

The Politics of Technical Assistance and Bi-Lateral Relations between the United States and Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study was set to examine the politics of technical assistance and bi-lateral relations between the United States and Nigeria. The major aim was to evaluate the impact of technical assistance and the role it was meant to play in the recipient under developed countries of the Third world. The theoretical framework adopted was dependency theory of Latin American scholars and those of them from the other parts of the world, such as Africa. Scholars like Andre Gunder Frank, Henrique Cardoso, Walter Rodney, Osvaldo Sunkel etc. were the proponents of the dependency theory. While the methodology applied was the secondary method of data collection. However, findings showed that foreign technical assistance from the United States to Nigeria has latent and ulterior intention to the benefit of American government at the detriment of the recipient countries like Nigeria; again, that poor management and corruption in under developing countries do pose a hindrance on the supposed role foreign technical assistance ought to play. To that extent, recommendations were made to make it possible for foreign technical assistance to play a role in enhancing development processes in developing Third world countries such as Nigeria as follows; that emphasis should be placed on all foreign technical assistance received from the donor countries, there is need to expunge corruption in the Nigerian system, etc. will aid the viability of those foreign aid to accelerate the development processes and strengthen the alateral relations in Nigeria in particular.

KEY WORDS: *Politics, Technical Assistance, and Bi-lateral Relations.*

INTRODUCTION

The politics of technical assistance has always hinged on self-interest of the donor countries to the detriment of the underdeveloped countries. Looking at it, technical assistance tend to appear as if they are panacea to the development problems of Third World Countries. Realistically, they are tools and instruments used by the developed countries to rein in the underdeveloped countries deeper into the exploitative, expropriating international capitalist system. A good way of portraying the politics of foreign assistance in terms of technical aspect, is by the tentative statement of; if the US government wants to give economic assistance in terms of funding to Nigeria, for instance, knowing obviously that the state needs the cash to pay for their debt, it can insist that Nigeria should open up our economic boarder, especially for British industrial companies. If the United State Government wants to train the Nigerian military troops on their

own turf, free of charge, the US can seize this chance to trickishly sensitize our top ranking military officers to uphold and promote capitalism in Nigeria.

Moreover, the Department for International Development (DFID) a United Kingdom government department, in conjunction with United States Agency for International Development, and International Education Project, have supported the educational sector in Nigeria by providing a more complete picture of schooling at the local level, covering approximately 30,000 households with school-aged children spread across the 36 states of the federation (Anjorin, 2013). Also, military aids have assisted in strengthening military cooperation between Nigeria and some of the super powers. Example, the military collaboration between Nigeria and China, allows or permits China to train and retrain Nigeria's security officials in the areas of combatting terrorism, production of military hard wares for the Navy, Army, Airforce and the police as well as Aircraft spare parts, and the opening of production centre in Nigeria (Anjorin, 2013).

Again, foreign technical assistance is one instrument that has aided most underdeveloped nations to improve from their backward state to an advanced economy. Foreign technical assistance rendered by a nation, group of nations, organizations to another country is an aid to help the recipient country to improve in so many areas of development. Foreign technical assistance comes in diverse forms, such as; military support or training technical assistance itself, development loan, grants and commodity import programmes, etc. Assistance entails all manner of aid that transact from a nation or government to another and has become an instrument by the developed countries to influence the underdeveloped Third Worlds. The donor countries view any sort of help as an instrument with which they interfere in the domestic or local affairs of the recipient countries. Conversely, all forms of assistance given by a government or financial institutions to any other country in need of such for the purpose of development, which could either be in cash or in kind has different dimensions. This takes the form of financial loan, supply of military equipment or hardware at a rate that might be considered low when comparisons are made, defense pact, technical assistance and advice in terms of intelligence gathering and otherwise, military assistance and alliance with other countries and infrastructural development (Aluko & Arowolo, 2010).

