

# Historicizing Development: Nigeria's 1945 Colonial Plan

by

Bekeh Utietiang, Ph.D.

butietiang@wju.edu

Department of History, Wheeling Jesuit University  
Wheeling, West Virginia

## Abstract

In Africa, the period after the Second World War was marked by expansive development policies and practices. Development had a dual purpose of responding to colonial poverty and giving a new lease of life to empire. This paper historicizes the planning process that led to Nigeria's Ten-Year Plan of Development. It challenges us to rethink why development has failed in Africa. The paper invites the readers to consider the ideological and material interests that colonial powers had in Africa and how that informed the planning blueprints and implementation of the Nigerian plan.

**Keywords:** Nigeria, development, colonial office, colonies, Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940.

## Introduction

The Great Depression changed Britain's thinking toward its overseas colonies. It exposed the contradictions of the colonial state. The economies of the colonies were not dependent on internal consumption but on external trade. For this reason, "the world economic depression that began in 1929 exposed the contradictions and tensions inherent in European colonial rule. Changes began to gather pace and gradually assumed a new complexion in the wake of the crisis."<sup>1</sup> European colonial rule had presented itself as a benevolent mission through which 'backward' Africans were to be 'civilized.' However, it was an exploitative mission. The economic relations between the colonizing powers and Africa were built upon the exploitation of the natural and human resources of the colonial people. The products originating from Africa were sold in the international market and the capital generated was used to further their mission in Africa.

The colonial state did provide limited social benefits such as medical services, water, education and sanitation in urban areas. During the depression, even these limited services became extinct because of fallen commodity prices and the inability of European nations to generate the revenues needed for the day-to-day administration of their colonies. Since the colonies were expected to be fiscally self-sufficient, the colonial administrators responded by retrenching staff, broadening the tax base and suspending public work projects.<sup>2</sup> As horrifying as colonial rule itself was, the global economic malaise created conditions in the colonies that became embarrassing to the whole colonial project. Critics argued that these deteriorating conditions “were evidence of years of complacency, neglect and exploitation.”<sup>3</sup>

The extreme measures adopted by the colonial states in response to the depression did not go unnoticed by the colonial peoples. Their response came in the form of riots and other mass actions such as “The Women’s War” of 1929 in Nigeria and the 1935 Copperbelt Strike in Northern Rhodesia. These events in the colonies received wide negative international media coverage in newspapers such as the *New York Times* and the *Daily Express*.<sup>4</sup> In Britain, the Christian Socialists and the Independent Labour Party, which traditionally had been critical of colonial rule, together with the Fabian Society influenced the Labour Party to respond strongly to the social welfare needs of the colonial people. The growing criticism of colonial rule within and outside of Britain and the crisis in the colonies evoked a response from the British government in the form of the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940 (CD&W). This Act marked a major shift in colonial development policy. With this Act, the British government placed importance on tackling the problem of colonial poverty. Alleviating colonial poverty became a major goal designed to inoculate Britain from the United States’ critique of colonial rule. After the Second World War, this Act was significantly expanded in 1945.

## **Setting the Guidelines for Development**

The Governor of Nigeria, Sir Bernard Bourdillon, was excited about the passage of the 1940 Act. He had been instrumental to the vigorous debates that were taking place at the Colonial Office on the nature of the Act. In April of 1939, he sent a long dispatch to the Colonial Office blasting “the established notions of financial self-sufficiency and damned the Colonial Development Act [of 1929] for its inefficacy. He lamented the problems of poor territories like Nigeria which, were burdened by debts, could not raise enough extra local revenue to meet the interest on new loans or to face the recurrent expenditure which development works often entailed.”<sup>5</sup> His criticisms centered on the structure of the 1929 Act. It was structured in a way that a loan or a grant was made directly to a specific project or grants were to defray interests on loans that the colony had raised. Colonies already saddled with heavy debt burden could not really draw from the funds made available through the Act. As D. J. Morgan writes, “The Nigerian Government had felt unable from the outset to add to its heavy debt burden, when there was no certainty that the ability to bear the burden would improve.

So assistance for major schemes as in Nigeria and elsewhere of a kind which they sometimes could not afford to accept.”<sup>6</sup> Bourdillon did not want the 1940 Act to suffer the same structural problems as did the 1929 Act and he concluded his dispatch by making a few proposals. He requested that development loans should be granted by London on reduced interest rates and the development of the departments of agriculture, forestry, veterinary, geological survey and co-operatives be fully financed by the Imperial Government.<sup>7</sup>

The idea of a colonial development program that would expand upon social services in the colonies was exciting for Bourdillon. His excitement is understandable because this was the first time that the British imperial government committed substantial financial aid to the colonies for their development and welfare. He had long disdained the doctrine of financial self-sufficiency that was the hallmark of colonial governance and administration. When parliament passed the legislation, he wasted no time in promoting it among his officials and asking the various Residents of the provinces to submit proposals for development. The Colonial Office did not provide much guidance, nor did Bourdillon provide his Residents guidelines on how to proceed. The Residents in turn asked for statements of needs from the departments and district officers. These initial proposals were ambitious and not very well planned. However, they began a process of thinking within the Nigerian colonial state on how to make effective use of the financial resources available through the Colonial Development and Welfare Act.

