social Charter

The social charter according to the NEEDS document refers “to that contract between the individual and his governments, which recognizes his rights and responsibilities and promises to deliver to him the necessities for a decent human existence. These include portable water, food, clothing shelter and access to adequate nutrition, basic education, primary health care, productive assets, security, and protection from shocks and risks. The social charter is premised on provisions of chapter 1 of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria – Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy; of which section 14 (1) b states:” The security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government” and Section 16(1) states: “The state shall within the context of the ideals and objectives for which provisions are made in this constitution”:

1. Harness the resources of the nation and promote national prosperity and an efficient dynamic and self-reliant economy.
2. Control the national economy in such a manner as to secure the maximum welfare, freedom, and happiness of every citizen based on social justice and equality of status and opportunity.
3. Without prejudice to its right to operate or participate in areas of the economy, other than the major sectors of the economy manage and operate the major sectors of the economy.

Section 2 (a) (b) and (c) states that the state shall direct its policy towards ensuring:

The promotion of planned and balanced economic development.

1. That the material resources of the nation are harnessed and distributed as best as possible to serve the common good.

2. That the economic system is not operated in such a manner as to permit the concentration of wealth or the means of promotion and exchange in the hands of a few individuals or a group; and
3. Suitable and adequate shelter, suitable and adequate food, reasonable national minimum living wage, old age care and pensions and unemployment, sick benefits, and welfare of the disabled are provided for all citizens (Amanze, 2010).

The role of Value Orientation in the achievement of NEEDS in Nigeria

Values are basic principles to all human societies, in human activities and actions all over the world. Values are acceptable ethical values and principles by which a society is built and sustained. There is a set of acceptable standards and patterns, that regulate conduct and social behaviour in society. Reorientation is the act of changing, adjusting, aligning, or realigning something in a new or different reaction. Value reorientation is therefore seen as the act “of deliberately attempting to change the direction which attitudes and beliefs in Nigeria are currently orientated or the act of adjusting or aligning behavior, attitudes and beliefs of Nigerians in a new or different direction within the public discourse of contemporary Nigerian politics” (Osisioma, 2012:68). This is articulated as a move away from corruption, embezzlement, dishonesty, and general indiscipline to the direction of virtues of honesty, patriotism, hard work, and a general abhorrence of social vices (Okafor, 2014:21).

Njoku (2011) sees value reorientation as “inculcating good values that can help Nigeria out of her numerous predicaments and can refocus the nation through greatness. A closer look at the above definition would make one agree that Nigeria would be rapidly transformed if she embraces good moral values, which have the potential to re-orientate the attitude and behaviours of Nigerians and to bring significant reduction in corruption, indiscipline, immorality, terrorism, kidnapping, and other social vices”. Value reorientation means the principles of right or wrong that are agreed upon and accepted by individual or social groups. Juliet (2020) added that, “Value orientation is high moral intelligence and entrenchment of strong values for the development and prosperity of the Nigerian society”. For Asobie (2012), “it is a transformation on a fundamental shift in the deep orientation of a person, an organisation, or a society such that the world is seen in new ways, new actions and results which become possible that were impossible before the transformation”. This is the foundation for honesty and integrity, which should regulate social relationships among members of society. It should also guide operations in organisations, especially public organisation that should be built on the systems of trust and accountability.

According to Anari and Inah (2021), “Nigerian society is characterized by a high level of distrust and suspicion, and everybody has become a suspect of misplaced value. Immorality and lack of sanctity of life have increased as murder and kidnapping have become a daily occurrence that pervades the society with infanticide, fratricide, patricide, matricide, and suicide, all in pursuit of materialism”. They added that “The malady of corruption has polluted the character and personality of every Nigerian. Seemingly responsible Nigerians within the corridors of power gather around themselves sycophants and praise singers; those who dare to criticize the ugly trends are faced with open harassment”. Regrettably, “these vices

have taken the place of virtue, while merit is sacrificed. These and other similar negative values have taken the place of positive values needed for development of the society. The factors that enhance the emergence of negative values in Nigeria need to be properly explained to the youths as the basis of negativity in the value system in Nigeria” (Njoku, 2015).

