

Leadership Fatalism and Underdevelopment in Nigeria: Imaginative Policymaking for Human Development

Chikwendu Christian Ukaegbu

*Department of Sociology
University of Wyoming*

Introduction

A group of Western scholars in the 1950s and 1960s set out to study the characteristics of individuals in developing countries that predisposed them to promote or prevent change. This group of scholars—known as the modernity school of development—contrasted the traditional with the modern personality on a set of attitudes and behaviors, the long list of which need not be repeated in this paper. Based on their empirical findings, modernity scholars concluded that development required the transformation of the traditional man into modern man.

There are weaknesses in the studies and findings of the modernity school, but not all characteristics identified by it constitute obstacles to, or facilitators of, development. One of the contrasting characteristics of the two personality types is that the traditional personality is passive and fatalistic, while its modern counterpart is autonomous and commands a sense of self-efficacy. Marxist scholarship, epitomized by dependency theory, heavily criticized and discredited the claims of the modernity school. One of the strongest attacks on modernity thinkers involved their ethnocentric view that non-Western societies must absorb Western culture before they can achieve development. But as Wei-Ming Tu points out, the success of Confucian East Asia in becoming fully modernized without being thoroughly westernized indicates that modernization may assume different cultural forms.¹

When one examines more closely the development policies of Nigerian governments, there is evidence that Nigerian leaders, both past and present, exhibit a fatalistic orientation, have a highly dependent mentality, and lack a sense of personal or group self-efficacy. Consequently, their collective leadership style continues to stall the country's development. In the present paper, I define "fatalism" as the tendency of Nigerian leaders to feel hopeless and act helpless when confronted

with problems of critical national importance. They tow the line of least difficulty and least challenge, seek and implement short-term and palliative solutions, and depend on, and outsource complex national problems to, international outsiders without first exploring all domestic possibilities. Before exploring this proposition further, I will first examine the concept of “leadership” to see whether Nigerian policy makers, especially the elected category and their appointed cabinets, are in fact leaders at all.

According to the Encyclopedia of Public Health, *leadership* is the process through which an individual or group of individuals influences others to accomplish a goal.² W. Bennis posits that leaders innovate, focus on people, develop and inspire trust, have a long-term perspective, show originality, and challenge the status quo.³ Leaders guide, direct, motivate, influence, and make choices that enable their followers to contribute to the success or positive transformation of the entity they lead, namely, the Nigerian political economy. A society may have a category, class, or group of people classified as leaders, but they may not provide leadership.

One could argue that because the human condition in Nigeria has continued to deteriorate, post-civil war political officials in both military and civilian regimes who were, or are still, expected to direct and guide the population toward positive change cannot possibly be described as leaders. One might even say these officials are bad leaders, as Chinua Achebe classified them in his enduring chronicle of Nigeria’s troubles.⁴ In either scenario, leadership is a mere title—such as president, head of state, governor, senator, member of the house representatives, minister, commissioner, or councilor. People who occupy such positions in Nigerian society play the role of either generating and enacting policies, as in the case of legislators, or they suggest and implement policies, as in the case of executive branch incumbents. These two categories of public officeholders constitute the focus of this paper. The fact that leadership in the Nigerian polity is more of a titular, nominal, or symbolic phenomenon than an attribute of role efficacy is a function of a fatalistic orientation pervasive among incumbents of leadership positions. In this regard, I will use the concepts *leader* and *leadership* to denote a class of people who occupy positions, rather than a category that guides, directs, and challenges its followers to achieve socially relevant and beneficial goals.

There are many definitions of *fatalism*, including “the doctrine that all events are pre-determined by fate and are therefore unalterable”; “the doctrine that events are fixed in advance so that human beings are powerless to change them”; and “the view that human deliberation and actions are pointless and ineffectual in determining events because whatever will be will be.” These definitions have one thing in common—a view that fatalism breeds and nurtures a dependent and disabled mind and body, infuses a sense of resignation in individuals, and renders human beings incapable of taking their destiny into their own hands. As poignant as these definitions are, one stated in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy best captures the disposition of Nigerian leaders toward development, namely, fatalism avers that we are powerless to do anything other than what we actually do.⁵ Consequently, fatalism finds expression in pessimism, defeatism, and a submissive attitude toward events. A public commentator wrote, “I consider fatalism the opiate of people

unwilling to accept responsibility for their lives. Be it God or the Government, or *other countries* [italics mine], it is much easier for them to allow another entity to run their lives. Hence nothing is their fault.”⁶

In his now influential work on fatalism and development in Nepal, D. Bista links the failure of Nepal to make progress to fatalism and caste.⁷ Of these two factors, Bista most blames fatalism—the belief that one has no personal control over one’s life circumstances as the more debilitating factor.⁸ According to Bista, under fatalism, responsibility is continually displaced to the outside, typically to the supernatural. In the case of Nigeria, responsibility tends to be displaced to the supernatural but also surely to humans in societies outside Nigeria, who are believed to have all the answers to the country’s development problems.

