

## Challenges of Underdevelopment in Nigeria: The Tiv Experience

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**Abstract:** *The Tiv nation, having abundant human and natural resources; solid minerals, fertile soils, highly educated citizens etc. is expected to have gone beyond the category of underdeveloped societies. Being the force behind Benue state as the food basket of the nation, the Tiv land is yet to attain feats commensurate with its strengths. This has been blamed on general factors like poor project supervision, poor government policy implementation, unemployment, improper assessment of policies, unfavorable business conditions, insecurity, poor leadership and corruption which also happens to be the same issues in other state yet they witness meaningful development in their lands. All these factors have ended pushing the entire blame to the government; a situation where successive government regimes turn to blame game among themselves. However, in spite of these claims, little research has been conducted internally, on the Tiv nation itself to ascertain specific internal factors that stunt political and economic efforts at development of Tiv land. This paper holds the position that aside from failure on government's side, underdevelopment as currently experienced in Tiv land is because of negative attitudes towards entrepreneurship, jealousy, fear of witchcraft attacks/manipulations (tsav), envy (Iyuhe), politics of bitterness and communal conflicts. It is concluded that underdevelopment is more or less a demon; it has resultant effects that are detrimental to the Tiv land, therefore, all hands must be on deck to put it to a hurt. It is only when the suggestions made in this paper are strictly adhered to, that Tiv land will be able to experience meaningful development. The author calls for attitudinal change towards each other's prosperity so as to encourage each other. Those who take giant strides towards development should be celebrated and those who stand in the way of development should not be accorded public support in order to compel them to desist from such acts.*

**Keywords:** *Underdevelopment, Envy (Iyuhe), Witchcraft attacks (tsav), Jealousy, Insecurity.*

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### I. Introduction

Since achieving its independence in 1960, Nigeria has struggled almost incomparably to achieve a measure of economic stability and realize its projected economic potential (Aidelomon, 1). Through successive regime changes from 1966, the country alternatively swung from Civilian to Military rule until democracy and relative political stability was eventually restored in 1999. Nonetheless, the challenge of underdevelopment has endured throughout this period (Awojobi, 154). Despite posting impressive figures via economic indicators and boasting what is now regarded as Africa's biggest economy, Nigerians still rank among the World's poorest people as the wealth of the nation miserably fails to reflect on the vast majority of its people (World Bank, 22).

Benue state is not in exception. Since creation in 1976, the first democratic government led by Late Aper Aku (1979-1984) made concerted efforts in putting the state on the map of development and subsequently making the state self-sufficient. Capital projects ranging from agro-allied to mining and manufacturing were established with the view to enhancing the states opportunities to development. Benue state like every other state later plunged into military rule until 1999 when the nation eventually returned to democratic rule. Since then, series of democratic governments has come and gone with respective blueprints for development. Yet there is apparently inexplicable disparity between the Macro-economic and Micro-economic fortunes of the State, where several reasons have been nominated for this ranging from the high level illiteracy, neglect of agriculture due to discovery oil, poor government policies poor project supervision/project abandonment and most recently corruption and herdsmen attacks on the state.

It is arguable that these issues/factors fueling underdevelopment advanced above are not peculiar to Benue state but other states have managed their way through these issues development is noticeable in these states. It against this background that this study is undertaken to examine the peculiar issues of underdevelopment in Tivland in Benue state, Nigeria. This paper is aimed at investigating the Tivland underdevelopment problem with the goal of identifying the causal factors that stunt political and economic efforts at development.

## **II. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS**

### **UNDERDEVELOPMENT**

Underdevelopment does not mean the absence of development. As a concept, underdevelopment makes sense only in comparative terms. Hence, the unanimous assertion by prominent scholars in the field of underdevelopment/dependency theorists such as Ander Frank (1975) and Walter Rodney (1972) that development and underdevelopment are two sides of world historical movement between the First World nations and Third World nations. Thus, these underdevelopment theories viewed underdevelopment in Third World countries as the outcome of the centuries of unequal relationship between the center (First World nations) and the periphery (Third World nations), which resulted in the development of the First World and the underdevelopment of the Third World. In Nigeria, while the periphery is represented by the masses, the center is represented by the ruling class. As a result of the unequal relationship deeply entrenched in Nigeria, the country has witnessed the exploitation of the masses by the few who show no interest in the development of the country, except in areas that benefit their elitist interest (Awojobi, 155). Therefore, unequal relationship in Nigeria has been sustained by corrupt practices because corruption thrives on it (Ameh and Olademiji, 23). In a nut-shell, underdevelopment means backwardness in all spheres of a country's national life, which results from the inability of a country to deal with its environment. It is also characterized by lack of indigenous industries, inadequate production of food, unscientific agriculture, etc. No doubt, Nigeria fits into this category of nations.