Furthermore, foreign technical assistance in form of aid to underdeveloped countries including Nigeria has been politically and economically devastating and as such, made the country to incur more debt than ever. This claim is supported by the fact that dependent theorists such as Frank, Santos, Armin, Furtado, etc. hold that the present economic and socio-political conditions prevailing in the southern pole are that of historical international process (Jhingan, 2010). The global system is such that the development of the centre occurs at the expense of the periphery. At first, a lot of peripheral countries have been incorporated into the global economy ever since the early era of British colonialism. Secondly, such small and underdeveloped countries have ended up becoming capitalist economies through incorporation into the world economic system. Again, the incorporation of these peripheral countries into the global economy has resulted to metropolis satellite connection in which the over flow profit generated at each level of the periphery is successively drawn off the centre. As a result of that, the periphery is impoverished and the centre is enriched tremendously (Jhingan, 2010).

Interestingly, foreign technical assistance have been instruments in the hands of donor countries to provide help to the developing ones through loans, grants, and some other means of

assistance. For them, the functions and significance of foreign technical is so much of importance to them for their intention to support the developing and under developing countries. This foreign technical assistance role is geared towards reforming their diplomatic and military status and interrelationship Nigeria has been viewed as one of the major beneficiaries of this US technical assistance because she has received a total sum of \$419.1 million so far in 2018 in a short period of time (Summer, 2018). For Nigeria, the basic reason for America indulging in foreign aid and technical assistance is focused on ameliorating the degree and rate at which absolute poverty increases as to be malignant, prevalent and perennial in the Southern part of the world; secondly, it is meant to support for the entrenchment of a stable democracy that protects the interest of the people and guarantees participatory kind of governance.

Also, it is meant for the promotion of good governance that will ensure standard and quality life existence by the citizens that will make the American government continue to grant both foreign aid and technical assistance to developing countries, which Nigeria happens to be one of them. Worthy of note that all those technical assistance to developing countries, from United States do play similar roles in other nations such as Tanzania, etc. with the aim of reducing poverty and improving their economic alliances between the donor and the recipient countries for which America do equally render help to inform of aid, technical assistance and administrative support which include countries like, Iraq Zambia, Kenya, Egypt, Uganda, Jordan, Israel, Afghanistan, etc.

Finally, in a bit to justify the choice of foreign aid and technical assistance, it is proper to say that these issues have been very recurrent ones in the underdevelopment woes of Nigeria over the years, irrespective of being so a hugely blessed country. It is consequently scholarly necessary to explore this area of study for the purpose of pulling Nigeria out of the entangling mesh of all these supports that undermine the sovereignty of these countries.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research was guided by the dependency theory. Leading dependency theorists are as follows; Herb Addo, Walden Bello, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Enzo Faletto, Armando Cordova, Ernest Feder, Andre Gunder Frank, Walter Rodney, Pablo Gonzalez, Casanova, Keith Griffin, Kumibert Raffer, Paul Israel Singer, Osvaldo Sunkel, etc. Many of these authors or theorists focused their attention on Latin America. The leading dependency theorist in the Islamic World is the Egyptian economist, Samir Amin. Whereas, Singer and Prebisch are regarded as progenitors of the dependency theory. Dependency theory is not a single strand of theory by the above mentioned progenitors, but a consolidation of the works of many theorists. There are still points of serious disagreements among the various strains of dependency theorists therefore; it would be misleading to suggest that there is only one unified theory of dependency (Feraro, 1996). Dependency theory emerged in the 1950s as a direct response to the inadequacies of the modernization theory. Theorists were frustrated by the fact that unabated growth in rich and industrialized countries failed to bring attendant growth in poorer countries.

However, Vernengo (2004) posits that the dependency theory evolved from a Marxian school of thought by Paul A. Baran in 1957 in his publication – *The Political Economy of Growth in Relationship with what Rosa Luxemburg and Vladimir Lenin wrote concerning imperialism*. Others are Prebisch, Celso Furtado, Anibal Pinto, Paul Sweezy, Andre Gunder Frank, etc. Sunkel (1969) conceptualize dependency theory as the impoverishment of a disadvantage state by the

enriched advantage state in a global system and dependency as the development of economic base by a state whose country's development policies are determined and influenced by the external powers of another state. While, Dos Santos (1971) in his view on dependency, sees it as a condition that actually structure the world economy to favour some states based on their economic standard and development at the detriment of the less privileged Third World Countries most. Thereby making it possible for a state to exploit and imperialize the other and subject them to their own economic system that determines and defines their progress in terms of economic growth and development as well.