Displacement of responsibility to the supernatural connotes *theological fatalism*, where all actions and events are believed to occur through the power of God or other supernatural entities. This is prevalent in the daily expressions of Nigerian citizens of all ethnic groups and socioeconomic statuses when referring to the future. Incumbents of high positions in both legislative and executive branches of government often conclude their public statements on complex and challenging national issues with the expressions, “by the grace of God” or “Insha’ Allah” for Christians and Muslims, respectively. B. Bruce, Chief Executive Officer of a successful entertainment company in Nigeria, noted with disdain and disappointment the tendency of Nigerian leaders to resign their hopes, aspirations, policies, choices, failures, and/or successes to God when he said, “when you ask him (a Nigerian leader) a question, he says things like this, by the grace of God this is what is going to happen. They use God as an excuse for failure or success.”⁹ *Theological fatalism* can be used interchangeably with *cultural fatalism* because religion, be it the world religions of Christianity and Islam or traditional African religion, is an integral part of a people’s culture.

A second type of responsibility displacement is what, for lack of a better expression, I call “secular transnational fatalism” or the “fatalism of international dependence.” In this variety, people from other societies outside of Nigeria are believed to have the answers to complex technical, ideational, and financial problems surrounding the country’s development. The nature and direction of the relationship between theological fatalism and secular transnational fatalism is not the subject of this paper. But it bears mentioning that both types of fatalism may have their roots in various cultural, group, and national experiences.

A fatalistic orientation among Nigerian policymakers may be explained by the following untested but reasoned propositions. Fatalism is embedded in the cultures of Nigeria of which the policymakers are a part. *Leadership fatalism* is a response to the demographic and ethno-cultural amorphousness of the country. Such an ethno-cultural complexity suffocates courage and clarity of purpose among policymakers, focuses their energy on balancing ethno-parochial claims, and renders them incapable of originating and enacting pro-development policies. Leadership fatalism may also be a manifestation of the culture of poverty in which simple, immediate solutions are preferred to long-term and challenging choices. Psycho-

logical dependence infused by colonialism remains a debilitating phenomenon in the cognitions of political actors in the post-colonial state.

Regardless of which one—or combination—of these factors is responsible for leadership fatalism in Nigeria, Alex Scott's idea of the concept is instructive: Individuals who are fatalistic still believe that some of their actions may change the outcome of certain events.¹⁰ The resultant unsustainability of such actions has plagued Nigerian development policy and practice over the years. I will concentrate on the most recent examples.

In April 2006, a major Nigerian newspaper announced that the Federal Government had disbursed 150 billion naira (N150bn)¹¹ to subsidize companies that import petroleum products, especially kerosene and petrol. The rationale was that such a subsidy was necessary because of the spiraling prices of crude oil—it would ameliorate the declining local supply of petroleum products and ensure a stable domestic pump price. There is no doubt that the increase in the price of crude oil since 2005 led to a corresponding increase in the prices of petroleum products in many countries of the world. This is particularly evident in the United States, where the price of petroleum products ate deep into the pockets of the ordinary citizen but produced astronomical rates of profits for oil companies.

The intent of the Nigerian government to ensure the supply of and stability in the price of very important products such as petrol and kerosene is commendable. But the route it chose to achieve these objectives, through importation and governmental subsidization of the import, is tantamount to a development policy and practice driven by fatalism. Nigerian leaders oftentimes govern from the premise that because they (politicians and bureaucrats) do not know how to do something, no one else in the entire country knows how to do it. There is therefore no need to even explore the possibility of a domestic solution to the problem. The immediate response is to look outside a country of 130 million people, which churns out thousands of university graduates yearly and commits huge amounts of funds to building its human capital through education, for answers.

The Nigerian treasury benefited from the continuously rising prices of crude oil which started in 2005. By February 2007, the government boasted of a strong foreign reserve of more than \$40 billion and optimistically projected increases in this reserve. But the 150 billion naira was too much to allocate to subsidizing the importation of petroleum products into a country where all avenues for domestic production of the commodities had not been exhaustively explored. By August 2006, only four months after the subsidy was implemented, 132 billion (or 88 percent) of the 150 billion naira had been spent and the Petroleum Products Pricing and Regulatory Agency (PPPRA) contemplated asking the Federal Government for an additional 100 billion naira.¹² This speedy depletion of the funds proved that the program was unsustainable.

T. Oneil lamented that because refineries in Nigeria constantly break down, the oil-rich country must import its fuel. But even with importation, petrol stations are often closed for want of supply.¹³ Yet in response to the bouts of fuel scarcity that started in Christmas 2006 and ran into January 2007, the Federal Government preferred to take another simplistic and short-term course: it planned to build

large fuel storage facilities and to subsidize petroleum marketers to construct mega filling stations without first settling the primary and nagging problem of unstable and insufficient production and supply of petroleum products.¹⁴ There may well be no fuel to store in the mega storage capacities and super-size filling stations.

While it is true that local refineries have been ineffective in meeting domestic needs for fuel, this is the outcome of a fatalistic and flawed development policy and practice. Why must production of petrol, kerosene, and other petroleum products in a developing country take place in gigantic high-tech refineries? Importation and subsidization of the import are the response of unimaginative development policy-making and a political leadership with no confidence in its own human resources, no knowledge of how to apply indigenous manpower to the task of national development. But how can political leaders and the citizenry know the capabilities of their trained manpower if the latter is not challenged continually to tackle the problems of society? That certain technological devices and processes do not function efficiently in Nigeria can be partially explained by technical inadequacies of indigenous manpower. More importantly, the incompetence of the executive and legislative branches of government and the resulting lackadaisical governance have contagious negative effects on indigenous bureaucrats and technocrats, who have not been able to make and correct mistakes through an enduring process of learning by doing on the job.