With a population of over 180 million people (World Bank, 22) Nigeria is the seventh most populous country in the world and the most populous in Africa. Nigeria also boasts Africa's largest economy since overtaking South-Africa in 2014. As at 2013, its gross domestic product (GDP) at purchasing power parity (PPP) stood at over \$150trillion, 20th in the world. Yet, for all its unarguable wealth both in human as well as natural resources, Nigeria continues to languish in perpetual underdevelopment. Wealth is very unevenly distributed as a select few accumulate it at the expense of the vast majority (Aidelomom, 28). Corruption is endemic, poverty is rife, insecurity is an everyday ordeal, and the life of the average Nigerian is mired in an ever repetitive cycle of political underachievement, economic stagnation, and widespread systemic failure (Aidelomom, 28).

## **III. General Causes Of Underdevelopment In Nigeria**

### **i. Corruption**

According to Ameh and Olademiji, the initial problem in the Nigerian everyday life is, of course, corruption. It is such a huge issue that has affected almost every area of life in the country and deprives us of growth (24). It feels like no matter which political leader we will choose, the result will be the same – they will not care much about improving the lives of Nigerians (Awojobi, 157). There are a lot of politicians who steal the funds that are meant for various projects related to country development and put them on their personal bank accounts. If you look at the lavish lifestyle of many politicians, it becomes clear that apart from their official salary, they also take the funds from the national reservoir.

### **ii. Poor leadership**

Gbervbie, Shodipo and Oviasogie also stressed the fact that bad leadership has become a cause of underdevelopment in Nigeria. To him, most of the so called leaders do not actually understand that leadership entails assuming responsibilities for certain important issues. Poor governance on the part of the leaders has also resulted to inappropriate check and balances and mechanisms to regulate the affairs of government officials and institutions. As such, politics is seen as a “do or die” affair, while ethical politics is delegated to the background. The leadership structure in Nigeria is also said to be poor due to the inadequacies in accountability and transparency of public affairs managements in the nation (123).

### **iii. Insecurity**

Insecurity is a critical issue in Nigeria today. As stated by Ewefan and Urhie, since the boko-haram insurgency intensified in 2009, a lot of International focus has been turned to the Nigerian security situation (45). Insecurity in Nigeria, like the rest of Sub-Sahara Africa is more a matter of human security rather than national security (Kalejaiye and Alliyu, 47). Besides the insurgency in north-eastern Nigeria, the country is also faced with security challenges such as, kidnappings, gang violence, militancy, religious conflicts, armed robbery, tribal tensions, and politically instigated clashes (Ewefan and Urhie (45).

Okechukwu and Onyishi highlight the assassinations of top public officials such as Bola Ige (Attorney general of the federation), Funsho Williams (Lagos politician), and Dipo Dina (Ogun State governorship candidate) as examples of a state continually falling into utter lawlessness and without the socio-economic apparatus in place to mitigate the effects of its rapid decline (11). Ewetan and Urhie point out the clear correlation between

insecurity and underdevelopment in Nigeria, noting that a spike in terrorist activities has left the country's economy in an "unpalatable" situation, and stressing that it is the responsibility of the government to provide for the common security of the people as stipulated in the 1999 constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria(204).

**iv. Unfavourable business conditions**

There is one thing that helps the nation to grow and develop, and this thing is business. The successful and developed country needs to have a large number of industries, which are also of high quality. It is impossible to contribute to the development of the country without the existence of the industries. Unfortunately, in Nigeria, there are no suitable conditions for the long-running industries. This is mainly because every industry is in need of constant and steady supply of power and it is barely available in the country. The few investors who strive to cope with the prevailing situation are discouraged with issues like multiple taxations and unfavourable economic policies.

**v. Improper Assessment of Policies**

In addition, the improper assessment of policies implemented also serves as a challenge to development (Itah, 47). Most policy makers fail to access the goal-achievement gap factor, implying that policy makers often times fail to access the level of achievements of certain implemented public policies. The reason for this is because most leaders present policies which are too cumbersome and difficult to achieve within the short period spent in office. As such, most plans for national development are usually abandoned at the end of such tenures and subsequent governments also fail to continue on the plans which were left uncompleted. This therefore explains reasons for numerous abandoned projects found in Nigeria and Benue state in particular.

**vi. Unemployment**

This problem is very serious because if not enough people are employed, their contribution to the country's development will slow down. The youth are unable to find jobs because of the high requirements and lack of work. According to Aloko and Usman, Not only the young people but also the older people who find it difficult to find a job are left unemployed when their knowledge and skills could have been extremely useful in the growth and development of Nigeria(470). Due to the unemployment rates, the GDP of Nigeria keeps reducing every year, which is one of the effects of underdevelopment in our country. The solution to this problem would be easier than it seems – more job opportunities have to be created for the youth(Aloko and Usman, 3).

