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Political Reform, Financial Aid, and Technology Integration: The Three Ways to End Nigerian Poverty

In the large country of Nigeria, located on the West Coast of Africa and home to a population of over 210 million (Worldometer), six people fall into extreme poverty every minute (Bloomberg 1). According to a study conducted by the Borgen Project, a non-profit dedicated to ending world hunger and poverty, the leading cause of Nigeria's poor economic status is government corruption (Borgen Magazine). Despite widespread awareness of the issue, little has changed. The United States and its allies must take initiative and address government corruption vehemently to make a major change in the dwindling status of the Nigerian people. A plan to end government corruption involving political reform, improved financial aid distribution, and integration of new technology is paramount to ending the crippling poverty in Nigeria.

Nigeria has long been a country controlled by foreign powers. As early as the 16th century, foreign empires ruled Nigeria, namely the Songhai Empire, Saifawa Dynasty, and Sokoto Caliphate. These empires desired Nigerian land for its natural resources, like iron, and its people for the slave trade occurring at the time. Due to the monopolies that these empires set up, and later those established by the British, a large power gap was entrenched in Nigerian culture. Tribal leaders would often cede control or rights to their property to European colonizers, agreeing to arrangements they did not understand. Furthermore, they didn't have much of a choice; there are multiple documentations where Nigerian leaders were forced with threats of violence if they didn't agree to sign trade agreements with the British. While the Nigerian population was likely against European control, the superior British weaponry and technology would make resistance futile. Rulers would often find themselves wealthier and wealthier as they sold off their people and resources, while low-class Nigerians suffered from poor financial, health, and social conditions coupled with the constant possibility of enslavement. Those in the government were synonymous with the wealthy high-class, controlling everything about the country from the population, economics, foreign relations, and more. And thus, an unequal power gap was created on the basis of nepotism and a government monopolization of the economy..

As time went on, the power gap persisted. From 1885-1914, the Scramble for Africa occurred, effectively signifying the virtually nonexistent power the Nigerian people had. This historical event was catalyzed by the Berlin Conference, a meeting between world leaders on how to partition the African continent into different territories for European economic and political control. However, this meeting included no Nigerian leaders or representatives (or any African representatives in general), cementing Nigeria's powerlessness.

Subsequently, Britain retained a full sphere of influence over Nigeria in 1885. Along with this, the British went on to charter the Royal Niger Company in 1886. The effect of both the company rule from the Royal Niger Company and the everlasting British sphere of influence was both positive and negative; much of the country modernized with the integration of Western technology and economic systems. While modernization improved the standard of living in Nigeria (along with Africa in general), the power gap and government corruption remained.

During both World War 1 and World War 2, Nigeria fought for the allies as a British colony. Although Nigeria wasn't in direct conflict with any of the Central Powers in World War 1 or the Axis Powers in World War 2, they were still forced to participate. In addition to being a colonial asset of Britain, the

Nigerian government was also coerced to providing the allies with supplies and soldiers through exchanging commodities and resources with them. As Andrew Stewart described in his WW2 book “The First Victory,” African soldiers’ roles quickly shifted from defending their homes in the colonies to going on the offensive, attacking Japanese positions. By the end of the war, over 45,000 Nigerian soldiers had been expended in what ended as a successful campaign (Stewart). Regardless, Nigerian lives were lost for its’ parent country Britain, which following the war still very much controlled the country.

By October of 1960, about fifteen years after the conclusion of World War 2, Nigeria had finally gained independence. However, the power gap and government corruption remained defining traits of the country. Parliamentary disagreements were common between the Igbo and Yoruba ethnic groups, as well as different religious parties (Nwanze). By the time the Nigerian First Republic was founded in 1963, multiple instances of rigged elections, anarchy, and uncontrolled violence had occurred in the country, resulting in civil unrest and riots.

For decades, oil and natural gas had been the main exports from Nigeria. Even today, the oil industry makes up an estimated 90 percent of the Nigerian export economy (Statista). The global trade for Nigeria’s natural resources has also existed for generations, forcing Nigeria into a heavy dependence on its oil industry. Between the late 1950s and the 1960s, Nigeria gradually grew more and more involved with foreign oil corporations. The combination of a large supply of oil in Nigeria and a virtual government monopoly over the oil industry paved the way for Nigeria to become Africa’s leading oil producer (Statista). With this wealth, however, very little was done to subsidize and compensate the general population, and much of it accumulated at the highest echelons of Nigerian society.