Again, the Nigerian government's failure to exhaust all domestic possibilities and capabilities for satisfying local demand for petroleum products before it rushed to spend inordinate amounts of money on importation of such products is the response of a leadership that wants things the easy way. But history shows us that development is not picked up on a platter of gold. In other words, there is no easy way to achieve development. In fact, the more a country takes the easy way (e.g., by relying on outsiders to manage its strategic resources and provide for its needs), the further away from development it will often be. This is because development is about learning by doing and perfecting production processes and devices through engaging the citizenry in gainful employment. A policy such as the subsidization of importation of petroleum products robs capable citizens of the opportunity to harness their creativity and innovativeness in times of national distress. Hence, citizens are not mobilized to contribute to build strong institutions for national development. The latter finds expression in institutional decline.

But this was not always so. Today, some people view the word "Biafra" as anathema. Something spectacular emerged from that unsuccessful project—Biafra demonstrated that the black man in general and Nigerians in particular are capable of generating technological development if challenged through imaginative public policy. With particular reference to the production of petroleum products in Biafra, E. Arene's first-hand and masterful account of this event is instructive as well as revealing of the magic of human ingenuity under a situation of national distress. According to Arene, because of the blockade of Biafra and the resulting limitations on access to machinery and spare parts, the Biafran Research & Production (RAP) unit could not build conventional fractionating towers essential for refining crude oil. RAP therefore resorted to the method of simple laboratory distillation,¹⁵ producing petrol and kerosene for military and civilian use. Further, RAP helped many

civilian and military formations establish simple refineries scattered around Biafra.¹⁶ Historically, small refineries using a simple distillation process were ubiquitous in nineteenth century America before the age of high-tech, complex refineries.¹⁷

Leadership Fatalism and Institutional Degeneration in Nigeria

One may ask what alternatives the government has, since the country's big and high-tech refineries have been incapable of meeting local demand for petroleum products. The answer to this question rests in having a political leadership that shuns fatalism and embraces a mental model and philosophy of development based on "national self-efficacy." In fact, the modernity school defines individual, group, and national efficacy as the opposite of fatalism. According to A. Bandura, self-efficacy refers to the beliefs people have about their abilities to execute a course of action required to attain designated types of performance.¹⁸ Self-efficacy is thus the power and confidence to produce an intended effect. In development discourse, national self-efficacy denotes the confidence of a nation's leaders especially, and citizens in general, that societal problems and obstacles are soluble and surmountable. Self-efficacy is the belief that the individual or group can exert considerable control over the environment, rather than surrender life and the future to external forces.¹⁹

The efficacious development policymaker dovetails his/her goals and policies to the needs and contexts of the immediate environment he/she intends to change. The resulting policy focuses first on tapping domestic human resources before recourse to those of other societies and powers whose goals and contexts differ from, or may be in contradiction with, those of the local environment. This means that a people must take its destiny in its own hands and avoid falling into a state of helpless dependence on outsiders.²⁰ Subsidy of the importation of petroleum products and similar policies and actions by the Nigerian government are ephemeral, short-term palliatives that undermine the hope of Nigerians for long-term development. Such policies and actions marginalize or sideline the country's human capital from the march to development.

A statement in the news credited Nigerian President Obasanjo with wondering why some people still study sociology and mass communication in the universities instead of studying subjects "relevant to the country's needs."²¹ There is a counter to this question: Why do many Nigerian graduates of mechanical, electrical/electronic and civil engineering, chemistry, mathematics, physics, agriculture, microbiology, economics, business administration, accountancy, computer science, petroleum engineering, geology, architecture, surveying, pharmacy, education, English, and law programs go without jobs for many years after graduation? Does it mean that these disciplines are also irrelevant to the country's needs? Any governing group that consigns a significant majority of its graduates to a protracted and indefinite state of unemployment, as is currently the case with Nigeria, should reassess its status and role as an agent of development. Research has shown that by 1985, graduates in engineering and allied disciplines (e.g., architecture and surveying) were seeking employment as secondary school teachers because they could not find jobs related to

their education.²² In another instance at another forum, President Obasanjo blamed the entire Nigerian university system for the country's high rate of unemployment. The blame no longer was on those who studied sociology and mass communication but on the entire higher education sector and all its disciplines and products.

Many influential observers of the Nigerian education system have rightly commented that the quality of education has drastically declined in the last 25 years. In July 2005, chief executives of several high-profile firms in a joint statement lamented what they called the failure of the Nigerian educational system in recent years. Speaking from first-hand experience as employers of labor, the chief executives unequivocally declared Nigerian graduates unfit for employment because of the poor quality of education they receive from their respective institutions of higher education.²³ Correspondingly, upon her accession to the position of minister of education, Oby Ezekwesili decried the rot in the nation's educational system and declared that it must be completely overhauled for better performance.²⁴ While it is true that the quality of education at all levels has fallen, the failure of the education sector should not be examined in isolation from the litany of failures in other sectors and institutions of society.

The health sector has not fared better in terms of availability of resources such as equipment, medicine, buildings, and even environmental aesthetics. Many general hospitals in the past were repositories of excellence and commanded public confidence. Today, they are in a state of dilapidation because of neglect by those who run them. Those in charge of public health institutions, in turn, point fingers at federal and state governments for not providing the funds necessary to maintain and upgrade the health sector.

