

NIGERIA AND AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT AGENDA: THE TECHNICAL AID CORPS (TAC) INITIATIVE

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Abstract

Deeming herself as Africa's Big Brother, and standing on her Afrocentric foreign policy convictions, Nigeria has since the years of independence, made robust contributions towards the development of Africa. Among such efforts by Nigeria to assist the socio-economic development of her African brothers, is the Technical Aid Corps scheme (TAC), designed as integral of Nigeria's aid package for Africa, aimed at assisting needy African states with Nigeria's large pool of trained professionals and technical manpower, to fast-track their socio-economic transformation, and enhance development. This paper discusses the trajectory of TAC as Nigeria's foreign aid initiative, with the view to demonstrating how it fits into Africa's development need and agenda. The paper argues that though the TAC scheme has made significant developmental impacts, but has been discredited by a number of realities. Aligning itself with the thinking of the realist apologists, this paper posits that though there is always a place for charity in the affairs of nations, but generosity without an eye for the national interest amounts to illusion. It concludes that the TAC scheme typifies an economically unprofitable Africa-centered foreign policy that does not worth Nigeria's commitment.

Keywords: Nigeria, Africa, Development, Development Scheme, Initiative

Introduction

There is hardly shred of doubt about Nigeria's commitment to the economic progress in Africa. Extrapolating from diverse examples, it is evident that Nigeria has been a major player in promoting development and economic growth of the countries in the continent of African, and had made robust contributions towards the betterment of the lives of the African people. Nigeria got itself deeply

committed to the enterprise of assisting the development of fellow African states and societies as a practical demonstration of her historic and manifest mission in the continent. Nigeria is traditionally recognized as the leader of Africa, because of her territorial size, a huge, dynamic and virile population, abundant oil deposits, *inter alia* (Tyoden 2012). Going by this, it will amount to failure of leadership on the part of Nigeria to wallow in riches, and watch her fellow African brothers smeared in the mud of penury and economic quagmire. Consequently, employing diverse avenues, both of bilateral and multilateral nature, Nigeria has, over the years, spent and still spends huge quantity of her resources, both in human and material forms, in the course of pursuing Africa's development agenda. Appreciable number of African states has been assisted by Nigeria's largesse, as the country shows itself as an answer to various challenging economic and developmental needs that glared and still glare at Africa, demanding attention. This benevolent disposition is not peculiar to a particular administration. "Every government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria since independence has been in the vanguard of promoting the economic and social development of Africa" (Ogunjobi 2007: 379). This stance is derived from the governments' avouched foreign policy that places Africa as its centerpiece.

Some of the development initiatives to which Nigeria has committed enormous resources for the purpose of promoting economic development in the developing countries of Africa abound: the African Development Bank (AfDB) has afforded Nigeria the avenue to express in practical terms, her belief in functional cooperation as a pathway for Africa's social and economic development. Standing on this conviction, Nigeria committed itself to outstandingly unique roles and huge financial contributions towards the creation and sustenance of the African Development Bank (AfDB); The Nigeria Trust Fund (NTF), an affiliate of the African Development Bank, was created at the sole initiative of Nigeria under General Olusegun Obasanjo in 1976, born out of Nigeria's pro-African policy stance, and aimed at assisting the development efforts of the low-income African members of the bank, whose economies and social conditions and prospects require concessional financing. The Fund is an expression of Nigeria's desire to use a portion of her oil revenue to benefit other African countries; In addition to the ADB's Nigeria Trust Fund, Nigeria has in the recent years set up another Fund in the African Development Bank called the Nigeria Technical Cooperation Fund (NTCF). The Fund was signed into existence on April 5, 2004 by the agreement between Nigeria and the African Development Bank, establishing the NTCF (Emenike 2015). The NTCF was intended as a grant window to complement the resources of the Nigeria Trust Fund, consisting of some 25 million US Dollars drawn from the net income of the NTF; Concessionary oil sales has featured as a

strong element of Nigeria's strategy to further consolidate her commitment to Africa's economic wellbeing engineered by her Afrocentric foreign policy principles. It was a decision by the Nigerian government under Yakubu Gowon, and was continued by the Murtala Mohammed's administration (Aluko 1990); Joint commissions with a number of countries within the African continent, has been established by Nigeria. These establishments are for various reasons which include the need to help alleviate the hard and difficult economic situations of different countries of the continent. Among such established joint commissions, is the Nigeria-Niger Commission, which has to no mean extent, profited Niger as a country in need.