Time and time again, Nigeria’s history has pointed to instances of government corruption leading to unequal wealth distribution. Whether it was through malignant European intervention or resource mismanagement, the long-standing corruption has brought poverty to the Nigerian people.

In 2019, the United States National Bureau of Statistics released a study highlighting the severity of poverty in Nigeria. The study reported that about 83 million Nigerians (roughly 40% of the population) were financially below the poverty line (World Food Bank). To put this into context, the poverty line in Nigeria is a mere \$381.75 a year per family (National Bureau of Statistics). As a result, Nigeria overtook India as the largest rate of people living in extreme poverty (Borgen Magazine).

As for the other average Nigerian household statistics, the numbers are equally abysmal. The average Nigerian household population is 5 and most families have as much as 3-5 children (AFS-USA). Possibly due to the high child population among other factors, Nigeria has a 117.2 in 1,000 child mortality rate, more than 18 times higher than the United States rate (Knoema). Also considering the average household population, that leaves about \$76 per person, a year. Undeniably, this is not enough money to support sustainable, healthy, and progressive lives in Nigeria. This is evident in Nigeria’s life expectancy of about 54 years, whilst the world average is an estimated 73 years (Worldometer).

Besides oil and natural gas, Nigeria also has zinc, gas, tin, iron ore, coal, limestone, lead, and arable land (OPEC). Despite the variety and capability to diversify the economy, very little reform has been passed in Nigeria. Beyond the economic sides of the country though are Nigeria’s rich culture: elaborate arts, inventive entertainment, special foods, engaging sports, and spiritual rituals (Britannica). These unique traditions accentuate the need to protect and aid Nigeria’s struggling population.

Worldwide financial aid to Nigeria certainly exists. Annually, Nigeria ranks ninth in the entire world in terms of average annual foreign aid received by the United States at about \$793 million (Concern USA).

Out of this sum, an estimated \$362 million are spent towards humanitarian efforts, \$294 million are spent towards health and population efforts, \$59 million are directed towards governance efforts, and the remaining sum is divided into agriculture, administrative, education, and infrastructure campaigns (USAID).

Contrary to the extremely high financial aid dedicated towards Nigeria and the benefits it implies, the relationship is inverse. According to researcher Juliette Lyons, as foreign aid increased, the growth rate slowed. The study shows that in 1990, the Aid and Growth in Africa percentage was about 14% with a GDP per Capita of about 5. However, in the middle of the decade, the Aid and Growth in Africa percentage rose to about 16%, yet the GDP per Capita fell to about 3 (World Development Indicators Online). As Lyons explains, “Instead of drastically improving the living conditions of the 600 million people who live below the poverty line, this aid makes the rich richer, the poor poorer and hinders economic growth in the region, not to mention catalyzing the vicious cycle of corruption” continuing “foreign aid simply reinforces the amount of resources available to already corrupt specific elite groups of people, thus tipping or keeping the balance of power into the hands of the executive branch of government.” (Lyon 1)

Although the United States does try to distribute aid to lower-income populations in Nigeria, their efforts remain unsuccessful. “The money is not distributed evenly among the population or used to promote growth and to help the poor but is instead used on military equipment, white elephant projects, dishonest procurements, etc.” (Lyon 1) The everlasting cycle of the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer continues.

Even today, Nigeria suffers the consequences of government corruption. Along with high poverty, the country is attacked by rampant HIV/AIDs, the recent COVID pandemic, and high food insecurity (CDC). Food insecurity specifically has been especially pertinent in the last four decades because of currency devaluation, neo-liberal economic policies that favor the rich, and lack of government economic intervention (African Research Review).

Food insecurity, poverty, government corruption, and lack of effective financial aid lead Nigeria into an unsustainable future. As children continue to lack the nutrition they need, the likelihood of the new generation being able to single-handedly solve poverty in Nigeria seems nearly impossible. To address the problem of poverty and eliminate government corruption, a campaign involving political reform, financial aid, or technology integration could be vital to a better Nigeria.