The transportation sector is in equally bad condition. Roads full of filth, potholes, crevices, swamps, and outgrowths of grass from nearby forests make land transportation difficult and unpleasant. Most cars on Nigerian roads are used cars, many of them so old that emissions from them expose citizens to health hazards. The media did a good job bringing the deplorable state of Nigerian roads to public view. The print media in particular described the roads using words and phrases such as "dangerous," "scandalous," "a sore thumb," and a metaphor for a failed social contract. One newspaper vividly captured the plight of commuters on the very important Ore-Benin road thusly: "The hopeless and helpless countenances of thousands of Nigerians including pregnant women and babies who have been detained uncomfortably against their will in both rain and shine and fumes from exhaust of diverse vehicles all paint a picture of a flock of sheep without a shepherd."²⁵

The federal aviation system boasted about a fleet of ten jet planes in 1979. But by 1999, it could not account for a single plane. Air travel has become one of the most hazardous undertakings because of the disproportionate number of plane crashes and non-fatal mishaps compared to the proportions of aircrafts that fly in the country's air space.

With all the inadequacies left over from its colonial origin, the once dependable railway system is currently in limbo in many parts of the country. A government policy to revitalize the railway system was initially assigned solely to Chinese companies until Nigerian engineers protested being excluded. The locals were

included in the revitalization endeavor only as a result of their protest. But why did the Nigerian government exclude indigenous engineers in the first place? This is because doing so is consistent with the mentality of external dependence embodied in the concept of *secular transnational fatalism*.

The electricity and water supply has been popularly nicknamed “epileptic” because of its lack of reliability. According to C. Edomarus, the British High Commissioner in Nigeria, Richard Grozney, did not mince words when he talked to journalists about the impact of the state of Nigerian infrastructure, electricity especially, on the national economy. Grozney noted that President Obasanjo’s aggressive diplomatic shuttle to attract foreign direct investment had not yielded the expected result because the country had not gotten its act together in the area of infrastructure. So long as the nation’s energy sector remained comatose, Grozney said, prospective investors would continue to seek out other countries where they would not have to spend so much capital on the provision of energy.²⁶

Still continuing on the topic of sectoral and institutional failures, a stressful business environment suffocates many firms and discourages business start-ups. After the highly results-oriented minister of finance Okonjo-Iweala was reassigned to the ministry of foreign affairs in a cabinet reshuffle, she expressed shock at what she observed in her new unit. There were no official letterheads or envelopes, no functioning photocopy and fax machines. At her maiden meeting with senior staff of the ministry, the reform-minded minister responded to questions from her subordinates on issues “bordering on systemic rot that had eaten deep into the fabric of the ministry thereby lowering the morale of the workforce.”²⁷

Chinua Achebe lamented the brazen misuse of national wealth through corruption by the civilian government in 1979–1983.²⁸ Public sentiment continues to indict the military administrations of 1985–1998 for having elevated corruption to the level of a national culture. In his lucid ethnographic study, D. J. Smith observed that corruption is a common phenomenon that defines the nation, a variable that every citizen takes into account in all interactions with the state and in many other arenas of political, economic, and social life.²⁹ Nigeria has remained at the bottom of the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) of Transparency International since 1996. It made only a marginal move up the scale in 2005, perhaps as a result of the fight against corruption by the Obasanjo government.³⁰ Regardless of what critics may say, the civilian government of Obasanjo exposed corruption as a national social problem.

Armed robbery, ethno-religious conflict, and political violence in Nigeria have escalated to troubling proportions in the past 15 years. Yet law enforcement agencies and other security institutions have not been able to solve the deluge of murders, including the murder of Bola Ige, former attorney general of the country.³¹

The clean cities of the colonial and immediate post-independence days are a thing of the past. Nooks and corners of cities are littered with mountains of waste in present-day Nigeria. The chaos and misery in Lagos were so overwhelming to George Packer that he described them as almost irreversible.³² Just as the Nigerian media invoked critical journalism to expose the inadequacies of Nigerian roads, they did same to x-ray the shameful state of aesthetics in Nigerian cities. The Econ-

omist (cited in *The Guardian*) described Lagos as one of the world's most uninviting cities by just about every negative indicator.³³

L. Onyekakeya lamented the passing of a once-celebrated upscale neighborhood, the Government Reserved Area (GRA), in Ikoyi, Lagos.³⁴ Nwosu exposed the pathetic state of the commercial city of Onitsha thusly: "every inch of the metropolis is being smothered with heaps of garbage and other refuse which at times pile up in the shape of mountains."³⁵ It is not surprising that M. Agboli and C. Ukaegbu had earlier described Onitsha as a monumental case of governmental neglect of a formerly heralded commercial city.³⁶ In the same vein, F. Aina warned that Abuja, Nigeria's gold standard and showcase of urban modernity, was fast becoming a slum. Beyond the gleaming facade of the city center, most parts of the Federal Capital Territory now compete with Lagos in terms of poor infrastructure and chaos, especially at the outskirts of the city.³⁷ Abandoned projects remain uncompleted in various parts of the country. In the past, most Nigerians who studied abroad enthusiastically returned home, took up jobs, and contributed to national development. Presently, most of those who go abroad make no plans to return home, and many more want to leave the country because of a lack of employment and economic and human security.

The list of institutional decline and failure is endless. To single out education as a failed sector when all sectors of national life are bleeding is to misdiagnose the problem. The failure of the education sector is merely a microcosm of the failures of the macro-society. The products of contemporary higher education may be unfit for employment or incapable of managing development, but many of those in government today and in the past 20 years received their higher education in the 1950s through the 1980s, when the quality of education was high. So what, exactly, did that pool of high-quality manpower do with its high-quality skills? Some of them aided the crumbling of the Nigerian socio-economic infrastructure yet now single out the education system as a scapegoat. Therefore, blaming the education system when all the other sub-systems of society are equally in decay demonstrates a lack of understanding or appreciation of the holistic and systemic nature of the development process and development policymaking.