In the middle of 1943, two colonial officials Gerard Clauson and Sydney Caine were tasked with the responsibility of creating a committee that will advise the Secretary of State for the Colonies on development in Britain’s colonial territories. This committee had the responsibility of bringing together “experts economists and important businesspersons with knowledge of colonial areas and put them in dialogue with the most competent young economic experts at the Colonial Office.”<sup>8</sup> In September of 1943, the Colonial Office established the Colonial Economic Advisory Committee. It was only after the formation of this body that guidelines were written on development planning in the colonies. These guidelines encouraged the formation of economic advisory committees in the colonies.<sup>9</sup> In compliance with these new guidelines, the Nigerian colonial state established the Advisory Committee on Economic Development and Social Welfare in August of 1943. The committee assisted in coordinating the different proposals that would later form the bulk of the ten-year development plan.

At this time, Lagos was the administrative center of the Nigerian colony and it was only proper that the headquarters of this new committee was in the city. However, the vast size of the colonial territory demanded that planning needed to move beyond Lagos to the local level and important inputs should be drawn from those who were at the frontlines of the colony. These better understood the local needs or economic problems. Thus, the Nigerian administration established provincial development committees in each of the twenty-three provinces of Nigeria. These committees were comprised of both official and nonofficial members. The official members were heads of departments while the nonofficial members, who were mainly Nigerians, were chosen by the Residents to represent the different interest groups.<sup>10</sup>

The devolution of development planning from the central administration to the provinces was an important step toward identifying and advancing schemes that reflected the needs of the different provinces. The Nigerian government even took it one tier below the provinces. They created the divisional development committees. The chair of this committee was the District Officer or the DO, as he was known in the colonial parlance. Members of this committee included “a few high-ranking chiefs, the District Officer, and senior officers of the Health, Agriculture, and Public Works departments. The divisional development committee also involved interest groups, such as the Christian missions, foreign firms, and a few educated elites.”<sup>11</sup>

This bureaucratic structure was in place by the end of the Second World War, and most of these committees had submitted numerous proposals to the advisory committee in Lagos with the hope of benefiting from the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940. The development plan that Nigeria will enact in 1945 was a result of the proposals that originated from the provinces and districts when planning was done in response to the 1940 Act. Unfortunately, the war obstructed the implementation of the 1940 Act. London’s attention was turned toward winning the war and production in the colonies focused on supporting the war efforts. The colonies also had to wait until after the war in order to continue development as envisaged by the 1940 Act.

## **The 1945 Act and Development Planning in Nigeria**

As the tide of war ebbed and there was reasonable belief that the allies would defeat the axis, London’s attention was again turned toward planning for development in the postwar period. As plans were underway in the parliament for the 1940 Act to be enhanced and updated, Nigeria was also envisioning ways in which its initial proposals were to be modified and improved. In May of 1943, the governor of Nigeria, Arthur Richards, set up a central committee called the Advisory Committee on Economic Development and Social Welfare. This committee had as its chairman, the chief secretary to the government. Other members of the committee included the commissioners of each of the three regions, the financial secretary, the director of medical services, the director of education, the director of agriculture, the director of public works, the chief conservator of forests, the commissioner of labor, the director of veterinary services and three members of the Legislative Council.

Governor Richards also established a development committee in each of the 23 provinces of Nigeria. Following in the footsteps of Bourdillon, Nigerian officials, including Governor Richards were excited about the new Act that was debated in parliament and wanted the machinery of development to be ready once the new Act was passed. A special department was created known as the ‘Development Department.’ This department had the responsibility of conveying instructions from the central government to the chief commissioners and provincial committees and also providing them with assistance and information.

F.E.V. Smith, a man that Governor Richards had great confidence in, administered this department. In September of 1944, Governor Richards sent the first set of development proposals to London. These were sent to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Colonel Oliver Stanley, to enable him and his advisors to prepare for Smith and H. E. Walker's visit to London.<sup>12</sup> Governor Richards' letter to the Secretary of State for the Colonies that accompanied the proposals demonstrates his confidence in Smith and his eagerness to begin development in earnest under the new Act.<sup>13</sup>

These proposals laid out plans for a fifteen year-period. Initially, the development plans were to last for ten years beginning from 1945, but this was changed to a fifteen year period because the planners feared a shortage of staff in the postwar period and saw the necessity of building each service gradually, thereby leading to a longer completion period.<sup>14</sup> While the Colonial Office accepted the Nigerian development plan of fifteen years in principle, it made clear that the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940 as envisaged could only cover ten years. It was proposed that the Nigerian plan should be divided into three phases, each lasting for a period of five years. The Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940 funds would cover the first ten years of the program but the last five years would be dependent on assistance from the Colonial Office.<sup>15</sup> Three main areas were covered in this preliminary plan of development: capital works, government services, and economic development.<sup>16</sup>

## **Welfarist Vs. Productionist Arguments**

In these initial discussions, one of the earlier ideological debates was whether social welfare led to greater economic development or vice versa. The Nigerian plan did not place much emphasis on economic development. The writers of the plan were not unaware of this weakness. This was in line with colonial development in the post-Depression period when more emphasis was placed on the provision of social welfare than on economic development. This does not mean that economic development was excluded but there were many officials both in the Colonial Office and in the colonies who believed that improving the social conditions of the colonial peoples was important for long-term economic development. For example, the Nigerian planners argued that it was important to have some basic social services in place without which it would be difficult to have a good economic plan. In a meeting with the Treasury in London Smith argued that, "The fundamental necessity was not so much development as welfare and spectacular development could not be looked for until the basic necessities of life had been provided; when this was done the productive capacity of the people as a whole could be improved and could be absorbed into some form of economic development."<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, Sydney Caine<sup>18</sup> and the Treasury wanted a greater emphasis on increasing production and economic growth. Caine argued that development in the past was found through private individuals who were economic prospectors.