Firstly, political reform is a tangible solution. Instead of simply devoting money to Nigeria, foreign arbitration is necessary to ensure fair elections. In multiple instances before, election fixing has been a common occurrence in Nigeria that has been negative for the country. To be sure that government corruption is as limited as possible when it comes to elections, the United States must send three types of people to regulate Nigeria’s politics. One way to regulate political conditions is to send legal attorneys and private investigators tasked to investigate every candidate, ensuring no history of embezzlement or extortion. The United States must also commit to offering military and security aid to all candidates to ensure the safety of potential officials. In addition, the United States should offer educators or political experts to Nigeria to ensure all Nigerians are fully aware and educated of their political system. While these measures at a first glance may seem like an overreach on the American government, a drastic measure to fix the crippling government corruption is necessary. The negative consequences of intervention and political reform could be initial public disapproval, as a direct foreign intervention hasn’t been used since the British centuries before (implying negative connotations towards the actions, despite the real aim of the intervention). However, the possible positive results of American intervention in

Nigerian politics outweigh the negatives. To maintain the safety, security, and legitimacy of Nigerian governance, political reform is a necessary step and foreign intervention is required.

Secondly, improved financial aid could decrease government corruption and poverty. As covered before, Nigeria receives about \$793 million in financial aid per year from the United States. The clear problem is government corruption; money sent to impoverished Nigerians is never received because the government is wrongfully taking most of the financial aid. Instead of increasing the financial aid the United States provides, the US should aim to ensure the right people are receiving the money. Currently, less than \$78 million are devoted to a four-part miscellaneous budget containing agriculture, administrative, education, and infrastructure campaigns within the United States financial aid to Nigeria (USAID). On average, that leaves roughly 19.5 million dollars per funding sector. Increasing the infrastructure and administration to a value suitable to ensure every Nigerian can reach his or her aid safely would solve both the problem of poverty and government corruption. It addresses poverty because instead of getting money taken by the Nigerian government, Nigerians are directly funded by certified American distributors working on behalf of the financial aid act. It also makes government corruption extremely difficult to continue because malignant government organizations taking peoples' financial aid can no longer self-sustain. On the other hand, the plan can also provide security for those in danger of being confiscated of financial aid immediately by the government. With the plan of implementing an improved financial aid system, Nigeria's poverty and government corruption elimination efforts can be significantly strengthened.

Lastly, the integration of new technology can help to solve poverty in Nigeria. Currently, funds sent through the UN or the United States are outsourced to local agencies. According to Warya Yusuf, ex-Project Coordinator of LNFO, Local NGOs funded by large organizations like the FAO or the World Food Programme are inefficient with their spendings. Yusuf jokes, "If you ask the UN to donate computers to a school in Africa, they will send 15 second-hand computers on a private jet and the fuel spent will be 10x the cost of the computers donated" (Yusuf). He asserts that even if funding is put towards a helpful initiative, like population research (surveys), the funding is proportionally too high, wasting financial aid to local NGOs. The integration of technology can reduce this problem. Technology like plows, tractors, GPS systems, and agricultural drones can help end poverty in Nigeria. Very little of the US financial aid to Nigeria budget is reported to be dedicated to buying farming equipment, yet this might be one of the best solutions. Farming equipment integration in Nigeria can help alleviate the extreme dependence on the oil industry, diversify job economics (using the available arable land in Nigeria), produce more food for Nigerians, generate capital for farmers, and also reduce funding towards corrupt or wasteful NGO projects. By requiring NGOs to buy farming technology, the poverty issue can be significantly reduced, living conditions would undoubtedly improve, and government corruption would be diminished.

In conclusion, the application of any and/or all of these plans can result in significant positive effects for Nigeria. Nigerians have suffered from government corruption and crippling poverty for decades, with foreign aid coming to no avail. But with political reform, improved financial aid, and technology integration, these issues of poverty and government corruption can be eliminated. The United States and her allies must take initiative to enact massive steps to preserve Nigerian culture and lives before it's too late. With the incorporation of these plans or similar in tandem with international cooperation in Nigeria, a new generation of plentiful nutrition and positive political change can be raised.

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