**vii. Poor government policy implementation**

There are a lot of policies in Nigeria that are technically supposed to improve the life of the local residents. They all look great on paper, but in practice, they have very little actual implementation. The result of it is the untimely ending of many projects that were designed for development because they have not moved on anywhere from the paperwork level. Government should take it under its own responsibility and watch over these policies, making sure that they were implemented and did not just stay on paper. It is the problem that the government should take immediate care of because there are so many potential improvements and so little implementation(Ewefan and Urhie, 42).

**viii. Poor project supervision**

There are a lot of projects that are suggested to improve the country's development in various sectors. However, similarly to the previous point, a lot of projects just do not get anywhere. They die out very quickly and get abandoned. Even if these projects manage to get to the stage of implementation, it often happens that they lack the proper supervision and are later just given up on. The supervisors that have been appointed to the certain projects have to stick with them until the proper completion. They should avoid jumping on board of other economy aspects and investing in them before the project is properly completed, otherwise we risk starting the same projects over and over again, which severely slows down development.

**IV. Specific Causes Of Underdevelopment To The Tiv Land Of Benue State**

A society or community cannot be solely developed by the government alone except the inhabitants of that community embrace development and makes concerted efforts to encourage development in the locality. The Tivland lacks development due to some peculiar factors inherent in the life of a Tiv man. According to Shirshima, prominent amongst these factors are: jealousy/envy, fear of witchcraft (*tsav*) (10-15).

**i. Negative attitudes towards entrepreneurship:** Until in recent times, the Tiv man unlike the Igbos and Hausas was not entrepreneurially inclined. We believed so much in government/private paid jobs. A close look at the business activities in big towns and cities will buttress this point in volumes. Key business activities in Tiv land are being carried out by none-Tiv. If there is any day the Igbo traders lock their shops while mourning one of them, the entire town is shut down. Until now that the new breed of Tiv youth is cropping up with high spirit

of entrepreneurship, even petty trading in Tiv land was done by none-indigenes. These people make huge gains from their businesses in Tiv land, then use the money to build their home towns, leaving the Tiv land underdeveloped.

**ii. Jealousy:** Jealousy generally refers to the thoughts or feelings of insecurity, fear and concern over a relative lack of possessions. To be jealous they say is normal and natural, but jealousy becomes problematic when we act out in jealousy or wallow in it. It consists of one or more emotions such as anger, resentment, inadequacy, helplessness or disgust. It is very common to see a Tiv person thinking that the only path towards becoming a great person in the society is to cut the other persons down (Shirshima, 10). This feeling has always led people into writing unnecessary petitions against their brothers and sisters with the hope that when the person is eventually displaced they will take over from him/her. This is what is known as 'Pull Him Down' (PHD) syndrome (Shirshima, 10). This has become a big challenge the Tiv people are facing in their quest for personal and common development. According to Shirshima, the problem of the Tiv nation is not external to the people; it is inward, internal and it is commonly associated with the behavioural pattern the Tiv have adopted for some time now. He further stated that the trend is the decline of ethical principles in the land (11). This trend has eroded the unity that existed in Tiv land that spurred initial developmental strides during the second republic. At most instances, the Tiv person does not work for the progress of the Tiv nation through the building of individual capacities, rather he is persistently applying the philosophy of pull him down on his own kith and kin.

**iii. Fear of witchcraft attacks/manipulations (tsav):** Till date, it is very common in Tiv land for successful people to hide their true status from their kinsmen. You see them living in mansions in the cities, but go to their ancestral homes, some of them don't even own a thatch house. There has been several instances where someone living in the city comes home to put up a developmental project but end up going back with a deadly disease if not dying mysteriously due to witchcraft attacks (tsav). This tsav has deterred many from trying to drag development to their homes. Justice Utsaha was quoted in Shirshima confirming that the Tiv man of today has turned to employing subversive tactics, including the issue of supernatural powers, to thwart the efforts of his brother who aspired to excel among his neighbors (11).

**iv. Envy (Iyuhe):** Envy is an emotion which occurs when a person lacks another's superior quality, achievements, or possessions and either wishes that the other lacked it. It is also defined as a feeling of unhappiness over another's good fortune together with a desire to have same good fortune. 'Iyuhe' (envy) is one of the peculiar traits that influence Tiv social political behaviour negatively. Jibo notes that those who have this kind of orientation would want to thwart their brothers and sisters and to hinder them from advancing. According to him, this tends to make Tiv politicians to view politics as mutually and exclusively preserved. This *iyuhe* explains why Tiv politicians see the other as an opponent instead of seeing him/her as a colleague for peace, unity and development for the whole Tiv nation, a situation that is active in Tiv nation (Jibo, 200). This act has hindered development of the Tiv land since prominent Tiv sons and daughters in politics have always being at war with each other. And where two elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers.

