

# Social Entrepreneurship, the State and National Development: A Viable Nexus for Addressing Social Challenges in a Developing Country Context

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*Abstract:* - Development denotes a society's continuous progress toward a better existence. Using secondary data and the Conflict/Elite theory, the paper argued that the goals of social entrepreneurs and the Nigerian State are linked and aimed at proffering solutions to societal problems. In practice, the interaction between these actors are lopsided which result from mistrust, flawed policy synergy on requisite social services provision and inadequate funding which have undermined successes of social welfare programmes in Nigeria. The paper findings indicate that bad leadership, poor governance and lack of social inclusion in public policy formulation poses challenge to promoting national/social entrepreneurship development and socioeconomic transformation in Nigeria. The paper concludes with the propositions that establishing mutual networking and cooperation between social entrepreneurs and the Nigeria state elites will engender positive impact toward the implementation of policies that target the people and engender poverty reduction, create employment opportunities and bridge income inequalities.

*Key-Words:* - Development, Governance, Living Conditions, State, Social Entrepreneurs, Social Nexus

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## 1 Introduction

Development equip individuals with the capacity to meet essential life sustaining necessities, self-esteem and independence. The goal of development policies, therefore, should be to bring about higher economic growth and reduce poverty such that its fruits are more widely and equitably shared among the populace. Thus, the primary responsibility of responsible governments should be to provide as many people as possible with the resources to overcome their helplessness and unhappiness due to lack of food, shelter, health, security, and protection, including the opportunity to attain their human potentials and entrepreneurial capabilities [1, 2]. One such core area that the State can create an opportunity for the people to develop their potentials is to establish an enabling environment for entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial activities to thrive, which is an all-encompassing phenomenon

that can affects every major sector of an economy and development [3, 4].

A cursory examination of the state of development in Nigeria do not portray a pleasant outlook as evidenced by available human, socio-economic and development indicators. For instance, the country is regarded as the poverty capital of the world with over 70 percent of the population living below the poverty level of US\$1.90 dollar per day; unemployment is over 30 percent, maternal and child/infant mortality is one of the highest in the world; over 13 million children are out of school and its human capital development ranked 150 out of 157 countries in the 2020 Human Capital Index [5]. The country continues to face other challenges, including the need to reduce the dependency on oil and diversify the economy, address insufficient infrastructure, and build strong and efficient institutions. Besides, inequality in terms of income and opportunities remain high, which has adversely

affected poverty reduction, thereby triggering social and political unrest.

These problems reflect the challenges the populace are exposed to in Nigeria and the clamor for change that can better their lives since the government and the market (private companies) have not been able to resolve them in the twenty-first century. Thus, other possibilities/alternatives should be considered that can minimize widespread social disparities, including poverty, social exclusion, inequality, unemployment and all other types of discrimination in the nation [6]. In the light of the above, social entrepreneurship, come, in principle and practice, to respond to the new demand of society, providing new ways for organizations to act [7].

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (2000-2015) and the current Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) encapsulates the commitment of the majority of countries around the world to make long-term efforts to eradicate poverty, improve healthcare, gender equality, security, freedom, and universal education etcetera. The dimension to which these needs are addressed and met create the platform for assessing the commitment of countries toward providing better life for its people and advancing socioeconomic development. These social benefits as underlined by the UNDP Human Development reports since the 1990s consistently presupposes the need to enhance the quality of human life globally, stressing that development is all about people and their well-being, which is the most important national asset of nation-state [8].