In the future, this was not going to be possible because of conditions of taxation and control of capital markets. This meant that the state had to undertake the role of economic prospectors. He wrote, "If it is going to do that effectively and intelligently, it must develop machinery for doing the economic prospecting which was formerly done by large numbers of private persons acting on their own account."<sup>19</sup> Caine's view of development was one that was mainly economic in character.<sup>20</sup>

What was at stake was a clash of development ideologies. Smith's view was based on the basic needs ideology, which was championed in the 1890s by Joseph Chamberlain, the secretary of the colonies. In order to unleash the productive capabilities of the colonial people, it was important that the populace be provided with basic needs. If the people were contented and prosperous, then you could require more from them and this would have a positive impact on the economy. On the contrary, Caine's view was that the foundation of development was economic growth and productivity. Through these, resources are produced that will allow the colony to invest in social services such as education, health, etc. The question is, what comes first: welfare or development? For Caine, it is development and for the Nigerian officials, it was welfare. Caine's view of development was narrow. Without a strong educational and health system, you cannot have a strong economic system. His views did not take into consideration the long-term economic development of the colony.

The Secretary of State was pleased with the preliminary development proposal from Nigeria and he "fully approved the general design of the Nigerian scheme which he thought was excellent. It was much better to prepare a comprehensive framework on those lines within which detailed schemes could be coordinated subsequently than to continue to submit un-correlated small-scale schemes for individual projects."<sup>21</sup> The development plan that Nigeria submitted and was under consideration required an assistance of £55 million to cover the fifteen-year period. The Secretary of State for the Colonies gave a general approval for the sum of £27 million from the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940 vote. Nigeria was to finance a further £8 million through loans. The loans were expected to cover projects that would become self-supporting. Though the Secretary gave his approval to the general outline of the Nigerian plan, Governor Richards wanted more. He sought approval for the Colonies to have the general scheme published. The Secretary accepted and said it was important for this to be done as soon as possible because he considered the Nigerian plan "as a model for comprehensive outline development schemes."<sup>22</sup>

He however informed him that final approval couldn't be granted at the present time because he had not settled with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the amount that would be made available in the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940. He also left open the possibility that the Nigerian plan could be scaled down if the Act did not make available the sums he had envisaged.

## **Approval and Funding of the Nigerian Plan**

Throughout the end of 1944 and early 1945, several discussions were carried out between officials at the Colonial Office and the Nigerian officials. The development bureaucracy that had emerged in Nigeria drafted several proposals that were submitted to London for approval. In the initial discussions between Nigeria and the Colonial Office, the emphasis was on getting approval for the different projects that were to make up what would become the Nigerian plan. There was no single document that existed known as the Nigerian plan. However, approval was also sought for a general framework of the Nigerian plan.<sup>23</sup> The different schemes and projects that were approved by London became the Nigerian development plan. In July of 1945, the Nigerian plan received a general approval from the Colonial Office. The letter of approval read, "We are in general agreement with the main outlines of the revised plan, which provides for a total expenditure over the ten years ending March, 1956, of about £56 million, of which total it is proposed that sums of the order of £16 million should be found from Nigerian revenues, £17 million from the proceeds of public loans, and £25 million from grants and loans under the Colonial Development and Welfare vote."<sup>24</sup>

Though a general approval was given, due to the requirements of the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940, Nigeria still had to get the approval of the Colonial Office for schemes that had received prior approval for shorter periods and that now had to be extended for the ten-year period. Such schemes from Nigeria fell under the plans for agriculture, veterinary, health, forestry, and roads. The governor and the development secretary wanted to present the Nigerian plans to the Nigerian Legislative Council in November of 1945.<sup>25</sup> They wanted to present the different plans in installments as "Sessional Papers" because they felt that waiting to present one large volume containing all the different schemes might be indigestible to the members. Since the plans had between 20 and 25 major schemes in them, their strategy was to issue two or three plans confidentially each week. Smith was seeking approval for the pending major schemes and also permission to release the plans in installments.<sup>26</sup> The request to submit the schemes in installments was agreed to by the officials at the Colonial Office.<sup>27</sup> While Smith was given the approval to present the plans as sessional papers, what he did not receive was approval for some of the major schemes that were to be part of the Nigerian development plan. In a meeting held on 24 September 1945 at the Colonial Office, the outstanding applications for health, agriculture, forestry, veterinary service and roads were discussed with the goal of granting the approval sought by Nigeria. Several points were raised during the meeting.

The problem was that these applications submitted by Nigeria did not have identifiable schemes. It was felt that by approving these applications, the Colonial Office was signing away very large grants to Nigeria, creating a later difficulty of identifying which services the money was being used for. Those present at the meeting felt that it was more preferable to have grants go to specific projects. The five applications sought for a grant of £7.5 million over ten years. In the agricultural application, for example, £750,000 was allocated to “other charges.” Members present at the meeting had concerns about this.