According to a former Minister of Education, speaking in her capacity as the representative of the Federal Government, products of universities of technology should create jobs rather than look for jobs after graduation.³⁸ This expectation presupposes that every graduate of the several universities of technology in Nigeria should establish a private enterprise which will employ labor. Such an expectation ignores the fact that entrepreneurship blossoms only with imaginative policies enacted by political leaders imbued with self-efficacy and devoid of a fatalistic orientation toward societal problems. Upon all the fanfare about the current economic reforms in Nigeria, there is no evidence that an encouraging entrepreneurial condition exists to motivate seasoned and experienced entrepreneurs, much less young graduates entering the economy for the first time. Look at the physical infrastructure (roads, electricity, water supply, telephone) access to loans, interest rates, raw materials, and machinery. None of these essential prerequisites of building a successful entrepreneurial class favors the Nigerian entrepreneur. Yet a govern-

ment that half-heartedly tackles these micro-level problems expects entrepreneurs to work miracles.

Of course, the expectation that entrepreneurs will work miracles to surmount the man-made obstacles accumulated over the years derives from a development philosophy driven by a fatalistic orientation. The latter recently found expression in another situation. As the citizens of Nigeria were gripped in the euphoria of debt relief, the Federal Government solicited and/or accepted financial assistance from foreign institutions under ambiguous conditions (there was a question as to whether the various components of assistance were loans or philanthropic gifts). Some examples include \$50 million from the World Bank to combat the avian flu;³⁹ \$500 million from the African Development Bank for animal and human health;⁴⁰ 15.5 million Euro from the European Commission toward eradication of polio in Kano State;⁴¹ the solicitation of \$180 million from the World Bank for malaria control;⁴² and pleas to international donors to contribute to Nigeria's food security program.⁴³

Other loans in this package include \$200 million from the World Bank to finance the Lagos Metropolitan Development and Governance Project;⁴⁴ a \$2.5 billion loan from China to finance critical infrastructural projects;⁴⁵ and \$272 million from the World Bank to finance power projects. The Action Congress, a political party in Nigeria, chided the Obasanjo government for increasing Nigeria's external loan to the tune of \$5 billion shortly after spending a huge chunk of the oil windfall to pay off previous loans.⁴⁶

It is perplexing that a country with a growing stock of foreign reserve would, so soon after debt relief, go cap in hand to seek or accept these paltry sums from the same institutions that drew it into huge debts in the past. If these transactions and solicitations as published in newspapers are correct, Nigerian leaders will, in no distant future, resort to lamentations and complaints about debt servicing. The debt burden as an excuse for incompetent governance and the resulting developmental failures will return to the front pages of newspapers.

As stated earlier, the subsidy of the importation of petroleum products without exhausting all the possibilities at the domestic level is a policy driven by fatalism. The government's justification of the action goes as follows: existing refineries always break down soon after repairs, and the difficulty and delays in securing spare parts poses a constraint to preventive maintenance of the refineries. Therefore, to ensure the supply of petroleum products to the suffering people of Nigeria, the "benevolent government" pays importers to encourage them to import the products without too much financial burden. This explanation is morally plausible because the policy is intended to ameliorate the suffering of the citizenry. But as the history of development shows, a morally plausible policy is not necessarily a developmentally efficacious strategy in the long run.

One may argue that the Federal Government has granted licenses to qualified indigenous businesses to establish refineries, thereby liberalizing the sector and ensuring an increased supply of petroleum products when those refineries become operational.⁴⁷ That is a commendable policy for increasing supply in the short term. I say "in the short term" for two reasons. First, the prospective private indigenous refineries most likely will import their technical skills and machinery from abroad

or acquire turnkey factories that generally contribute little to building indigenous human capital. Second, many industries owned by indigenous private entrepreneurs are known to atrophy after start up for a variety of reasons, including a turbulent business environment,⁴⁸ managerial bottlenecks,⁴⁹ and succession problems.⁵⁰ There is also the well-known problem of obtaining spare parts and machinery for the efficient functioning of the production process.

For example, in 1991, I personally studied managerial practice and enterprise survival in 20 firms owned by indigenous entrepreneurs in southeast Nigeria. By the time I revisited the firms in 2001, about 75 percent of them had either closed down, declined beyond recognition, or been leased to multinational corporations. The liberalization of ownership of refineries will create jobs in the oil refining sector. But its capacity to build skilled human capital for the sector is not as sustainable and effective as an alternative approach and policy, stated below, which I call “imaginative policymaking” for an effective and durable development.

Leadership Efficacy and Imaginative Policymaking for Human Development

A policy driven by national self-efficacy and geared toward the development and effective utilization of indigenous human capital in the petroleum refining sector should include a component that poses a challenge to Nigerian institutions of higher education (universities and polytechnics in particular). In the scenario envisioned, the Federal Government solicits proposals from tertiary institutions, individually or in consortia, to design and construct infrastructures for refining petroleum. The government selects the best proposal from each of six geo-political zones, assures the winners a steady supply of crude oil, and challenges them to produce petroleum products from the crude oil. The academic mini-refineries will be steadily monitored by resident foreign observers to ensure program transparency. Government promises an attractive incentive to successful proposals as follows: Institutions, or consortia of institutions, that refine crude oil into good quality petrol and kerosene, with greater technical efficiency, will receive generous financial, technical, and moral support from the federal and the relevant state governments to expand and upgrade their refineries. The quality of the petroleum products from the academic refineries will be tested by selling them to the Nigerian public in a sample of cities across the country.