Essentially, social entrepreneurship can play a pivotal role in this respect, as it represents a critical change agents of society whose mission is to identify areas where societies are deadlocked and provide innovative and creative solutions to addressing them. Social entrepreneurs have an impact on society by reforming systems or putting in place mechanisms that effectively combat poverty, unemployment, and inequality [9, 10]. Thus, a broad understanding of how social entrepreneurship function and its influence on national development will create the opening and necessity for government of many developing countries such as Nigeria to develop and implement regulations that will incorporate them into the mainstream of national economy as is the case of developed countries such as Canada, United States, United Kingdom, to mention but a few [11]. However, since the 1980s, the dominant economic development model in Sub-Saharan African economies has been a struggle between proponents of free market ideology and those who believe that

the government, private and social enterprise sector have roles to play in accelerating economic transformation [3]. Beyond this dichotomy, what is important is to push for the right balance among these sectors and to advance policies that promote inclusiveness, equity and full employment. This paper, therefore, seeks to interrogate how the role of social entrepreneurs and government can be harnessed to create a nexus that engender national and economic development in the country, since they both seem to share common objective of addressing the incidence of growing poverty and inequality.

To achieve this goal, the paper is structured into sections. Following the introduction, statement of the problem and the methodology adopted for the study, section two reviews relevant literature on the role of social entrepreneurs and government in stimulating national and entrepreneurship development. Section three provides the conceptual framework for this study, the use of the Conflict/Elite theories that forms our theoretical base and the discussion of findings for the study. Section four end with the conclusion.

### 1.1 Statement of Problem

A detailed view of a developing country like Nigeria over the past three decades have showed that not much has been achieved by successive governments in transforming the lives of the people of Nigeria for the better. With a population growth rate of 2.6 percent, over 100 million Nigerians live on less than US\$1.90 dollar a day; unemployment has reached double digits of 30.9 percent, and more than 10 million children are out of school (Nigeria has one out of every five out of school children in the world); growing inequality exists between the rich and the poor (Gini Index is 35.1); weak physical and institutional infrastructure are common place, poor education, healthcare and corruption amongst other issues permeate the country [12; 13, 14]. Furthermore, years of economic deterioration, particularly poor industrial capacity, have not been substantially reversed by the implementation of free market policies such as macroeconomic stabilization programs, price liberalization, privatization, commercialization and currency devaluation [15]. Nonetheless, it has been argued over the past three decades that the key development challenge confronting Nigeria is leadership and lack of social inclusion [16; 17]. In practice, critical state and non-state actors such as the public, private sectors (particularly micro, small and medium-sized enterprises) and social enterprise that are catalysts for achieving development goals conduct their

activities independently of one another without any form of national synergy, and their interactions are frequently marked by mistrust, lack of transparency, lack of inclusiveness, and openness in the formulation and implementation of socioeconomic policies, among other things. This is evident in the failure of many social policies (i.e. People's Bank, National Directorate for Employment (NDE), NEEDS, Sure-P, Social Investment program etcetera) which successive government has implemented to help lift a greater majority of the populace out of poverty [13].

Furthermore, successive Nigerian governments have not succeeded to establish an atmosphere in which firms/businesses can be motivated to plow their wealth and other investments into the economy in order to stimulate job creation/opportunities, and utilizing the populace's entrepreneurial abilities/spirit to boost the nation's economic productivity [12]. This is despite being recognized as having the biggest economy in Africa; the largest producer of crude oil in Africa and sixth oil exporter in the world, including attaining a seven percent economic growth from 2000-2014 [13]. Although reforms have been undertaken to help create a friendly business environment, including facilitating faster business start-up to help boost Nigeria's ranking on the World Bank's Doing Business ranking to 131 out of 190 in 2020, Foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows have nevertheless remain stagnant, with new FDI totaling US\$1billion in 2020 as a number of persistent challenges such as corruption, poor electricity, insecurity remain [18]. [19].

As a result, the country's economic expansion over the last two decades has not resulted in the development of industrialization, which is necessary for producing productive employment and building the groundwork for long-term poverty reduction and development. For instance, according to the African Development Report [20], the African continent (of which Nigeria is a major player) has experienced deindustrialization over the last two decades, as evidenced by the fact that manufacturing's share of total value added to the world economy has decreased from 13% in 1990 to 12% in 2000 and 10% in 2011. Since then, the continent has continued to house the majority of the world's poor (with Nigeria being the poverty capital of the world) with rising inequality [20]. It is therefore an indisputable evidence that the achievement of inclusive and sustainable industrialization drives sustained economic growth, reduce hunger, ensure equity and equal opportunity, stimulate the creation of decent jobs and income, improve health and well-

being, increasing resource and energy efficiency, and reduce green gas and other pollution emissions [21; 22; 23; 24].