Another issue raised was the payment of European staff with the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940 grants and the payment of African staff by Nigeria. At the end of the ten-year period, that was going to create a problem when, suddenly, the Nigerian government would assume the payment of these European staff. That could potentially place severe stress on the Nigerian budget. Caine’s opinion at the meeting was that Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940 grants toward the expansion of staff should be given in the form of a percentage. The Nigerian budget assumes a percentage of the cost while the CD&W grants assume the other part. Over the years, the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940 grant percentage would be gradually reduced so that by the end of the ten year period, Nigeria was paying for the entirety of the staff. In this way, the Nigerian budget would not suddenly be hit by a heavy recurrent expenditure for staff. This procedure had already been followed in a scheme that had been approved for Jamaica.<sup>28</sup> A draft letter was prepared to be sent to Smith informing him that the schemes would be framed on a percentage basis. The draft letter was approved by those at the meeting and also shared with the Treasury for their views.<sup>29</sup>

In October of 1945, Governor Richards wrote to the Colonial Office reiterating the urgency in approving the outstanding schemes. He wrote, “Unless outstanding schemes can be disposed of at once, so that writing of draft full plan can proceed immediately, there will be insufficient time for this draft to be sent to you for approval and to be put in print by the first week in November, which I consider to be the latest date for the circulation to members if the Legislative Council is to meet on 10th December.”<sup>30</sup> What neither the governor nor the development secretary was aware of was the fact that there were discussions in the Colonial Office as late as September about changing the procedure for funding the Nigerian plans. Given that Richards and Smith had discussed extensively with the Colonial Office and had even revised the plans according to their requests, he was anxiously expecting an approval so that he could present the plans before the Legislative Council.

The proposal on awarding the grant on a gradual percentage basis was changing everything late in the game. Parkinson was very critical of this decision. He felt that there wasn't enough time for Smith to recast and re-submit five of his most important schemes. Smith and the governor had only one month before the date they were supposed to present the plans to the members of the Legislative Council. Parkinson stated that the agricultural plan that drew much of the criticisms from the members was first submitted in June of 1944 and was fully discussed with the Colonial Office’s agricultural adviser.

After further discussions with the development department at the Colonial Office and also the Treasury, it was revised and resubmitted in July. The same was true of the forestry plan, which had been revised and re-submitted on 13 of July 1944 and the medical plan that had also been revised and re-submitted. Parkinson felt that Smith was expecting an approval with only minor modifications. He said sending the letter with radical modifications on the way grants were going to be awarded for the development plans was going to be a rude shock to Smith. Parkinson found the arguments for funding on a graduated percentage basis unconvincing. He pointed to the earlier approval of development officers and preliminary expenditure on medical and health services, which had provided for an expansion of staff with funds entirely from the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940 grants without any objections. He also did not see any practical advantages for the graduated percentage as the agricultural plan, for example, only called for a steady expansion of staff combined with a proportionate increase of expenditure on other charges. Parkinson wrote:

We do not object either to the total expenditure proposed for agriculture, or to the total amount to be provided from C.D. and W. schemes, or to the object on which the money is to be spent. ... Our objection is to the way in which it is proposed to apply the C.D. and W. assistance. But even if the whole of the expenditure was met from C. D. and W. Funds in the early years, the money thereby saved to Nigeria would only have to be devoted to meeting the increasing deficit in the later years, as the C. D. and W. assistance tapers off, and at the end of the ten year period Nigeria would presumably be in exactly the same position financially as if the assistance had been provided as originally proposed.<sup>31</sup>

Parkinson recommended that Nigeria must be clearly advised on what they needed to do and the advantages of the new proposal.

Sir George Gater, while not disputing the wisdom of the new proposal, agreed with Parkinson's view that the new proposal was going to be a shock to Smith and may evoke a tremendous outburst from both Smith and the governor. Like Parkinson, he argued that the agricultural scheme was discussed with the agricultural adviser, Dr. Harold Tempany, and revised to his approval and full support. It was also discussed with the representatives of both the Finance and Development Department and the Treasury and no objections were raised. Given the process this went through, Smith would have grounds for complaint. His suggestion was that the Nigerian plan should be accepted as it stood with provisions for some additional safeguards as it regarded expenditures of money from the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940 fund.<sup>32</sup> In October of 1945, the Secretary of State for the Colonies sent a letter to Governor Richards granting approval for the basic proposals for the outstanding schemes.

However, he informed him that modifications had been made to the precise form in which the assistance was to be given and also that there would be variations in the distribution of the funds between different services and over different years. Caine was to communicate the details of these modifications to Smith.<sup>33</sup>

Prior to the Secretary of State for the Colonies letter in October, Caine sent a letter early October informing Smith of the procedural changes that were to be adopted in regards to the Nigerian plans. His letter anticipated the reaction that might come from Smith. From the outset, he informed Smith that although they had talked about the development plans before, they had to take another careful look at the applications. The reason for this, he wrote, was because of the magnitude of Nigeria's development plans in relation to those of the other colonies. Given the scale of Nigeria's plans, it was only prudent that the details of the schemes should be looked at carefully. Two major applications that Caine identified were agriculture and forestry. These two had something in common. In both these areas, all the grants requested from the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1945 funds for emoluments and recurrent charges in connection with the expansion of staff. While Caine believed that the funds requested for these applications were acceptable, he did not think that the method proposed for the use of these funds was the right one. He found two main difficulties with this. The first was that this amounted to handing a blank check to Nigeria, and this would not be a fulfillment of their responsibility to Parliament. The second difficulty he had was with Nigeria suddenly assuming these financial responsibilities at the end of the ten years when Colonial Development and Welfare grants would have run out. He believed that this would create great difficulties for Nigeria. To resolve these two difficulties, Caine suggested two solutions:

The first is that C.D. & W. grants towards recurrent charges in these two applications (agriculture and forestry) ought, as far as practicable taper off towards the end of the ten year period, so that the transference of the residual is less burdensome. (This need not affect the total assistance, but only its distribution in time). The second is that the C. D. & W. assistance might be given not to cover the full cost of the salaries and incidental charges for certain classes of new employees, but to cover a proportion, of the cost of all the new staff required for the development of these departments.<sup>34</sup>

Caine went on to suggest to Smith that these two schemes, together with all new applications for grants that involve the expansion of staff be amended so that the grants would only go toward a percentage of the staff salary while the rest would be assumed by the colonial state. The percentage should be graduated over the ten years period with it peaking in the middle years and then beginning to drop toward the tenth year. At the end of the tenth year, Nigerian revenues should be paying fully for the staff. The amount of assistance agreed with Smith was not changing, what was changing was the procedure on how this assistance was going to be granted.