Again, the emergence of dependency theory was as a reaction to the postulations of modernization theory and other demining theories of development against the underdeveloped countries advancement. They are of the view that societies advancement should be made to pass through same stages of development, else they will find it difficult to develop because developed countries were once at the stage of underdevelopment prior to taken these steps and stages to arrive at a developed state. This was achieved by means of investment and reinvestment of capital, technological advancement and further integration into the world market, which dependency theories objected and developed their own means and approaches to achieve development on their own and compete favourably in the international market (New school, 2009). Different academic submissions on dependency theory suggest that wealthy countries are capable of subjecting third world countries to remain dependent nations for a very long time. This agenda they are trying to achieve by applying so many measures like political and economic interventions to ensure supremacy. With less advantage countries in Africa and the world at large under the influence and control of the affluent countries, dependency has been strongly entrenched and the flow of resources to wealthy countries have maintained supper leader in development strive.

More importantly, relating the dependency theory to this research, it is evident to say that it will go a long way in explaining how the politics of foreign technical assistance in America – Nigeria relations has actually integrated Nigeria, just like other Third World Countries, into the international economic system that has affected not only development processes but also our national development. It is on the strength of this realization that we would be better equipped to control the negative sides of foreign help that comes from Africa to Nigeria through appropriate strategies and policies for development to thrive in our country. Indeed, the tie between Nigeria and America is a very strong one, and Nigeria depends on America for assistance to achieve its development goals. Over the years, Nigeria has depended on America for technical assistance to strengthen their military capacity, make advancements in the electoral system, and bring about reduction in the rate of poverty growth and development generally. This scenario creates a huge dependence on the American government and consequently an unequal relationship that spurs on underdevelopment. It is against this background of unequal relationship that this study adopts the dependency theory as its theoretical framework to investigate the impact of foreign technical assistance from the United States on development in Nigeria.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Politics is a process of power exhibition and resource distribution, cooperative and conflict resolution, decision making processes, a dialogue and above all social interactive activities (Heywood, 2007). Politics equally can be seen to be those activities that take place in the city –

states through which laws are made to govern the people in the society and those processes of exercising powers and authorities in a manipulative ways (Heywood, 2007).

On the contrary, technical assistance is a collaborative and coordinated approach to facilitate development in terms of building the strength of both organizations and individuals in a particular environment that will gradually improve the pattern of carrying out their various activities that are ultimately geared towards achieving an advanced state of life, contrary to the already existing level. It aids the promotion of economic stability and all round development as well. It also helps to build countries capacity where deficient for economic and human development cooperatively (IMF, 2016).

Lastly, Bi-lateral relations are those interactive relationship that exist between two countries that is of both economic and political benefit for the countries involved. Bi-lateral relations also affect the social, cultural relations of the two countries in such relationship. It is on the other hand, different form the unilateral and the multilateral relationship that involves one country only and so many countries respectively. It is cooperative relationship mostly between the developed evaluated country and the underdeveloped classified country for mutual benefits derivable.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research method employed here is the historical approach, otherwise referred to as the longitudinal studies approach. This method leans on the strength of the archived materials. It is chosen because the formation on the policy of foreign assistance, especially, technical assistance has a long history in Nigeria, which strongly inspires this approach.

Data used in conducting this research will be collected majorly from secondary sources. The secondary sources of data will include materials derived from relevant government publications, newspapers, magazines, international and local dailies, journals, textbooks and internet sources. Also, though an extensive review of literatures related to this particular area of study.

AMERICANS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE IN NIGERIA

America has over the years technically assisted Nigeria in so many ways that seem to be helping Nigeria advance in both the economic, social and political sphere of life and governance. Fleuret (2018) postulates that America has in so many ways technically helped Nigeria through the USAID in promoting a broad-based advancement in the economy, as well as ameliorating the rate of poverty to improve and increase agricultural productivity, jobs creation etc. in the local areas. In a bit to give support to Nigeria's government to the comprehensive Africa agriculture development programme, the USAID has improved the advancement of evidence-based agricultural policies. The crux of the matter and the point of departure here is that this research will expose how these variables have been paper talks while the reality is in sharp contrast with what is practically happening.