Correspondingly, while the government of advanced countries see social entrepreneurs as crucial to the continued growth and development of their societies, the same cannot be said of Nigeria where the government does not have a deliberate clear-cut policy to harness the hidden potentials that lies within this sector that can foster sustainable development, including the creation of value, decent chance to job opportunity for all. This situation has hindered their smooth functioning, capacity and operations, since all efforts and policy is focused more on business entrepreneurship. While scholars have argued governments and the free markets mechanisms cannot adequately resolve modern developmental challenges in the twenty-first century, additional options should be explored to reduce social inequities in societies (i.e. high unemployment, urban poverty and social exclusion) [24]. This is where social entrepreneurs respond to society's new demands by combining a passion for a social mission (i.e. poverty reduction) with traditional economic procedures such as productivity, discipline, efficiency, innovation, and determination to achieve results. Interconnecting government with social entrepreneurs is believed to help galvanize the sector's innovative approaches and strategies for addressing our internal (local) social challenges [7]. Since social change is participatory, it has been argued that interconnectivity, collaboration, partnership, and scaling innovative solutions are required to address social problems of societies [25; 26].

## 1.2 Methodology

The research method used in this study was conceptual analysis discourse. This is vital as the purpose is to analyze concepts in their constituent elements in order to gain insights and deeper understanding of the issue under examination. We describe, interpret, and analyze the concepts of social entrepreneurship, the state, and national development with a sociological lens in order to elicit a better understanding of their relationships and interconnection in the context of a developing country like Nigeria, using secondary sources of information such as textbooks, articles, government statistics, reviews from researchers, international institutions and agencies, and so on [27]. The major critiques leveled at this analytical method revolve with definitions and interpretations.

## 2 Problem Formulation

Entrepreneurial growth is a vital key to socio-economic development. Entrepreneurship involves creation and use of innovative ideas, maximization of output from given resources and development of managerial skills which are critical factors for driving overall development. It has been described as the driving force for decentralizing and restructuring an economy. An entrepreneur is someone who is continually looking for new ventures and is willing to take on the risk and uncertainty that comes with running a business [28]. Traditionally, small enterprises, scalable start-ups, huge firms, and social entrepreneurs are the four main forms of entrepreneurship that have existed over time.

Thus, social entrepreneurship is the identification and utilization of existing opportunities, as well as the recruitment of necessary resources for overcoming social challenges in societies [29; 30; 31; 32]. Accordingly, the Centre for Advancement of Social Entrepreneurship (CASE) [33] sees social entrepreneurship as “recognizing and resourcefully pursuing opportunities to create social value or crafting approaches to address critical social needs of societies. Although, a social entrepreneur follows the same path to success as business entrepreneurs, their objectives are radically different. By applying entrepreneurial concepts to build, coordinate, and manage social ventures, social entrepreneurs seek to make beneficial changes in the world first and foremost (i.e. Grameen Bank in Bangladesh). They are crucial social change agents whose duty is to discover areas where societies are stuck and offer novel and creative ideas to solve them i.e. education, health, social and legal services, transportation, vocational, communication and financing [30; 31]. Social entrepreneurs carry out activities that improve and sustain the livelihood of their communities and organizations. Their operations in various parts of the world go beyond simple product and service commercialization to the expansion of options for individuals to become self-emancipated and earn revenue [34]. Social entrepreneurs are not primarily for profit initiatives, but persons in search of alternative funding strategies or management approaches to create social value or impact [35]. For social entrepreneurs, wealth is a tool for them to solve social problems, and success is defined by the good social impact they create in lifting the poor out of poverty. This action corresponds to Emerson's [36] blended-value bottom-line conceptual framework for creating a value creation system that incorporates both financial rewards and social

impact. Conversely, business entrepreneurs are individuals who take the risk of starting a new company. Their purpose is to maximize the use of finite resources to create value or wealth [37]. The business entrepreneur establishes their firm with the intention of profiting from it and their ideas about how the world should be are not connected with their company's actions. Be that as it may, the product and/or services given by an entrepreneur can clearly identify the company's goals and determine whether it is a business or a social enterprise. While these two forms of businesses can be similar, there are key differences between them and these include:

- a. Who is investing in the entrepreneurship? Many social entrepreneurs seek their first phase of funding from philanthropists. Although these investors want to see a return-on-investment (ROI), they are more likely involved in the business due to its social mission. A traditional business entrepreneurship usually seek capital from a venture capitalist firm and they are about the ROI and nothing else.
- b. How are profits used? A business entrepreneurship uses their profits to grow the company and pay shareholders. They get into the business for the sake of making money and increasing their personal wealth. Although, social entrepreneurship engages in for-profit activities, their profits may be donated to charity or used for other philanthropic efforts.
- c. How do you define wealth? A business entrepreneurship defines wealth as naira or dollars made through their actions. Money is the goal of their business. A social entrepreneurship values wealth accumulation and the profits generated by their company. However, they see money as just a tool to affect real change throughout the world [38; 39].

Overall, entrepreneurs (social or business) are influenced by a variety of factors, the most important of which are personal factors (i.e. initiative, proactivity, perseverance, problem solving, persuasion, self-confidence, self-critical, a planner, and risk taker) and environmental factors (which include the political climate, economic and social conditions, market situations, legal system and land tenure policy, amongst others). Furthermore, high income levels of people, desire for new products and sophisticated technology and faster means of transport and communication are

factors that stimulate entrepreneurship development while political instability, unrests, strikes, inconsistent economic policies, unfair trade practices, lack of infrastructure, irrational monetary and fiscal policies stifle the growth of entrepreneurship in the developing country like Nigeria.

## 2.1 The Role of Government in Promoting National and Entrepreneurial Development

It is believed that the disparity between the industrialized and developing countries stems not just from lack of gap in resources but also gap in knowledge, which is the consequence of investments in education, infrastructure, technology, and entrepreneurship development [4]. The political economy of development becomes a critical discourse in this context because it focuses on the interplay between politics and economics, with a particular focus on the role of political power holders in influencing socioeconomic decision-making of nations. In this sense, we should examine the social and institutional processes by which economic and political elites affect the allocation of most nation's scarce resources now and in the future; create and implement policies that are either for their own profit or for the benefit of the greater populace.

It has therefore, been stressed that rapid development and growth with equity is possible through the institutionalization of effective governance. Governance encompasses the mechanisms, processes, and institutions that determine how power is exercised, how decisions on public issues are made, and how citizens express their interests, exercise their legal rights, fulfill their obligations, and mediate their differences [40; 41]. Governance, especially good governance has been regarded as the single most important factor in tackling poverty, inequality and promoting all-round development [42; 41]. However, the quality of a country's public institutions is a significant component in determining how decisions are made and in whose interests they are made, which ultimately reflects the type and character of government and the country's level of development (whether developed or developing). This is so since the locus of power in any society lies within the State and the State will definitely have a say in how the economy is run and the quest for national and entrepreneurship development [16; 41].

This bring to light the rationale for democratic governance. Conceptually, democratic governance is the expression of integrated and effective