The Technical Aid Corps (TAC) scheme is one among the many initiatives by Nigeria in her bid to contribute to African development. In her pursuit of African developmental agenda, Nigeria in 1987, enunciated the TAC Scheme, designed as integral of Nigeria's aid package for Africa, aimed at assisting needy African states with Nigeria's large pool of trained professionals and technical manpower, to fast-track their socio-economic transformation, and enhance development. This paper discusses the TAC scheme as Nigeria's foreign aid initiative, with the view to demonstrating how it fits into Africa's development need and agenda.

TAC: Meaning And Historical Background

Through both bilateral and multilateral avenues, Nigeria has demonstrably exhibited acts and behaviours that profited meaningfully, the economic development of peoples and societies in Africa. One of such avenues of Nigeria's show of benevolence is the Technical Aid Corps Scheme, TAC, instituted by Nigeria during former President Ibrahim Babangida's military government in 1987, to serve as a platform for helping African states with technical manpower, to fast-track their socioeconomic and cultural transformation (Tyoden 2012). The Technical Aid Corps is a mechanism for Nigeria's foreign aid and technical assistance to especially African countries, through the use of Nigeria's abundant trained manpower, to assist the needy countries both in Africa and the Caribbean.

Motivation and drive for Nigeria's foreign aid to African states generally, and the TAC scheme in particular, is based on Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy pursuit, manifested in Nigeria's unalloyed concern for Africa's economic wellbeing, *inter alia*. "Nigeria cannot talk about world...rapid economic development...and economic conditions without ensuring that the same conditions prevail in Africa...Nigeria has to divert a modest amount to aid and economic cooperation with other developing countries in our sub-region...to combat illiteracy and to provide necessary infrastructure lacking from the years of colonial neglect" (Garba 1977: 142). The TAC scheme underlies the big brother

role of Nigeria in Africa, aimed at providing, as Emeka Anthony will say, 'a more sustainable assistance to African states' (Obi 2006). Motivated by the realization that some African states have compromised their ability to respond to the legitimate aspirations and needs of the citizenry, Nigerian government under the military administration of Ibrahim Babangida, felt the imperative to introduce the Technical Aid Corps to fill the gap created by the weak capacity of some states to produce highly trained manpower towards driving the economy of those states. As a manifestation of Nigeria's Africa-focused foreign policy agenda, the TAC scheme has its philosophical roots buried in the Nigeria's conscious resolve and efforts at using its endowed human and material resources for the benefit of the black race, first enunciated by Nigeria's Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, at independence in 1960, at the United Nations General Assembly, on the occasion of Nigeria's admission to the United Nations (Daura 2010). The proclamation by the Prime Minister, articulated the Afrocentric principle of Nigeria's foreign policy, including its desire to champion the course of the black race either within the African continent or in the diaspora. The pursuit of this declaration was later to be followed by series of financial, material and logistic assistance to several African countries as beneficiaries of Nigeria's Afrocentric largesse. Coming from this backdrop, the TAC scheme has been described as "One of the Nigeria's designed instruments of Afrocentric foreign policy, in the area of aid and development assistance, targeted at impacting positively on Africa, and involves conscious mobilization of domestic human resources, and deploying them to different parts of Africa, where they are critically needed" (Euka 2020).

Though the TAC scheme is credited to the Babangida during whose administration it got institutionalized, but the idea predates his era. Nigeria, before the Babangida regime has been at the forefront of technical assistance to African countries, as well as to countries with African descent in the Caribbean (Oyelakin 2014). Apart from peacekeeping roles in Africa, Nigeria had also assigned magistrates, judges, administrators, educators etc, to many African countries like Zambia, Tanzania, Kenya, Swaziland, Gambia, Lesotho among others, in the early days of their political independence in the form of technical assistance which they needed (Euka 2010). Particularly in the case of Botswana, Malawi, Gambia and Zimbabwe, such Nigerian judicial officers provided veritable platform for the take-off of their judicial systems (Eze 2010). Little wonder that till date, Nigerian professionals, accountants, lawyers, university professors, medical doctors and others, are still found in some African countries.