There are several potential benefits of this program. It enhances the development and consolidation of indigenous human capital in the country’s most strategic sector because the academic refineries will serve as avenues of practical experience to students in relevant disciplines. It will increase the supply of petroleum products in the long term. It will motivate the higher education sector, which now finds a practical role in the development process, to seek more avenues to contribute to national development. It will reduce the amount of foreign exchange spent on importation of petroleum products. Expansion of the academic refineries will set the stage for Nigeria to earn value-added foreign currency through the export of petroleum products to other countries. Imaginative policymaking ties policies to

the strengths, weaknesses, and needs of the social, economic, and physical environment. The high number of tertiary educational institutions, the epileptic performance of existing refineries, and the high demand for petroleum products constitute strengths, weaknesses, and needs, respectively.

Take another example: the link between the physical environment and imaginative public policy. During my first study of enterprise management and survival in Nigeria in 1991, I encountered a young general manager (GM) of a blossoming paint manufacturing firm. Highly optimistic about the future, the GM projected that his then-young firm would survive, grow, expand, and diversify in ten years. He challenged me to return to observe his successes. I revisited the firm in 2001 and 2002 and found that the company had experienced significant decline in a number of key indicators of enterprise success: there was significant decline in the number of workers; the quantity of paint produced and the volume of activity in the business complex had visibly reduced; and company profits had declined. All these found expression in the subdued mood of the few workers and managers who remained. The mood of the rank and file in 2001 and 2002 was indeed less ebullient and less exuberant than the mood of their counterparts in 1991. The company compound was desolate.

In an interview in 2002, the GM, now Executive Director, lamented the decline of his company, saying, "Prof., do you know that Nigerians do not paint their houses twice in their lifetime? They only paint during construction and no more. Construction has declined for many years, and the paint market is very slow and sluggish." To verify this statement, I started to look at the condition of houses in the various towns I visited that year, namely, Aba, Onitsha, Enugu, Owerri, Umua-hia, Awka, Nsukka, Lagos, and some parts of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. I also observed houses in Port Harcourt in 2004. I found that the majority of the houses in these towns were dirty, dilapidated, and in generally poor condition.

Imagine a bill of the National Assembly, or state assemblies, couched in a philosophy of environmental aesthetics that all homeowners and landlords must paint their houses every five years, starting from the time of the passage of the bill. All paints must be manufactured in Nigeria. The government must not issue licenses for the importation of paints. Local firms are given breaks on import duties to facilitate the import of raw materials. Foreign businesses that wish to benefit from this policy are encouraged and given incentives to establish paint factories in Nigeria to create jobs for the teeming unemployed. This step is important because jobs and gainful employment are at the heart of development. The government sets up a monitoring system to make sure that every aspect of the bill is implemented as intended. If effectively implemented, the bill will expand paint manufacturing and create many more jobs in that sector because of a continuing demand for paints. It will also create secondary jobs through high demand for painters. It promotes the philosophy of national self-efficacy, attaches environmental aesthetics to job creation, achieves a multiplier effect in a sub-sector of the economy, and discourages the dependence on outside forces inherent in a fatalistic development philosophy. This bill, which links public policy to the physical environment, is another example of imaginative policymaking.

Some zealous scholar-democrat would question why citizens in a democratic society should be “forced” by law to paint their houses rather than do so by the principles of voluntarism and free will consistent with democratic ideals. Such a criticism ignores the fact that the established democracies of the world are the most coercive on environmental aesthetics through their zoning laws and building codes.⁵¹ These zoning and building laws very often are tied to the economic development of cities. In other words, issues of environmental order and aesthetics cannot be left to the invocation of self-cultivation, personal virtue, and voluntarism. Even in Confucian societies, where behavior guided by self-cultivation and inner virtue is deemed superior to that directed by formal law, politicians still enact and enforce laws to maintain environmental order.

Further, imagine that Nigeria wants to expand its plastics industry through imaginative policymaking. It can do so through a public policy that increases demand for plastic products. It can invoke one of its present environmental weaknesses—the mountains of solid waste that are haphazardly dumped, without proper packaging, in many cities in the country. A bill of the National Assembly and/or state assemblies that requires all individuals and households to pack their solid waste in plastic bags before taking them to a designated dump is appropriate here. Relevant municipal workers load the bags of waste into trucks and deposit them at designated landfills. If properly implemented and managed, this bill will increase the demand for plastic bags and the plastics from which the bags are made. It will therefore create more jobs because firms will employ more hands to meet the high and continuing demand for plastic bags. The practice of packaging individual and household wastes in bags will relieve the waste collectors of the current arduous task of using spades to transfer the waste from dumps into trucks. Hence, this bill also has the capacity to reduce human suffering among waste collectors.

According to D. Leonard and S. Strauss, effective development managers have several characteristics: “they have a well defined mission that they want to accomplish, are activist and entrepreneurial in their pursuit, devote considerable attention to the policies affecting them, and attempt to serve the public interest. They see internal administration as grounded in a larger set of purposes and feel some responsibility for factors outside their organization.”⁵² These qualities of effective development managers are equally applicable to effective development policymakers. And effective development policymakers would do well to see the intricate connections between the strengths, weaknesses, and needs of society and public policy.