management of humans and resources. It allows for wider participation in the social institutions and rules that affect people's lives in order to achieve equitable economic and social outcomes. Democratic governance exists when government institutions pursue pro-poor policies that promote sustainable development of all citizens and are underlined by the principles of public participation, openness, representation, accountability and protection of individual and group rights [43]. Democratic governance further states that rules, institutions and practices that govern social interactions should be inclusive, fair, equitable, and that the people are free from discrimination, including promoting the needs of future generations. As a result, the proposition by proponents of the Washington Consensus neoliberal policy demand for government to have a minimal role in the economy of emerging countries like Nigeria are not sustainable. Their belief in the trickle-down effect of free market economy policy where people would benefit from the growth of a country's GDP has not been realized as indicated by existing poor human and social development indicators earlier highlighted [44]. It is argued that poorly developed markets which is the make-up of most developing countries like Nigeria are marked by monopolies and oligopolies resulting in high prices in accessing vital social services like education, healthcare, telecommunications, housing, transport, raw materials and electricity that may ultimately hinder development. Similarly, most academics agree that markets alone do not lead to efficiency, and that a complete reversal of the state's role in economic development is unachievable [3]. However, the essential issue being canvassed in this study is that there is the need to define and determine what is the right form and extent of government engagement for socioeconomic growth in a developing economy. These realities do not undermine the importance of the markets, but simply emphasize that markets had to be created, measured and paced, governed, and that sometimes private firms might not do what needs to be done given the enormity and complexities of social problems confronting the global south [4].

From the foregoing, it is critical to highlight the critical role that government should may play in fostering entrepreneurship and long-term national development. These responsibilities include:

- i. Provide security to safe guard life and property; maintain law and order and the freedom to do business.

- ii. Ensure conducive environment for entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial ecosystems to thrive.
- iii. Invest in and support social enterprise research in order to perform cost-benefit analyses and measure the value of people-oriented social enterprises.
- iv. Adherence to effective policy implementation and development of critical infrastructural facilities such as roads, ports, bridges, telecommunications, electricity, amongst others.
- v. Incorporate social entrepreneurship into entrepreneurship education activities in schools, vocational education and training colleges and universities in order to stimulate socioeconomic development
- vi. Promotion of savings culture to stimulate capital for investment, including growth
- vii. Promotion of appropriate laws and regulations for promoting corporate governance.
- viii. Assist in the formation of a social enterprise association, which will serve as a centralized database and network for social entrepreneurs.
- ix. Encourage public policy that supports the growth of social enterprises by developing precise legal definitions of social enterprises to manage problems such as taxation and access to public markets.
- x. Provide long-term funding to help social enterprises grow from start-up to scale-up.
- xi. Establish suitable mechanism for monitoring, impact assessment and evaluation [45].

From the above, it is clear that the government's involvement in enabling growth, particularly the establishment of a basic framework for stimulating efficient markets to boost productivity, is critical. However, since 1980s in Nigeria, successive government has tried to promote specifically business entrepreneurship without any attention given to social entrepreneurship in order to engender economic productivity. This has been done through the enactment of the National Productivity Centre Act 1987, introduction of entrepreneurship studies into Nigeria's educational system, establishment of the Centre for Entrepreneurship Development (CED), the defunct Peoples' Bank, National Directorate of Employment, (NDE), National Programme for the Eradication of Poverty (NAPEP), National Open

Apprenticeship Scheme (NOAS), Small and Medium Enterprise Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) set up in 2003, and SMEEIS amongst others. These programmes were targeted to boost growth, generate income, and provide job opportunities in order to solve the country's poverty and unemployment issues.

As vital as they were, the initiatives have not been able to achieve the key objective of solving the poverty and unemployment challenges confronting the populace, particularly the underprivileged, marginalized and vulnerable groups out of their vicious cycle of poverty [46]. In the fields of health, education, economics, and social welfare, the majority of programmes devote little attention to the poor. The provision of social services, in particular, frequently excludes the poor [46]. Furthermore, the challenge with promoting national and entrepreneurship development in Nigeria by successive government has been attributed to their undemocratic character in pursuing economic development which has largely been an exercise in alienation between the leaders and the governed [15]. What is happening presently in a developing nation like Nigeria tends to be development against the people, their psyche, ingenuity, resourcefulness and self-esteem through the institutionalization of harsh economic policies such as Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) market policies which are insensitive to the social condition of the people, traumatize them and break down their social consensus

Also, the social policies of government have not succeeded in fostering an enterprise culture that vigorously stimulate the growth of social entrepreneurs, promote innovators and risk takers; provide and maintain a supportive environment, identify and remove barriers to entrepreneurial growth at all stages of development. Government's inability to address issues of inadequate capital, lack of access to bank credits/financial markets, erratic power supply, infrastructural shortcomings, bureaucratic fees, multiple taxation, and inadequate business skills training centers, among other challenges, are suffocating the growth of entrepreneurship, particularly social entrepreneurs in Nigeria.