While it could be said that volunteerism as a form of developmental assistance has noticeably been age long in Nigeria's African international relations, but it

was not institutionalized. Prior to the time of the establishment of the Technical Aid Corps (TAC), the concept and practice of using volunteers to provide services as a form of international development tool to needy countries was primarily spontaneous, largely uncoordinated, which left no remarkable landmark beyond the impact of the moment. The realized deficiency of the above approach, led the government of Nigeria under President Ibrahim Babangida, to articulate the need for a well-structured, and more enduring Technical Aid Corps (TAC) Scheme. Emphasizing this, Fage wrote that “Unlike the previous aid policy, the TAC scheme was a more coherent and ambitious policy in the sense that it sought not only to streamline Nigeria’s hitherto uncoordinated foreign aid and technical assistance policy, but also to widen Nigeria’s aid beyond the shores of the African continent to the Caribbean and the Pacific” (Fage 2012: 197).

The practical basis for the formation of the Technical Aid Corps Scheme was laid when in December 1986, Burkina Faso under the then President Thomas Sankara approached Nigeria for the secondment of about two hundred (200) primary school teachers to the country (Eze 2010). In a memo to the then Armed Forces Ruling Council of Nigeria, the Foreign Affairs Minister at the time, Professor Akinyemi, using the Burkina Faso request as a springboard, enunciated the concept of TAC as a more veritable, enduring, sustainable and credible alternative to the old-fashioned and cash-based foreign assistance. The approval given to the Professor Akinyemi’s idea by the Nigerian Government under President Babangida, on the 1st of October 1987, led to the birth of the Technical Aid Corps Scheme as a permanent mechanism for dispensing Nigeria’s technical assistance and aid system. Upon its creation, the stated goals and objectives of the scheme as enshrined in the statute establishing it are as follows: to share Nigeria’s know-how and expertise with the recipient less endowed countries in the African, Caribbean and Pacific regions; to give assistance on the basis of assessed and perceived needs of the recipient countries; to promote cooperation and understanding between Nigeria and recipient countries; to facilitate meaningful contact between Nigerian youths and youths of the recipient countries; to complement other forms of assistance to the ACP countries; to ensure a streamlined programme of assistance to other developing countries; to act as a channel of enhancing South-South cooperation, and; to establish a presence in countries which, for economic reasons, Nigeria has no resident diplomatic missions (Fage 2012, Eze 2010).

TAC: Structure And Modus Operandi

As a veritable tool for promoting and actualizing Nigeria’s technical aid policy agenda in Africa, the TAC scheme got its legal backing and programme framework in 1993, by the Decree 27 of 1993 (Fage 2012). The signing into law of

the decree or statute that established the TAC scheme happened on January 22, 1993. This was six years since after the establishment of the TAC scheme. It became officially documented in the Directorate of the Technical Aid Corps scheme, established under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. By the law establishing the TAC scheme, the Directorate is charged with the responsibility of implementing the provisions of the statute as well as ensuring the attainment of the objectives of the scheme. The decree that established the TAC, and created the Directorate provides that the Directorate should be headed by a Director/ Chief Executive Officer, who is appointed by the President for a five-year term, renewable for another five years. It states that the Director/CEO shall be the Chairman of the Board, which shall consist of five persons appointed by the President, and one ex-officio member to represent the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The appointed five members of the Board shall hold office for four years, and shall be eligible for re-appointment for another four years. The Directorate is also empowered to biennially deploy qualified Nigerian professionals as volunteers to African, Caribbean and Pacific countries. It however, carries out this and other functions, subject to the policy direction from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. While the Directorate Headquarters in Nigeria provide the lead in many of its internal recruitment process, the operation of the Scheme in recipient countries is largely driven by the Nigerian Missions located in those states through the concurrence of the Headquarters. In this way, the Missions serve as a collating centre for requests for volunteers, as well as a monitoring organ for the progress of the Scheme, whenever the volunteers are deployed abroad. This connection between the Directorate of TAC in Nigeria and Nigeria Missions abroad, makes the scheme inevitable as the most potent instrument for the conduct of Nigeria's foreign policy. The mode of operation of the TAC is guided by a legal instrument called TAC Country Agreement. The Agreement represents a working document which guides the obligations and responsibilities of both Nigeria and the recipient states. The operation of the scheme in the recipient country is defined by this Agreement.