Over the years, the Nigerian government has made considerable efforts in developing systems of value for its citizens. Imaekhai (2010) reviews a “series of attempts made by Nigerian leaders towards ethical revolution from January 15, 1966, when Major Kaduna Nzeogwu seized power with the primary aim of tackling the ills of tribalism, nepotism corruption, and favouritism”. In the second republic, the late President Shehu Shagari proclaimed an “ethical revolution”. Major General Muhamadu Buhari in 1983 took over the Government of Shagari and launched “War Against Indiscipline” (WAI) while Mass Mobilization, Self-Reliance, Social Justice, and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) was established by President Ibrahim Babangida. The aim of MAMSER. The aim was to get Nigerians to embrace the values embodied in the programme. MAMSER was a product of the Political Bureau that submitted reports to the Nigerian Military Federal Government on March 27th, 1987. The Bureau noted with misgivings that “the behaviour of Nigerians in the political process has been largely negative” adding that the negativism was easily exemplified in “a culture of helplessness, apathy, and indifference to the political process” (Imaekhai, 2010). Juliet (2020) stressed that it therefore called for “urgent and concerted efforts towards the creation of the right political culture in Nigeria, which should be executed through a coherent programme of social mobilization and political education...”

Juliet (2020) added that, “Abacha's administration which came shortly after Shonekan's interim government reintroduced the War Against Indiscipline and Corruption (WAI-C). The Goodluck administration came with a Rebranding policy agenda. This was in recognition of the continuous decay of the country's image which emanated from poor attitudes and behaviours. The present administration of President Muhammadu Buhari initiates the 'Change Agenda'. Unfortunately, the so much desired change is not being envisaged”. For Agbese (2016), “what the country needs is regimentation, not empty sloganeering. According to Agbese, leaders drive regimentation by demonstrating their discipline, their incorruptibility, their obedience to the rule of law, and their respect for the rights of others, including and especially the poor. Lack of all these, no doubt has exacerbated the level of injustice in the country, resulting in self-determination agitations from various militant ethnic groups”. Little wonder, that “Nigerians are politically angry, economically hungry, and socially militant. Millions of Nigerians are wallowing in abject poverty, existing under primal standards of living. No jobs for timid youths and graduates while individual and ethnic interests reign supreme” (Osagie, 2016). It became therefore important to enhance the value system of the country, as one of the key strategies for achieving the goals of development.

Acknowledging the importance of value orientation, it was identified as the first strategy for achieving the goals of NEEDS. The aim of this was to inculcate positive values in the citizenry and build self-confidence and human dignity, while also promoting ethical conduct in the public service. This has not been enthroned in the public service. With a lack of ethical values, accountability, and sincerity, public offices are abused, and the result is retarded development.

Key challenges affecting Value Orientation as a strategy for achieving National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy in Nigeria

Post-performance assessment of the policy by scholars shows that the policy has not fully achieved its objectives (Onuoha, 2008; Iroegbu, 2010, Obisanya, 2015 Anam, 2016). Onuoha (2008) stated that the NEEDS programme is a new wine in an old wine skin. The demand is the same: namely the state should withdraw from the economy. The only new thing about the programme is the political will the Obasanjo regime exhibited. He was able to implement a programme that Babangida regime could not do under a military regime due to pressure from the masses. However, the implementation of the economic reform programme is mostly about the implementation of World Bank loan conditionalities. Axe (2004) also observed that NEEDS was fundamentally influenced, by the analysis of Nigeria as a rent-based state, which status is a major stumbling block to development. The NEEDS document was lacking in data, timelines, implementation milestones, and deliverables. Admits all these concerns, there are key value-oriented challenges that affect the implementation of the policy in Nigeria.