Consequently, successive government has not mustered sufficient political will to place the people's interests at the centre of the national development agenda through the construction of roads, bridges, infrastructure, educational and healthcare facilities and industrial development zones that will enhance access to job opportunities, improve the people's well-being and promote

overall national development. It has also failed to bring about the diversification of the economy with active investment in the promotion of social entrepreneurship development. Rather, Nigeria's development issues have mostly been a struggle between State elites on the one hand and the people on the other for control and appropriation of the dwindling country's scarce resources, as well as the disarticulation of the economy to the disadvantage of the poor and vulnerable as evidenced by the growing incidence of poverty, unemployment, inequality in the country.

## **2.2 The Contribution of Social Entrepreneurs in Promoting National Development**

The transformation of nations to become a robust and prosperous economy requires that the leadership adopts the culture of productivity, innovation, improvements and proper management of human and material resources which are the drivers of development. Be that as it may, most societies are dealing with socio-economic challenges of unemployment, poverty, inequality, energy problems, infrastructural decay, to mention but a few [47]. All these issues negatively undermine the living conditions of the people. Thus, all efforts must be galvanized to come up with strategies for tackling them. One sector that can help overcome these challenges in order to achieve economic transformation is the social entrepreneurs.

Social Entrepreneurship focuses on the identification of social challenges and the adoption of innovative and entrepreneurial approaches targeted at proffering short and long term solutions [48]. Social entrepreneurs serve as the active catalyst that can adequately combat poverty and lack of job opportunities in the public and private sectors and engender sustainable economic development when adequately harnessed. Accordingly, Schumpeter [49] refer to social entrepreneurs as "change agents" in the larger economy. For him, economic development is a process of carrying out new combinations in the production process and entrepreneurs are precisely the person whose role it is to implement these new combinations [50]. Entrepreneurs are not necessarily the owners of a company, but they are responsible for introducing changes in an at least one of the following ways: the introduction of a new products or new market, the acquisition of a new source of raw materials or the reorganization of a sector of activity.

Social enterprises, unlike the traditional non-profit organizations are normally not engaged in advocacy as a major goal or in the redistribution of financial flows (i.e. grant-giving foundations), but they are directly involved in the production of goods or provision of services to the people on a continuous basis. In most developed countries where social enterprises exists, they operate in two broad spheres of activity: on the one hand, the training and reintegration into employment of persons excluded from the labour market and, on the other hand, the rapidly developing sector of personal services. Social enterprises main contributions is to bring about the transformation of existing welfare systems, employment creation, local development, building of social capital and social cohesion. It is the desire to drive positive social change with its lasting, transformational benefit to society that distinguishes social entrepreneurs from other practitioners [51].

The importance of social entrepreneurs is fully recognized in industrialized countries as representing the new or renewed expression of civil society against a background of economic crisis, the weakening of social bonds and difficulties of the welfare State. It is broadly associated with the major economic roles of the public authorities: with the allocation of resources through production of quasi-public goods and services; with the redistributive function through the provision, free or almost free of charge, of a wide range of services to deprived people, including helping poorly qualified unemployed people, who are at the risk of permanent exclusion from the labour market, back to work [52]. Today, most societies particularly the developed ones are moving towards a redefinition of relationships between the individual, the intermediate structure of the civil society and the state. In any case, the world is moving from a "welfare state" to a new "welfare mix" where responsibility should be shared among public authorities, for-profit providers and third sector organizations (which include social entrepreneurs) on the basis of efficiency and fairness.