The three examples of imaginative policymaking outlined above, and many more not mentioned here, indicate that the macro-level policies (rationalizing money supply and the banking sector, increasing foreign reserves, debt relief, paying off foreign debts, stabilizing foreign exchange and interest rates, reducing inflation, privatizing state-owned enterprises, or even the all-important policy of fighting corruption) which attracted the attention of the Obasanjo administration will not and cannot scratch the surface of Nigeria’s social and economic problems without complementary, down-to-earth micro-level policies that have direct links with the social, economic, and physical environment. In fact, Nigeria’s blueprint for development, known as the National Economic Empowerment and Develop-

ment Strategy (NEEDS) is a macro-oriented policy document. In and of itself, however, NEEDS is a passive strategy that cannot energize imaginative policymaking unless policymakers pay equal attention to micro-economic policies.

Michael Porter is right: Unless there is appropriate improvement at the micro-economic level, political and macroeconomic reforms will not bear fruit.⁵³ For Porter, “hard work is important but just as important is the type of work done. Initiative is important, but not all initiative is productive. Education is crucial but so is the type of education sought and what the education is used to accomplish. Saving is good, but only if the savings are deployed to productive uses.”⁵⁴ By implication, Porter is saying that human and material resources should be guided and directed for productive developmental outcomes. That is the role this paper has assigned to imaginative leadership. N. Kleniewski put it very succinctly: “Macroeconomic policy is a general policy rather than a specific policy. Comparing it to medicine, it is more of a tonic that keeps the patient well, rather than a surgical procedure that corrects a problem in a specific organ.”⁵⁵ Consequently, prosperity ultimately depends on improving the micro-economic foundations of competition.⁵⁶

As textbook and freelance definitions indicate, micro-economic policies tap the optimizing behaviors of industries, firms, labor, and consumers. Individuals are seen as suppliers of labor, capital, and as ultimate consumers of the final product. Hence, imaginative policymaking aims to increase consumer demand and employment levels. It also helps to expand capital in specific firms, industries, and sectors of the economy, consistent with the examples stated above.

What does a \$43 billion foreign reserve, the official figure as of February 17, 2007, mean to Nigerians when the cost of various food items continues to rise rather than fall? A 50kg bag of rice cost 1, 200 naira in 1999. The same bag of rice cost more than 6,000 naira in 2006, with no corresponding increase in the earning capacity of most Nigerians.⁵⁷ Many citizens cannot be guaranteed meat protein for weeks or months, and kerosene remains unaffordable to the isolated and constantly struggling woman in the village. In fact, overall human development has slipped, irrespective of the growing foreign reserve. This is a mark of underdevelopment.

Longitudinal data on human development show that Nigeria ranked 146 out of 174 countries on the Human Development Index (HDI) in 1999.⁵⁸ By that ranking, Nigeria was ahead of 27 other countries with low human development. But in 2005, it ranked 158 out of 177 and was ahead of 19 other countries with low human development. And in 2006, it ranked 159 out of 177, this time ahead of only 18 other countries on the low human development category. In 2006, countries such as Senegal, Gambia, Kenya, Lesotho, Swaziland, Cameroon, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Togo, Ghana, Eritrea, and even war-torn Sudan and Congo ranked higher than Nigeria on the human development index.⁵⁹ Recall that 1999 was a year of low foreign reserve, while 2006 was a year of high reserve. At a workshop on Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Reform in Abuja, the head of delegation of the European Commission to Nigeria stated that Nigeria ranked third among countries with the highest number of poor people in the world. Only India and China were ahead of Nigeria in this ranking.⁶⁰

According to the 2005 and 2006 human development reports, mentioned

above, life expectancy plummeted to 43.4 years; there is a 46 percent chance that people will not survive to age 40, and the probability of surviving to age 65 is only 32 percent for both males and females. Some 70 percent of the population lives on under \$1.00 a day, while 91 percent live on under \$2.00 a day. Infant, child, and maternal mortality are still high relative to the situation in some less-endowed countries. The Human Development Index measures what really matters in life, namely, the overall well-being of people. These data, therefore, indicate that stockpiling foreign reserves in and of itself has no effect on the quality of life and well-being without imaginative policies to commit national earnings to productive use. This is consistent with what I call "Development 101," i.e., the well-known cliché that development is not necessarily about growth in gross national income (GNI) and/or gross domestic product (GDP), or the expansion of national savings. Rather, development is about improving the quality of life through food security, education, healthcare, gainful employment, and consolidating people's purchasing power to acquire the basic needs that sustain and prolong life. Therefore national savings and incomes are not ends in themselves but means to an end.

The executive branch of Nigeria's nascent democracy is not the only domain of culpability for the paucity of imaginative development philosophy and policy in Nigeria. Blame also goes to an uneducated and unpatriotic military that long ruled Nigeria but did not understand the intricate connection between the domestic economy and the world system. Or if they did, they used it to serve their selfish interests. Presently, more blame goes to the national and state legislators who claim to be educated but do not seem to have a clue as to what development is all about or seem consumed by matters related to their class interest.