Obisanya (2015) admitted that the NEEDS policy was as good in terms of definition and framework. However, it faced a lot of challenges. Soludo (2004) explained that NEEDS provided the missing link in all previous development plans i.e. workability. He further argued that NEEDS was different from previous plans in four ways, namely the participatory nature of the planning process, the collaborative planning framework, sharp focus, and workable content as well as implementability. He concluded that NEEDS was anchored on the fact that Nigeria has all it takes to be one of the leading economies in the world. To Ayo (2004) NEEDS document was lacking in timelines, data, implementation milestones, and delivery. He questioned the desirability of seeking external funding for a Nigeria project and the government's emphasis on economic reform, advising that growing the private sector was key to revitalizing the economy. He posited that insecurity was responsible for the seemingly uncontrollable emigration of Nigerians to other countries and urged the government to demonstrate its capacity to make investment safe in Nigeria to arrest the drift. Let's examine some ethical and value-oriented issues that affected the implementation of the programme,

1. Lack of professionalism in the conduct of public affairs: Like reform policies designed to achieve poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria successive regimes, the Obasanjo NEEDS Document lacked the institutional capacity to address the fundamental ethical issues such as lack of professionalism, absence of effective policy assessment structures, weak institutional mechanism for public accountability and integrity. The lack of values and ethical principles affects the moral structures and functionality of public institutions in Nigeria.
2. Leadership style: this poses another major problem in the achievement of the policy framework and other economic policies in Nigeria. Obisanya (2015) defined leadership as the capacity of someone to lead a group, organization, etc. It also means responsibility- having a passion for the purpose and the mission of the organization or society one leads. Since independence, leadership in Nigeria appears to be deteriorating. Many reform programmes had been undertaken before this, but the society lacks political leadership committed to implementing them. However, the

Nigerian leaders seem good at prescribing solutions to the economic problem but are worse for not providing the institutional framework to make it grow.

3. Lack of policy inconsistency: In Nigeria, every administration that is in power comes up with a new policy initiative instead of building the previous one. For instance, the late Yar'Adua administration dumped the NEEDS policy and birthed the Vision 20:2020 and the seven-point agenda. The Transformation agenda was introduced to define the framework for the economic 'progress' of the country. That trend continued with successive administrations, to date. Nigerian leaders lack the ethical orientation of sustaining development policies. Their inability to understand that real reform requires long-term systematic policy initiatives and implementation affects the efforts towards development and NEEDS was no exception.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study aimed to assess the role of value orientation in achieving NEEDS in Nigeria. NEEDS envisions a prosperous country that is not only developed economically but infused with strong moral and ethical values. The aim was to re-instill in the people the virtues of honesty, hard work, selfless service, moral rectitude, and patriotism. This has been difficult depending on the leadership commitment and exemplary conduct of government. The implementation of NEEDS was retarded because of several factors, among which include a lack of value principles in the public sector. This has been a ban on several development efforts. In the future, the paper recommends,

1. There need to promote the principles of accountability and answerability in the public service. The present administration which came into power on the platform of anti-corruption, transparency, and accountability has not done much in the implementation of its mandate. There must be an aggressive fight against corruption through institutional checks. Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) in Nigeria should be positioned to operate in such a way that their actions improve outcomes for its citizens. "It is crucial that the agency incorporate ethical practices into every process, from the creation to the application of its policies. The start of the public accountability process involves seven crucial questions that are posed and responded to by the organisations in charge of providing services" (Ejiroghene, Daniel, Samuel, and Nick, 2022). Government agencies responsible for anti-corruption campaigns must be much more committed and should be allowed some level of independence. By so doing, ethical values and morality will be enthroned in the public sector.
2. In addition to the role of Federal agencies, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) should embark upon massive youth value orientation and development programmes on creative skills as this may be a viable intervening tool for employment.
3. At the institutional level, reorientation of the youths, prospective leaders of tomorrow, should form part of the school curriculum to instill discipline in the youths. Students should be taught not to give and receive bribes no matter what.

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