On the contrary most of the feasible technical assistance that comes from America to Nigeria is tied with strings that makes it all most impossible for Nigeria to achieve the advancement Nigeria has been yearning for. Despite all what they face, due to their level of underdeveloped state, Nigeria still has no other choice rather than to stick in the quest for technical assistance from

America which could be attributed to the bad governance in Nigeria. USAID has supported efforts to bring about responsive governance at different levels of government, starting from local, state and the country at large; to enhance quality and credible elections, and improve the stench for civic engagement.

America through USAID has played a role in improving the capacity of government agencies to strengthen fiscal responsibilities and improve accountability and transparency.

Also, America has added Nigeria to advance their market access, reduce obstacles to trade, and expand access to portable water. they have in addition assisted to develop a policy environment for small business and increase access to market-driven vocational and technical training connected with private sector job opportunities. They have equally help in focusing on increasing access to commercial financial services, which include microfinance, in terms of education; America has done quite some moves through their numerous orchestrated programmes which were intended to support Nigerians gain equitable access to qualitative and standardized basic education through reading and literacy skills development, teachers training programme, improved support for the girl child education, infrastructural improvement, and community entire involvement. An instance is their efforts in educationally rehabilitating some of the chibok girls, even during the search for the missing chibok school girls that were kidnapped, America sent an interdisciplinary US team that was sent to assist the Nigerian army (Ahmed, 2014).

Again, on health sector and the move to improve quality health care system in Nigeria, America through the Global Health initiative USAID coordinates in collaboration with Nigeria's government to ensure improve health facilities and the accessibilities of such by Nigerians to relatively grantee high-impact health service delivery and strengthen the leadership, management, governance and programme continuity (Fleuret, 2018). The aspect of sanitation, clean water and other environmental improvement were and have been the huge challenges of Nigerians with particular reference to the Northern part of Nigeria. In a collaboration effort, the American governments through USAID have been able to strive on improving access to safe water, a good sanitation and hygienic environment to most affected parts of Nigeria. Furthermore, America has assisted on conflict management, promotion of legitimacy and capacity of governance structures, with a latent invention, to defend religious freedom as to curb violence.

Moreover, aside from America's technical assistance, aid has equally been provided by other international organizations such as United Nations. The United Nations Development Assistance Frame work III (2014-2017), signed between the Nigerian Government and the United Nations system on 30th July, 2013, a strategic common programmatic framework of the UN support for the next four years, rememba typical example (United Nations, 2017).

Action aids (2006) posits that technical assistances to developing countries are overpriced and under evaluated just as it suits them. Technical assistance has been a highly insulated aid from donor's efforts to improve the quality of life and governance in underdeveloped countries in conformity with the widely advertised principles of ownership and partnership. Specifically, Action Aid argues that;

- ❖ Technical advisers are often under pressure from donors and governments to “get the job done” rather than take extra time to build capacity.
- ❖ Advisers often have incentives not to pass on knowledge to their counterparts in Nigeria.

- ❖ Technical advisers are more focused on meeting donor demands than building capacity in Nigeria.
- ❖ Some advisers have often lacked skills or expertise in building capacity in Nigeria.
- ❖ Some governments have not been strategic in their use of technical assistance in Nigeria.
- ❖ Heavy use of expatriate consultants can foster a “dependency culture” in Nigeria.
- ❖ The common failure of donor co-ordination has fuelled technical assistance problem in Nigeria.
- ❖ Capacity building initiatives have been undermined by a lack of policy coherence in Nigeria.
- ❖ Costs and prices play a limited role in determining demand and supply, leading to high costs of technical assistance in Nigeria.
- ❖ Much technical assistance in Nigeria is often officially tied, and donors prioritize their own nationals even when technical assistance is not officially tied.
- ❖ Heavy use of expatriate advisers in Nigeria inflates costs because of associated expenses.
- ❖ The technical assistance market is highly inflexible and competition is severely limited.
- ❖ Donors want to maintain control and meet disbursement timetables.
- ❖ Technical assistance is used to ensure that aid money is well spent.
- ❖ Donors use technical assistance alongside conditionality to promote reforms they consider to be important in Nigeria.
- ❖ Technical assistance in Nigeria contributes to donor geopolitical or commercial objectives.
- ❖ There is a lack of clear strategic frame work for capacity building in the course of most technical assistance in Nigeria.
- ❖ Too much value is placed on international expertise and experts and not enough on local knowledge, and experts with understanding of the local political, social and cultural context in Nigeria.
- ❖ It is often incorrectly assumed that learning is always one way; from expert to recipient(action aid 2006)