The lessons of imaginative policymaking are two-fold: First, the concept of public-private partnership often invoked by Nigerian commentators gives an erroneous impression that for a partnership to exist, government and private sector agencies must co-execute or co-invest in specific material projects such as housing and road construction, urban revitalization, water supply, etc. That is only one part of the partnership. In fact, a lot of what public-private partnership entails is vicarious or indirect, through well-thought-out, demand-oriented public policy to energize the private sector. Also, government's view of job creation always focuses on the actual number of jobs which government is able or plans to create in the public sector. That is also only one, and in fact a small, part of the equation of job creation because government can only create a limited number jobs to avoid a bloated public sector of redundant workers. Therefore, imaginative policymaking enables government to make micro-policies that seek to fuel demand in specific sub-sectors of the economy, an act which correspondingly fuels demand for labor in the relevant sub-sectors.

Imaginative development policy requires that policymakers first look into the society, seeking and exhausting the possibilities therein, before looking outward for solutions to problems. It requires policymakers to develop and challenge indigenously human capital in all sectors, give indigenous human capital a chance to make and correct their mistakes through trial and error, and tie economic development policies to the strengths, weaknesses, and needs of the social, economic, and physi-

cal environment. Imaginative policymakers must be aware that natural resources (oil, solid minerals, forest, and agricultural products) cannot make Nigeria a rich and wealthy country. Instead, real national wealth and prosperity in the midst of a continuously growing population rests in the combination of national innovativeness, high productivity, and domestic and international competitiveness with all or the majority of the citizens actively participating in the development process.

Under imaginative policymaking, effort is focused on policies that multiply resources rather than on those that simply distribute them. When an existing policy or practice fails, imaginative development policymakers continue to ask the question, Is there no other way? Such a question challenges the society, nurtures national self-efficacy, and creates conditions conducive to building strong institutions for improving human development. Rushing to seek solutions outside will remain only a palliative, governed by a philosophy of development dominated by fatalism and will therefore not provide a lasting cure to Nigeria's development problems. This raises a critical question: How can Nigerian policymakers eschew fatalism, cultivate self-efficacy, and invoke their imaginations in policymaking so that they can become real leaders rather than titular leaders or mere occupants of leadership positions?

Voluminous literature on individual performance indicates that self-efficacy is not biological. Rather, it is a trait that can be learned, just as entrepreneurial behavior can be learned. Self-efficacy can be shaped through social influence.⁶¹ A. Bandura observed that verbal coaching and information that a person receives about performance norms, future expectations, and past performance jointly influence self-efficacy.⁶² Garland and Adkinson, as cited in P. Earley, found that self-efficacy was increased by simply telling subjects during training before a task, "You can do it."⁶³ If formal training can increase people's self-efficacy, it can also increase the use of their imaginations. Consequently, Nigerian leaders should receive education and on-the-job training on building self-efficacy and applying their imagination to matters relating to public policy. This can be achieved in several ways using the services of existing institutions.

The Nigerian Institute of Strategic and Policy Studies (NIPSS) in Kuru Plateau State trains high-level public officials in public policy and administration. But fatalistic policymaking among public officials in leadership positions has continued, despite NIPSS' longevity and pioneer status as a training institution for public officials. It is not clear whether NIPSS includes the development of self-efficacy and imaginative policymaking in its training programs. If not, it should expand its program to include the training of federal and state legislators and officers in federal and state executive branches to acquire these leadership qualities. It also means that personnel in NIPSS will need to undergo orientation on the meaning, sources, and processes of imaginative policymaking and building self-efficacy. This will prepare them to impart such skills to public officials.

A second approach entails localizing the training of legislators and officials of the executive branch of federal and state governments. Nearly every state in Nigeria is host to a federal or state university or polytechnic. One university in the state can establish a center for public policy. The center will provide on-campus training

on self-efficacy and imaginative policymaking for the category of public officials examined in this paper.

It is also possible to bring the training program to the legislative environment as a third alternative. Here, academics and other individuals with expertise, competences, and insights in public policy provide training to elected officials in state houses of assembly and those in the executive branch. The national assembly and the federal executive branch can use the services of the University of Abuja in the Federal Capital Territory.

The fourth approach involves the creation of regional centers of public policy education in each of the geo-political zones of the country. State governments in each zone select a viable higher institution as the center for public policy education. Experts in public policy and related subjects in other institutions of higher education and other agencies in other states are invited to deliver lectures and lead workshop sessions at the zonal center. This approach is preferred above the other three because it has the capacity to bring policymakers and policy implementers of each zone into one learning environment. Legislators and officials of the executive branch from various states of the zone meet in one venue, interact, and share their experiences, problems, successes, failures, new insights, innovations, and drawbacks in public policymaking and implementation. Whichever of these approaches is selected, the program should be scheduled so that it does not interfere with the regular work functions of participants.

Content of training should include formal readings on theories, paradigms, and case studies of public policymaking drawn from within and outside Nigeria. It should also include how the policymaker can cultivate self-efficacy, develop confidence in indigenous human and material resources, and inspire trust and confidence in the Nigerian citizenry. Practical examples of how the strengths, weaknesses, and needs of the society can excite the imaginations of policymakers for transformational public policies should be a central part of the program. For the long-term, however, institutions of higher education should consciously tailor their curricular and pedagogical efforts to enable students to cultivate self-efficacy and imaginative policy skills. Participants of public policy education should be made to see themselves as the people's entrepreneurs—poised to seek new ways of conceptualizing existing societal problems or finding unique ways of tackling old problems, creatively invoking new ideas to maximize the usefulness of national resources to society. Implementation of public policy education for both policymakers and students will enable Nigeria to have *leaders* rather than people who occupy leadership positions in name only and not in practice. When that happens, imaginative public policy anchored in self- and national efficacy will supplant its fatalistic counterpart for effective national development.

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