However, the idea of a distinct 'third sector', made up of most social enterprises and organizations which are not purely seeking profit nor are part of the public sector, really began to emerge in the mid-1970s. Such organization were certainly very active in many areas of activity and were subject of specific public policies. As the problems caused by economic crisis deepened, the awareness of the limitations of the traditional public and private sectors steadily grew. Against this background, the interest in other kinds of economic organizations

was strongly advocated, a bit like the search for a “third way” of development between capitalism and state socialism by newly independent countries during the 1950s and 1960s, though on a different scale.

The value of a social entrepreneur is to assist a population that is underserved, neglected, or severely disadvantaged and lacks the financial or political weight to deliver the transformative effect on their own. They identify a stable but fundamentally unjust equilibrium that causes a segment of society to be excluded, ostracized, or suffer. They perceive an opportunity in the inequitable balance of society, create a social value proposition, and use inspiration, ingenuity, daring, direct action, and courage to contest the state's hegemony. Furthermore, they create a new, stable equilibrium that unleashes stored potentials or alleviates the suffering of the target group they have identified, and secure a better future for them and the society at large. (i.e. Grameen Bank). Social entrepreneurship is a business model used by national government, individuals, and organizations to help solve some of the world's greatest problems. It is using business as a force for good and the way the business can influence positive change.

They are mainly the founders of micro, small, and medium businesses, which account for more than 25% of jobs in the country [49]. The poll also indicated that Nigeria has 17 million small and medium-sized businesses, which employ 32.41 million people and contribute 46.54 percent of the country's GDP. According to the World Bank [53], formal SMEs account for 45 percent of total employment and up to 33 percent of GDP in emerging economies (GDP). The goal of social entrepreneurship is to create a positive social impact through addressing societal problems [49; 54]. They are individuals who adopt a mission to create and sustain social values; relentlessly pursue new opportunities to serve that mission; continuously innovate, adapt, and learn new ideas and skills; act boldly and beyond their resources; and demonstrate a high sense of accountability for their contributions to society [49; 55; 56]. They have been described as not for profit initiatives but in search of alternative funding strategies. This is not to say that social entrepreneurs always avoid profit-generating value propositions. Social entrepreneurship ventures can generate revenue and can be formed as non-profit or for-profit organizations [57]. A good examples of social entrepreneurs include North Star Alliance in South Africa, ASAFE in Cameroun, Sanjit Roy, the founder of BAREFOOT College, a solar-powered college for the poor in India; Mark Koska, who

redesigned medical tools by introducing a non-reusable, low-cost syringe to be used in under-funded clinics; Jeff Kurtzman, co-founder of Incubation, which provides low-cost, low-maintenance incubators; and Scott Harrison, founder of Charity Water, a non-profit organization that provides safe and portable water in 28 countries around the world [58; 59].

Social entrepreneurs are involved in giving practical reality to many noble ideals-helping the poor, homeless, physically, psychologically or mentally challenged people, and not limited by constraints of resources currently available in their drive to proffer solutions to social challenges. Nigeria, for example, has a wide range of social and environmental issues. These include high rate of poverty, weak governance and accountability issues, a poor healthcare system, poor waste management practices, lack of electricity, a large housing deficit etcetera, all of which have implications for health, employment, and financial inclusion [60]. All of these problems present huge opportunities for social entrepreneurs who can assist to help the economy recover. They stand between the private and public sectors, applying new tools and approaches to the work governments have traditionally done without results and bring forth innovative solutions to solve them. Most of them are change agents who think outside the box to produce changes in the short term that reverberate through existing social systems and engender large changes in the long term.

They can also work with government rather than against it by improving the government's willingness or ability to invest in a specific government function "by rethinking the way its value is expressed." For instance, when social entrepreneurs collaborate with government, they can provide additional public good, such as data on an integrated public-private transit system or information on improved healthcare service delivery, better ways in which the resources of the nation can be utilized to better the well-being of the people, among other things. For instance, in 2016, the Buhari government launched its #500 billion Social Investment Programme (SIP) that involves direct cash transfers of #5,000 monthly to one million beneficiaries in poor vulnerable households; school feeding of 5.5 million primary school children; training of 500,000 graduates as teachers and 100,000 non-graduates as artisans and other special intervention projects. However, concerns have been raised on how these projects will be carried out without an authentic database of potential beneficiaries. With a vibrant social enterprise sector involvement and collaboration,