While Caine's argument may sound logical, what it did not take into consideration was the economic power that came from investing such large sums in agricultural development at the initial period. Caine's main issue was distinguishing between "productive" and "recurrent" costs. He did not think that Colonial Development and Welfare funds should pay for recurrent costs, because this was unsustainable and thus would create dependency on London. He wanted Nigeria to cover such costs. It is important to note that the Nigerian colonial government was not attempting to shift recurrent costs to London. It wanted to front load resources and build up its agricultural extension services and hire colonial personnel to help stimulate agricultural production and generate the revenues that would be needed by the state to continue and expand development for many years. Hence, expanding agricultural staff was a pathway to expanding agricultural production. At this time, Nigeria's main revenues came from agricultural production. Unlike many other colonial regions, Nigeria did not have large-scale industrial agricultural production. Its agricultural production was reliant on small scale farmers. This system, by its very nature, required plenty of agricultural staff if production was to increase. This is because you need extension staff to train the rural people on how to expand production through the use of fertilizers, improved varieties and irrigation. The expansion of staff had the potential to expand production which would have placed Nigeria at a better economic position to absorb the staff at the end of the tenth year without placing undue burden on Nigeria's budget. This was one of the strengths of this plan.

## **The Rift Between Colonial Office and Nigeria**

The disagreement between Caine and Smith opened a rift between the Colonial Office and Nigeria. This was not surprising as some in the Colonial Office, such as Parkinson, had warned that Smith and Richards might not take the changes kindly. In light of the correspondences between Caine and Smith, Richards decided to hold off releasing the plans to the Legislative Council until he was able to reach an agreement with Caine. He offered some revisions to the Nigerian plans to meet the demands of Caine. For example, in the last four years of the plan, the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1945 vote would only provide for 4/5, 3/5, 2/5 and 1/5 of the recurrent charges in agriculture, veterinary, forestry and health schemes. The governor, however, raised an important problem that could have arisen with regards to staff. The fear was that he might have a problem engaging good staff for only a short term. He needed assurance from the Secretary of State that assistance would continue beyond five years so that staff would be aware of reasonable prospects for ten years employment. Another area of much difficulty was in the recruitment of engineers. Given the scarcity of engineers, it was important to enter into as long as possible agreements with them.<sup>35</sup>

At the Colonial Office, there were discussions about the governor's expectations. J. B. Williams even wondered if Richards' conception of development planning was the same as that of the Colonial Office. He disagreed with the approach Nigeria was taking as regards to their applications. He was critical of the governor's conception of development planning. He wrote, "Our own conception has been that colonies should draw up a broad overall plan of development which should be considered by the Secretary of State's advisers and approved with or without modifications and then detailed schemes covering particular pieces or work should be submitted within the plan and approved separately."<sup>36</sup> Here, the Colonial Office was attempting to exercise control over the development process approving every single project or scheme that Nigeria undertook. The Nigerian officials had a different conception. Though Nigeria had received a general approval for a comprehensive plan, what the governor wanted to do was to place individual schemes before the Legislative Council. This was the substance of the disagreement. In Williams' view, individual schemes with their expenditures still had to be approved by the Colonial Office, but the governor wanted blanket approval covering the schemes for which the expenditures had not been discussed and approved by the Colonial Office. Williams found it inappropriate to grant the governor approval to spend £25 million in ten years without showing the specific schemes and their estimated cost. This meant that neither the governor nor the development secretary would need any more authority from either the Secretary of State for the Colonies or the Legislative Council to spend the money in the ten years that the the plans were effective. He doubted if this procedure of giving the governor unfettered access to Nigeria's allocation was in accordance with the conditions that were laid down by the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1945. The Act, he wrote, "lays down that the authority for expenditure is that the Secretary of State should make schemes with the concurrence of the Lords Commissioners of the Treasury."<sup>37</sup>

Williams also responded to both the criticism of Parkinson and Gater that these schemes had been discussed and revised with the governor and Smith. He wrote, "The understanding in my mind then was that we were being asked to approve merely the comprehensive plan as a whole and that individual schemes could be gone into on their merits and if necessary remodeled, nor was it clear that there was any particular urgency to approve schemes covering the whole of the ten years. It was certainly not clear to me at that time that the Nigerian Government wished to lay schemes in cut and dried form before the Legislative Council."<sup>38</sup> While being sympathetic with the views raised by Williams, Caine believed that not giving an approval in principle to the Nigerian plan meant going back on their word. He disagreed with Williams that the procedure to be followed by Nigeria would be outside of the scope of the Act. Another important point made by Caine was that they were still experimenting with planning. He wrote, "we must recognize that we are still feeling our way towards the kind of procedure which will enable due account to be taken of long-term planning without holding off all action until the ideal plan is produced, which may take years."<sup>39</sup> Frank Stockdale<sup>40</sup> agreed with Caine that the Nigerian plans had gone too far to attempt to begin a new procedure.<sup>41</sup> The point raised by Caine about those involved feeling their way toward the appropriate kind of procedure is an important one when looking at development planning in this time period.