**v. Politics of Bitterness:** In recent times, politics has claimed a lot of lives (Monday and Simon, 47). Illustrious and industrious Tiv son and daughters who joined politics died prematurely. Mahmud Iyornder Akirga and his brother Steven Akirga died mysteriously. Same was with senator Adagba, Jonathan Biam and Godwin Tata. A long list of Commissioners, State Assembly members, Special Assistants and many other top government functionaries who lost their lives since the return of party politics in Tiv land from 1999-2019 could drafted if one takes his time to do that. A lot more are down with strange sicknesses that defied the medical wards. All these people could have taken development in no small measures to their respective place in Tiv land at large if only they didn't die in politics.

**vi. Communal conflicts:** The Tiv land has been plagued by crisis and wars for decades. Internally and externally, there has been long history of communal conflicts in Tiv land. The Tiv land at the boarder settlements with Cross River state, Taraba State and Nassarawa state have been under continuous attacks; the Tiv-Jukun crisis in Ukum, Katsina-Ala and Logo local government areas which is currently ongoing, the Uger-Mbakunu, Uger-Ikyurav-ya, Udam-Mbakyya conflicts all in Kwande LGA, the Udm-Mbadudku crisis in Vandeikya LGA and the Udam- Gaav conflicts in Konshisha LGA are instances of external aggression against the inhabitants of the Tiv land. All these conflicts have led to loss of lives and property worth millions of Naira. As if this is not enough, the Tiv people themselves have serially engaged themselves in wars; the Mbagen-Etulo, Kusuv-Etulo in Buruku LGA, the Nyiev-Uyoo, Nyiev-Ikyurav-ya, Mbakyaa-Dzeev crises in Kwande LGA, the Ukum-Katsina-Ala crises among Ukum-Shitile-Ikyurav-Tiev and Tongov that have rendered the two LGA inhabitable and has stalled business activities in that axis, the Mbagwaza-Utange crisis and Ukan-Ipav in Ushongu and Gboko LGAs, the Mbaiaase-Ugambe in Gwer and Konshisha LGAs and a whole lot of them that

have led to destruction of lives and property worth millions of Naira. In accordance with the Aloko, these have contributed to underdevelopment of Tiv land (97).

## **V. The Way Forward**

This section of the paper makes suggestions as to the roles to be played by stakeholders in Tiv land in order to curb the incidence of underdevelopment in Tiv land of Benue state Nigeria.

The government has done a lot in terms of policy formulation geared toward bringing development to the land but a lot of the policies still remain mere paper work without implementation. It is suggested that such policies and programmes be fully implemented in order to bring development to Tiv land.

The Tiv Traditional ruling council also has a role to play in the quest for the development of Tiv land. The council through the instrumentality of the Tor Tiv should impose stringent sanction on traditional rulers of communities involved in communal crisis. This will make them press hard on their youth not to take laws in their hands by going to wars with their brothers.

Community elders and custodians of the Tiv culture also have a strategic role to play in reducing the scourge of underdevelopment in Tiv land. The Tiv cultural beliefs hold that “the voice of the elders is the voice of God. This author hereby calls on them to come up clearly and condemn evil acts that scare people away from home, making them to take development to other communities for fear of witchcraft attacks and manipulations.

The elites in the Tiv nation have severally been indicted for been behind the supply of arms and ammunitions to their respective communities to go to war with other communities in times of disputes. The author calls on the elites in Tiv land to desist from this act and instead empower theses youths that are used for destruction in lucrative and entrepreneurial ventures, this way the efforts of government towards development will becomplimented.

The working class and general masses also have a role to play. That inherent envy and jealousy that fuel the pull him syndrome should be done away with from among the people. The Tivs should learn to celebrate each other's success. This way everyone will be gingered to do more and the resultant effect will be development of the Tiv land.

The youth of Tiv land is not left out. All hands must be on deck in order to realize the desire to develop our land. The youth is urged to shun all forms of youth restiveness and embrace entrepreneurial activities so as to be self-sufficient. This will also be a boost to their ego in turning down dirty offers from politicians who use them as thugs during electioneering campaigns.

## **VI. Conclusion**

This paper has been able to identify some of the general factors associated with underdevelopment of Nigeria as a nation and of course in Benue state. The paper also uncovered salient factors responsible for underdevelopment that are Tiv specifics. The study also made suggestions to the Tiv traditional council, elites, government and youths towards fostering development in the land. This study concludes that underdevelopment is more or less a demon; it has resultant effects that are detrimental. Therefore, all hands must be on deck to put it to a hurt. It is only when the suggestions made in this paper are strictly adhered to, that Tiv land will be able to experience meaningful development. The author calls for attitudinal change towards each other's prosperity so as to encourage each other. Those who take giant strides towards development should be celebrated and those who stand in the way of development should not be accorded public support in order to compel them to desist from such acts.

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