The procedure for recruitment and deployment of the volunteers under the TAC scheme is to collate the number of Nigerian experts required by the needing country. Based on that figure, the Nigerian Government will undertake the recruitment of suitably qualified Nigerians who will be required to do two years of service in any country in Africa or elsewhere. The conditions are not complicated. Such successful applicants will receive a living allowance in US Dollars monthly for the two year service abroad. Nigeria will pay this as well as the transportation to and from the country. Nigeria will also pay resettlement allowance to the deployed Nigerian professionals on getting to the benefitting

country, in dollars and in Naira, on their return to Nigeria after a tour of two years. The host country will only take care of local transportation, medical bills and accommodation.

TAC: Developmental Impacts

The impact of the TAC programme has been profound right from the outset. Fage argues authoritatively that "...the scheme has made some remarkable achievements" (Fage 2012: 200). Through the TAC scheme, Nigeria has over the years contributed skilled personnel to many African countries, despite shortage of such professionals in Nigeria itself. Nothing else demonstrates Nigeria's sacrificial commitment to the African course. Findings from researches conducted by experts on this area reveal that this scheme has remained a great relief to many of the needy African countries that are obviously deficient in well-trained manpower needed for meaningful development (Oyelakin 2014. Tyoden 2012, Daura 2010). As has been said earlier in this study, the Nigeria's Technical Aid scheme has filled the gap created by the weak capacity of some states to produce highly trained manpower towards driving the economy of those states. About 32 African countries have experienced the presence and services of the Nigerian Technical Aid Corps. Some of those African countries are: Angola; Benin Republic; Burkina Faso; Cape Verde; Central African Republic; Ethiopia; Equatorial Guinea; Kenya; Lesotho; Liberia; Sao Tome and Principe; Senegal; Sudan; Tanzania; Gambia; Uganda; Sierra Leone; Mozambique; Zambia; Namibia; Niger Republic etc (Kamilu 2012).

Few years ago, Ethiopia made a request for six hundred and seventy one (671) high caliber Nigerian professionals in diverse academic disciplines, to fill their manpower needs in their efforts to establish eleven new universities. This is added to the numerous numbers of Nigerians already serving under the TAC scheme in that country prior to the time of this request. This demonstrates a clear indication to the scheme's utility and positive achievements as well as wide acceptance of the TAC scheme as an effective technical assistance programme. In countries like Gambia, the TAC scheme, for some long time, became the brain behind the establishment and smooth running of the University of Gambia. Nigeria through the Technical Aid Corps scheme provided the key administrative and academic staff of the University. These included the Vice Chancellor, the Deputy Vice Chancellor, the University Registrar, and a host of other principal officers both of the teaching and non-teaching extraction.

"Since the establishment of the TAC scheme...it has made gains in various areas of Nigeria's foreign relations with other countries" (Imobighe and Alli 2012: 205). The positive contributions of the Technical Aid Corps volunteers in the countries

of deployment, and commendations from international agencies, have greatly enhanced the visibility of Nigeria as a donor country and thus as effective and responsible player in the international arena. Contrary to the stereotyped image of Nigeria and Nigerians as drug traffickers, and perpetrators of other criminal acts by many countries of the world, the deployment of the volunteer corps of the TAC Scheme to the regions of Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific served as publicity for Nigeria, portraying the country in a more positive light. As Kamilu puts it, "The TAC Scheme has endeared Nigeria to many countries..." (2012: 206). It has ensured the survival and continuation of Nigeria's leadership role in Africa, and contributed in some sense, to the strengthening of relations between Nigeria and some countries in Africa. The global recognition of the scheme is perhaps one of its remarkable achievements. It has been welcomed by the Commonwealth of Nations, among other international bodies and organizations. Based on the international recognition accorded to TAC, the Commonwealth of Nations in March, 2003, signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Nigerian government. The MOU with the Commonwealth calls for the provision of Nigerian expertise to needy members states under the Commonwealth Assistance Programme. While the scheme is being managed by the TAC Directorate, the Commonwealth provides the funding. Similar collaborative arrangements have been sought for, and explored by the TAC Directorate. Nigeria now therefore, collaborates with international agencies like the United Nations Volunteer Service; the Japanese Agency for International Cooperation and; the Canadian International Development Agency (Eze 2010). To some appreciable extent, the Nigeria Technical Aid Corps scheme played a remarkable role in the establishment of the South-South Commission.