No one had the crystal ball on how to develop the colonies. Though some form of development had taken place in the empire for years, this was the first attempt at long-term development planning. Those who were fashioning these policies were not themselves experts with many years of experience in development planning. They were learning on the job, attempting to respond to development problems in the colonies.

This new rift was a challenge to the officials at the Colonial Office. In one sense, they wanted to approve in principle the schemes that were already discussed with Nigerian officials. On the other hand, they did not want to give the Nigerian officials authority to spend Colonial Development and Welfare funds on these schemes without a detailed examination and approval of such schemes by the Secretary of State for the Colonies. The Secretary wanted schemes emanating from the colonies to be fully examined and vetted by London. The approval sought by Nigeria did not allow that because the governor did not have full details on the schemes in question. Caine's view was that an urgent meeting needed to be held to resolve the problem. This was an attempt to resolve whether the previous correspondences with Nigeria constituted a commitment that could not be broken or whether "it is now desired to re-examine the whole position, in which case, of course, a suitable explanation would have to be given to the Governor with the direct authority of the Secretary of State."<sup>42</sup>

This meant, the decision was moving from the civil servants to the politicians. There were important political changes that had taken place in London. There was a new Labour government in power and a new the Secretary of State for the Colonies that was very supportive of development and wanted it to happen rapidly. At this time, Arthur Creech Jones was the Parliamentary Undersecretary of State for the Colonies and George Henry Hall was the Secretary of State for the Colonies. When Creech Jones discussed the matter with the officials concerned at the colonial office and with the Secretary of State, he came to the conclusion that the previous Secretary, Oliver Stanley had already made a commitment to Nigeria and the Nigerian plans were drafted based on that commitment. It was the decision that the Nigerian plans should be approved in principle. Based on this, a telegram was to be sent to Nigeria informing the governor that the Secretary of State for the Colonies had approved in principle assistance toward the big schemes in question. He was also to be informed of the colonial office's flexibility in reviewing the annual estimates of the schemes and modifying them if necessary, based on the circumstances of the time. Creech Jones felt that there was need for adequate technical advice and this was to be emphasized in the telegram to be sent to Nigeria.<sup>43</sup>

As a result, the Secretary of State for the Colonies wrote to Governor Richards on 23 November 1945 informing him that he was prepared to approve assistance in principle to the schemes. He insisted that the approval was based on the condition that annual estimates must be presented and he reserved the authority to review the schemes and modify them as needed. This, he argued, would allow for flexibility.

He wanted Richards to make clear to the Legislative Council the fact that he reserved the right to modify the approved schemes after annual reviews. He also insisted on the importance of using adequate expert advice on all schemes in which experts were not already available. Agreement was reached between Nigeria and London and the governor was ready to present Nigeria's development plan to the Legislative Council.

On 8 December 1945, Governor Richards wrote the Secretary of State informing him that he would be placing the Ten Year Plan of Development and Welfare before the Legislative Council on the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> of December. Together with his letter were six copies of the plan. These copies were meant for distribution to the London press such as the *Times*. A vote was not intended to be carried out by the Legislative Council on the plan. The intention was for a motion to be taken to refer the plan to a select committee that consisted of both unofficial members of the Legislative Council and a few official members that were directly concerned. The select committee had the task of considering the proposals in detail when they sat in January of 1946. Together with the plans sent to the Secretary of State was a summary of the plan that was to be distributed to both the local press and the international press. This one page summary mentioned broadly the different schemes that would be carried out. It also discussed the cost of the plan. The plan was estimated at "£55,000,000, of which £23,000,000 will be provided under the Colonial Development and Welfare Act, £16,000,000 to £17,000,000 will be raised by loans, and the remainder progressively found from Nigerian Revenues."<sup>44</sup>

The plan was presented before the Legislative Council on 13 December 1945. A resolution was unanimously adopted by the members of the Council thanking His Majesty's Government for the generous contribution of £23,000,000 for the development of Nigeria. The resolution read, "That this council accords its deep sense of appreciation for the very generous allocation to Nigeria of £23,000,000 from the money provided under the Colonial Development and Welfare Act and requests that His Excellency the Governor should convey to H.M. Government and the people of the United Kingdom, through the Secretary of State, the (?gratification) and thanks of this Council, as representing the people of Nigeria, for this most generous and important contribution to the development of this country."<sup>45</sup> The governor sent the resolution as a telegram immediately to the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

The Nigerian Legislative Council approved the "Ten Year Plan of Development and Welfare for Nigeria" that had been presented to it in December of 1945 and referred it to the select committee. This committee met in January and presented their report to the Legislative Council on 7 February 1946 and the council unanimously accepted the report. The resolution read,

Be it resolved: That this council adopts the Report of the Select Committee appointed to consider the Ten-Year Plan of Development and Welfare for Nigeria set out in Sessional Paper No. 24 of 1945 and approved the Plan as amended by the Select Committee and recommends its acceptance as the general development policy of the Government of Nigeria for the next ten years, subject to periodic review of details in the light of experience and the inclusion of such additional schemes as may prove to be necessary as the result of unforeseen circumstances.<sup>46</sup>

The last part of the resolution provided the flexibility that the Secretary of State for the Colonies needed in order to make adjustments to the plan. Richards was happy with the fact that all the unofficial members commented on the desirability of the plan. The positive response of the unofficial members was important to the governor because he was afraid that these members would be very critical of the plan and also incite the Nigerian press against the plan. Richards said that throughout the debate, every unofficial member took part and they saw the plan as “a thoroughly constructive piece of work and a clear indication of the desire both of His Majesty’s Government, through the generous allocation to Nigeria ... to ensure that this country should be developed as rapidly as possible.”<sup>47</sup> For Richards, this was a big win and he could not wait to share the Nigerian plan with all the colonial governors.