Consequently action aid (2006) makes the following recommendations for improving technical assistance in Nigeria

- ❖ Draw up capacity building plans based on national development strategy.
- ❖ Ensure technical assistance contributes to capacity building.
- ❖ Ensure transparency and accountability in the use of resources.
- ❖ Ensure that women’s are fully taken into account.
- ❖ Allow southern countries to take the lead in the capacity building process.
- ❖ Make maximum use of country system, including for procurement, financial management and reporting.
- ❖ Do not use technical assistance to either substitute for or complement conditionality.
- ❖ Be fully transparent, to both citizens and poor countries, about funding for technical assistance and its impact.
- ❖ Ensure great cost effectiveness, by ensuring that all technical assistance contracts are fully competitive and that bid are made fully transparent.
- ❖ Strengthen the targets agreed under the paris declaration.
- ❖ Collect and make available more data on donor-by-donor spending (action aid, 2006).

To the extent that technical assistance help in the development of the economies of less developed countries like Nigeria; the developed countries have contributed to do it as a “soft” lever to police and direct the policy agendas of developing countries governments, or to create ownership of the kinds of reforms donors seem suitable. Donor funded advisers have even been brought in to draft supposedly “country owned” poverty reduction strategies like the case in Nigeria during the structural adjustment programme (SAP) (Green Hill, Watt, Griffins & Burnley, 2005).

CONCLUSION

There is a lot and series of condemnation about technical assistance intervention and that which discouraged expected further administration because of the poor outcome of the impact over the years in conjunction with corrosive corruption, poor maintenance, short project lifespan, non-prioritization of needs before delivering assistance, poor monitoring and evaluative assistance can only contribute towards development only if certain strategic efforts and measures are taken into consideration and implemented, coupled with a critical and appraisal of the awkward poverty rate and extreme hopelessness, impoverished set of people within the undeveloped countries. However, global efforts are geared towards a more better approaches to be engaged as to achieve effectiveness of the technical assistance delivery (Tolulope, Olatuyoye & Adebuseyi, 2016).

Moreover, Nigeria is one of the recipient countries in the world that are seriously in need of America’s technical assistances which are designed and structured in a mechanized way to cope with the conditionalities attached to those technical assistance rather than complaining of its aftermath which we were of course, aware of before taking such loans or technical assistance. This is the reality and the true picture of how technical assistance have restructured the relationship between America and Nigeria in terms of development of various countries in the world as no country is an island.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this research has necessitated these recommendations as follows;

- ❖ There is need to globally develop a method of consistently providing assistance that is well attuned to the political subtleties of the recipient countries.
- ❖ NGOs, academics and the media have the role of developing a more vigorous public conversation about technical assistance from America to Nigeria for a well-informed public can help aid providers adhere to core principles and maintain extreme caution and sensitivity.
- ❖ Much more emphasis should also be placed on technology development. Which involves widening, deepening, broadening and strengthening manufacturing sector and human development initiatives that will ameliorate the rate of extreme poverty increase in Nigeria.
- ❖ All the received technical assistance should be adequately utilized to the benefit of Nigeria and Nigerians, and not for the sole interest of the foreign donors such as America.
- ❖ Nigeria must learn to be proactive in terms of social mobilization for her own self-reliant development skill that will reduce all these quest for external help and technical assistance, due to the cost effects of most of them.

- ❖ It is crucial for Nigeria to maintain a strong and mutually bilateral relationship that will be beneficial to both America and Nigeria economically, socially and politically. The American – Nigerian bilateral partnership must be constructed and properly managed in strategic terms, on the broad model of America’s relationship with South Korea, Taiwan and Japan after World War II.
- ❖ There is need to expunge corruption in Nigeria’s system if at all, technical assistance from America will mean or have much relevance to Nigeria’s development by strengthening the Agencies created to fight corruption in Nigeria.

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