Among other things, the TAC Scheme has provided very many Nigerian professionals the platform and great opportunities to showcase and market their personal worth and saleable qualities. Consequently, some foreign countries and companies have found many of these Nigerian professionals employable, and have since engaged their services either on contract or permanent and pensionable basis. Some of these professionals retained in these recipient countries have become instrumental in facilitating and attracting internationally-sponsored projects to Nigeria. Daura Mamman, a one-time Director and Chief Executive Officer of the Directorate of Technical Aid Corps, contained in his study, the story of how an ex-TAC volunteer retained by the Shelter-Afrique, in Kenya, and rose later, the Director of Operations of the company, became instrumental to the signing of a protocol between the Government of Bayelsa in Nigeria and the Shelter-Afrique, for the provision of affordable housing units in Bayelsa state.

In spite of its many and varied achievements, the scheme has not been without some challenges. Among other challenges that confront the scheme is that it has turned out to be an encumbrance on Nigeria's national budget. This is because a huge amount of money is expended annually on the programme without immediate visible gains on such expenditure. Added to this challenge, is the continuing difficulties in getting recipient states to fulfill their obligations under the TAC Country Agreement which includes provision of accommodation, local transportation and free medical services to the TAC volunteers.

TAC Scheme On The Weighing Scale

Though the Scheme has been applauded by some who perceive it as the most ambitious foreign policy project ever undertaken by Nigeria (Oyelakin 2014), but it has attracted criticisms by those who are opposed to it. The Scheme has been weighed and found to be a clear demonstration of foreign policy of waste pursued by Nigeria at the great expense of the good of its own citizens (Enuka 2020, Obi 2006). First, it is argued that the scheme is wasteful since young Nigerian professionals working at home do not earn as much as those in TAC Scheme. Secondly, and most importantly, Nigeria is still much in need of these professionals herself. Many Nigerians do not have access to medical doctors, yet Nigeria sends out the ones available for other countries' needs, at the health expense of Nigeria and Nigerians. These are needed men and professionals who ought to be sent to the rural areas in Nigeria, given the dire need for them in such places. It is a paradox that Nigeria still hires and imports Engineers to execute road projects etc, and yet exports her own Engineers to other African countries. Obi (2006) could hardly contain his avowed disapproval of this scheme and policy. He lamented that it is simply incomprehensible how Akinyemi and his master, Babangida, got to the conclusion that a country like Nigeria that is so much in need of high class manpower for her development now has more than enough to think of exporting them to other lands at Nigeria's expense.

The pursuit of such Nigeria's Afrocentric foreign policy, have not been without costs. Their achievements have been at the expense of the nation's economic interests, especially in the short run. Aid which are urgently required for rapid economic development in Nigeria and to enhance the material welfare of Nigerians, have been expended abroad as aid or on other uneconomic ventures. The rationale which Nigerian successive governments have proffered for the granting of economic assistance to other African countries creates the impression that such assistance is obligatory. Therefore, no serious efforts are made to tie the aid to some activity that would enhance Nigeria's national interests. Moreso, the TAC scheme evidently turned out to be an encumbrance on Nigeria's national

budget because a huge amount of money is expended annually on the programme without immediate visible gains on the expenditure. It is but imperative for the Nigerian leaders and foreign policy formulators to realize that pursuits of her foreign policy of waste must be put to check. Nigeria's foreign relations in Africa must obey what Professor Inno Ukeje calls the *Micawber rule*, according to which undertakings are matched with resources, and commitments are never allowed to outrun strength.