## **Conclusion**

By focusing solely on the correspondences and discussions between colonial officials in Nigeria and London, this chapter reveals certain problems with development planning in the late colonial period. The British had an idea that they wanted to develop the colonies but they did not have a coherent plan on how to go about it. They had to rely on ideas that originated from the colonies or generated by the colonial officials in London. After asking the colonies to draw up these plans for a ten-year period, about halfway through the plans, the Colonial Office asked the colonies to revise them to five-year plans because it was difficult to plan for a ten-year period. It is easy to look at the failure of these plans and question the intention of Britain to develop the colonies. My research shows that the 1945 development plan was a genuine attempt to develop the colonies after neglecting them during the Great Depression and World War II. The failure to rapidly develop Nigeria and other colonies was not as a result of bad intentions, but three interlocking problems: the lack of financial resources, the ingrained racial biases of the colonial state and the diverging conceptions of development between some officials at the Colonial Office and Nigeria leading to bureaucratic wrangling.

There is no doubt that development in the post-World War II period was not completely altruistic. Britain saw development as a tool to give a new lease of life to empire. The colonies were also seen as economic pumps to prime the British economy.

Colonial resources were to play an important role in this economic recovery by helping Britain balance its payment of deficit problem. However, it must be noted that the focus was not entirely on economic development but also social welfare. Many of the schemes undertaken by the British were geared toward improving the living standards of colonial people. The relative dearth of financial resources available to Britain hampered development. Emerging from the war, Britain's economy was sick and the state lacked the financial resources to carry out robust development in the colonies.

The racial biases of the European colonial regime also limited the participation of Nigerians in the development process. Though Nigeria had to contribute a substantial amount of the capital needed for development, the Nigerian people had a limited voice in what schemes and projects were carried out. A few Nigerians who served as unofficial members in the Legislative Council and in the development committees did not have a vote. They only hoped that their ideas during the discussions shaped the plans. The attempt by the European officials in Nigeria to be the custodians of development was in line with the civilizing mission of European colonialism. Inherent in that ideology was the notion that Europeans were superior to Africans and thus exhibited patronizing attitudes toward the locals. There was the notion of Britain's "trusteeship" over Nigeria. This ideology held that Nigerians could not determine their own future. This future had to be created by the British. The Europeans saw themselves in a dual role in which they determined both the future and the pace at which colonial people would reach that future.

And finally, development planning was bogged down in a bureaucratic wrangling between London and Nigeria. This slowed the process as endless meetings and correspondences went back and forth between Nigeria and London. These three problems challenge us to rethink the failure of development today in Africa south of the Sahara. Rather than blame this failure on corruption and the ineptitude of African leaders, perhaps the problem lies in the poor development plans crafted by Western or Western inspired technocrats and experts.

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> Joseph M. Hodge, Gerald Hodl & Martina Kopf, ed. *Developing Africa: Concepts and Practices in Twentieth-Century Colonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 12.

<sup>2</sup> Moses Ochonu, *Colonial Meltdown: Northern Nigeria in the Great Depression* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009), 7.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert: Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), 145.

<sup>4</sup> The New York Times in its 30 May 1935 issue reported on the Copperbelt Strike. It says the strike was 'efficiently organized' and was against the government.

<sup>5</sup> Constantine, *The Making of British Colonial Development Policy, 1914-1940* (London: Frank Cass, 1984), 244.

<sup>6</sup> D. J. Morgan, *The Official History of Colonial Development: The Origins of British Aid Policy, 1924-1945* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1980) 60.

<sup>7</sup> Constantine, *The Making of British Colonial Development Policy*, 244.

<sup>8</sup> Robert L. Tignor, *W. Arthur Lewis and the Birth of Development Economics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 56.

<sup>9</sup> Falola, *Development Planning and Decolonization in Nigeria*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1996), 26-28.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-30.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>12</sup> F. E. V. Smith, C.M.G was the Head of the Development Branch of the Secretariat and H. E. Walker, C.B.E. was the Deputy Director of Public Works. Walker had collaborated in the preparation of the proposals and he had a wide knowledge and a long experience in Nigeria.

<sup>13</sup> Richards to Stanley, 22 September 1944, The National Archives, Kew, Colonial Office Records (Hereafter TNA: CO) 583/271/4.

---

<sup>14</sup> F. E. V. Smith, Memorandum on Nigeria's Preliminary Development Plan, 3 October 1944, TNA: CO 583/ 271/4.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Planning & Reorganisation Development Proposals. Extracts from notes of a discussion with the Treasury on 9 November 1944, TNA: CO 583/271/4.

<sup>18</sup> Sydney Caine was appointed financial adviser to the colonial office in 1942 and was in charge of colonial development policy from April of 1943. He was Assistant under-secretary of state from 1944 to 1947.

<sup>19</sup>Memorandum by S Caine, 12 August 1943, TNA: CO 852/588/2, in S. R. Ashton and S. E. Stockwell, eds. *Imperial Policy and Colonial Practice, 1925-1945* (London: HMSO, 1996), 168.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Notes of a meeting held in the Secretary of State's Room to discuss the Nigerian Development proposals, 25 October 1944, TNA: CO 583/271/4.

<sup>22</sup> Notes of a meeting held in the Secretary of State's room on Nigerian preliminary development plan, 6 November 1944, TNA: CO 583/271/4.

<sup>23</sup> It is important to note that at this time, there was no single document that contained the whole plan of development for Nigeria with all the different projects. There were several plans that dealt with different departments such as health, agriculture, forestry, veterinary services, roads, and so on.

<sup>24</sup>Creasy to Smith. 6 July 1945, TNA: CO 583/271/4.

<sup>25</sup> The use of the plural "plans" here is to make clear that the Nigerian development plan was actually a conglomeration of different plans emerging from the different departments. The official documents used the plural "plans" and I retain that usage here.

<sup>26</sup> Smith to Creasy. 10 August 1945, TNA: CO 583/271/4.

- 
- <sup>27</sup> Creasy to Smith, telegram, 28 August 1945, TNA: CO 583/271/4.
- <sup>28</sup> Notes of a meeting at Frank Stockdale's room, 24 September 1945, TNA: CO 583/271/4.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>30</sup> Richards to Hall, telegram, 9 October 1945, TNA: CO 583/271/4.
- <sup>31</sup> Minute by Parkinson, 1 October 1945, TNA: CO 583/271/4.
- <sup>32</sup> Minute by Gater. 3 October 1945, TNA: CO 583/271/4.
- <sup>33</sup> Hall to Richards, 11 October 1945, TNA: CO 583/271/4.
- <sup>34</sup> Caine to Smith, 10 October 1945, TNA: CO 583/271/4.
- <sup>35</sup> Richards to Hall, 23 October 1945, TNA: CO 583/271/4.
- <sup>36</sup> Minute by J. B. Williams, 2 November 1945, TNA: CO 583/271/4.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>39</sup> Minute by Caine, 2 November 1945, TNA: CO 583/271/4.
- <sup>40</sup> Stockdale was an adviser on colonial development planning at the CO, 1945-1948.
- <sup>41</sup> Minute by Stockdale, 2 November 1945, TNA: CO 583/271/4.
- <sup>42</sup> Minute by Sydney Caine, 15 November 1945, TNA: CO 583/271/4.
- <sup>43</sup> Minute by J. B. Williams, 22 November 1945, TNA: CO 583/ 271/4.

---

<sup>44</sup> Richards to S of S, 8 December 1945, TNA: CO 583/271/4.

<sup>45</sup> Richards to S of S, telegram, 13 December 1945, TNA: CO 583/271/4.

<sup>46</sup> Richards to S of S, 23 February, 1946, TNA: CO583/271/4.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

## References

Ashton, S. R. and S. E. Stockwell, ed. *Imperial Policy and Colonial Practice, 1925-1945*. London: HMSO, 1996.

Ayo, Edward Jide. *Development Planning in Nigeria*. Ibadan: University Press Limited, 1988.

Beusekom, Monica M. van. *Negotiating Development: African Farmers and Colonial Experts at the Office du Niger, 1920-1960*. Oxford: James Currey, 2002.

Butler, L. J. *Industrialisation and the British Colonial State: West Africa, 1939-1951*. London: Frank Cass, 1997.

Constantine, Stephen. *The Making of British Colonial Development Policy, 1914-1940*. London: Frank Cass, 1984.

Cooper, Frederick. *Africa Since 1940: The Past of the Present*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Cowen, M.P. and R. N. Shenton. *Doctrines of Development*. New York: Routledge, 1996.

Dibua, Jeremiah I. *Development and Diffusionism: Looking Beyond Neopatrimonialism in Nigeria, 1962-1985*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Falola, Toyin. *Development Planning and Decolonization in Nigeria*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1996.

- 
- Havinden, Michael & David Meredith. *Colonialism and Development: Britain and its Tropical Colonies, 1850-1960*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- Hodge, Joseph. *Triumph of the Expert: Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007.
- Hodge, Joseph M, Hodl Gerald & Kopf, Martina, ed. *Developing Africa: Concepts and Practices in Twentieth-Century Colonialism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014.
- Kent, John. *British Imperial Strategy and the Origins of the Cold War, 1944-49*. Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1993.
- Malmsten, Neal R. "British Government Policy Toward Colonial Development, 1919-39." *The Journal of Modern History*, 49, 2 (1977): 1249-1287.
- Ochonu, Moses E. *Colonial Meltdown: Northern Nigeria in the Great Depression*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009.
- Okigbo, P.N.C. *National Development Planning in Nigeria, 1900-1992*. London: J. Currey, 1989.
- Osborne, Myles. "Controlling Development: 'Martial Race' and Empire in Kenya, 1945-59." *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 42, 3 (2013): 464-485.
- Phillips, Anne. *Enigma of Colonialism: British Policy in West Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.
- Rist, Gilbert. *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith*. New York: Zed Books, 2002.
- Schuknecht, Rohland. *British Colonial Development Policy after the Second World War: The Case of Sukumaland, Tanganuyika*. Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2010.
- Staples, Amy. *The Birth of Development: How the World Bank, Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Health Organization Changed the World, 1945-1965*. Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2006.
- Tilley, Helen. *Africa as a Living Laboratory: Empire, Development, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge, 1870-1950*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011.