In addition to the matter of foreign policy of waste, the TAC scheme is a demonstration of Nigeria's foreign policy of illusion. The pursuit of the TAC scheme and other of such programmes are informed by Nigeria's perception and image of herself. Nigeria's image of herself is that of a great African power, a view that has served as the bases for her arrogant allocation of flamboyant roles and responsibilities to herself. One begins to wonder if Nigeria really has the resources and magnitude of power that match those visions and self-imposed mission. Any serious student of International Relations and Foreign Policy will have little or no difficulty to discover that such Nigeria's image of herself is only assumed and preposterous. For Nigeria in her known real situation to be operating her foreign policy as if she is a great power is indicative of a sort of political illusion. This is nothing short of a self-imposed mission based on an obscured vision of reality. In their bid to acquire international praise, by playing big and good brother role, fuelled by the Afrocentric foreign policy force, different Nigerian governments appeared to be more interested in expenses on foreign African states and nationals than the very Nigerian citizens for whom the resources are meant. Nigerian leaders and the different Nigerian governments forgot that "Respect from abroad acquired through the prodigal disbursement of scarce national resources in favour of external forces, cannot act as a sovereign elixir for such a nation whose internal survival is at stake" (Ukeje 1999: 137).

The TAC is a clear case of charity beginning not at home. To the neglect of the welfare of its own citizens, Nigeria's foreign policy became over-Africa-centered in the pursuit of the TAC programme. Charity loses its *charityness* if it fails to start from home. A pertinent question that begs for an answer is: how has the Nigerian benefited from the TAC and the Nigeria's foreign policy that informs it? The Nigerian people have not been directly considered as the focus or relevant factor in TAC scheme. It is not controversial that the Nigerian had not been made the direct focus of the TAC policy (Adeniji 2005). Rather than a foreign policy that is citizen-centered, it has always been assumed that the Afrocentric philosophies that have coloured Nigeria's foreign policy objectives would benefit Nigerians on the long run. This raises the questions of whether there is any premium on the value of the life of the Nigerian, and whether there is any premium on the welfare

of the Nigerian. The questions are pertinent because defending and protecting other nations, and pursuing after their cause, backed by the adoption of Africa as the cornerstone of Nigeria's foreign policy, at the detriment of Nigeria's own citizens, is abysmally useless and meaningless. Moreover, foreign policy successes in which Nigerians are not direct beneficiaries are not likely to enjoy the support of the people. The goal of making the Nigerian the focus of foreign policy involves giving priority to the wellbeing, development and survival of Nigerians in all foreign calculations. The TAC scheme negates this understanding.

Conclusion

It has been contended in this study, using the case of the Technical Aids Corps Scheme that Nigeria is concerned for, and committed to Africa's development. This concern and commitment is informed by Nigeria's foreign policy principle that placed Africa seriously in Nigeria's African international relations. The paper argued that though the TAC scheme in so many respects made significant developmental impacts, but it has been discredited by a number of realities. While it benefited other African states as its beneficiaries, the TAC scheme deprived Nigerian citizens of the services of those professionals deployed to numerous African states to serve. More so, the project is capital intensive, and has a serious purse-drying effect on Nigeria, and by extension, Nigerians. Owing to the huge amount of money required to be spent on the scheme annually, it turned to become an encumbrance on Nigeria's national budget. This is especially so, when the scheme is operated without immediate visible gains on the expenditure. The underlying reason for Nigeria's commitment to economic growth and development of Africa is to demonstrate leadership and earn respect from African states, an aspiration enshrined in her Afrocentric foreign policy stance. By every sense of judgment, Nigeria needs to be fixed before she can fix other countries. A country that is associated with institutional failings and where social upheavals threaten the polity because of inept and corrupt leadership should need to first, put its house in order before lending its shoulders for the troubles of others. The images of Nigerian communities are painted with hunger, unemployment, dilapidated schools and healthcare centers, while Nigeria spends fortune to fix same in other countries for the benefit of their citizens. This is senselessly hypocritical. Respect of African countries for Nigeria cannot be gained this way.

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