these funds could have been channeled to achieve better results of pulling the poor out of poverty through the use of credible social enterprises such as Live Above Poverty Organization (LAPO), Mobility Aid and Alliances Research and Development Centre (MAAARDEC), Solar Sister Nigeria, Project Enable Africa, Seed Tracker, The Cece Yara Foundation, Junior Achievement Nigeria etcetera. Social entrepreneurs' goal seeks to target social issues such as reducing barriers to employment for disenfranchised groups and individuals; the elimination of homelessness in the community; improve the health outcomes for members of the community etcetera, by weaving them into the core of their business in order to create positive social value and impact for all. Thus, the social value created by social entrepreneurs' actions demonstrates how much of an influence they have had on the lives of people who need it, as well as providing a ray of hope for achieving Sustainable Development Goals 1, 3, 5, 7 and 8 through creating jobs, driving economic growth and innovation, improving social conditions and addressing social and environmental challenges.

In the light of this, Zahra *et al* [61] outlined four factors fueling the globalization of social entrepreneurs and these include global wealth disparity, the corporate social responsibility movement, the market, institutional and state failures, and the technological advances and shared responsibility. In all, because their services are oriented to the poor, social entrepreneurs, like governments, markets, and communities, can be considered as one of the pillars of a successful development plan.

Today, social entrepreneurs are present in virtually all sectors or segments of the society. Their footprints can be found in organizations that work for child rights, women empowerment, safe environment programs, housing, transport, health problems, waste management, and financial issues of rural and marginalized groups, amongst others. In addition, social entrepreneurs have particular obstacles they are faced with in generating social value, social returns, or social impact [62]. These challenges include funding, lack of proper channel for communicating their business idea, lack of a central governmental agenda, lack of structure and plan, government approval, competition from others, acquiring technologies, and raising awareness etcetera, are just a few of the hurdles social entrepreneurs have to confront and overcome. In all, this study brings to fore the fundamental role that social entrepreneurs play in the world through the creation of social value and widespread

improvement of people where society or the community benefits.

### 2.3 Conceptual Framework

The proposed model utilized for this study as shown in figure1 (see appendix section) posits the best approach for solving social problems in a developing society like Nigeria. The model primarily argues that the quest of government for sustainable socio-economic development through solving socio-economic problems are better attained through sustainable nexus between the State and the input of social entrepreneurs. This synergy will expedite the quest for national economic diversification of the country which will go a long way in addressing the problems of poverty, unemployment, inequality and social exclusion. For instance, youth unemployment has diverse implications which can impact on the security of the country as we are already witnessing today. Many of the cases of kidnapping, ritual killings, banditry, terrorism etcetera which are rife in Nigeria are perpetrated by unemployed youths, who have taken to these heinous crimes in order to make a living [63].

The study conceptual framework shows that there are three possible routes to attaining sustainable socio-economic development when resolving societal social problems. The first route is when social entrepreneurs' attempt to solve social problems alone even though they have the skills to craft innovative, viable and pragmatic solutions. However, the study posits that such lone attempt will not yield the desired result given the complexity of the social environment in which they operate i.e. bad leadership, corruption, lack of legal regulation and poor governance. This is denoted with the dotted arrow, which shows that social problems cannot be successfully solved unilaterally by one sector without collaboration with other key stakeholders in other sector including State actors.

The second route is the attempt by government trying to solve societal problems alone particularly as it relate to the framing and implementation of policies to address the problem of poverty eradication programmes in a developing country like Nigeria. We argue that this route will yield no meaningful solution given the problems of lack of requisite expertise and skills, corruption, bad leadership, lack of pro-poor policies, social exclusion, lack of openness and transparency that characterize the governance process in many developing countries, including Nigeria. This is because social problems, such as poverty, cannot be tackled effectively by a one-size-fits-it-all solution

by government such as the adoption of free market-enterprise based policy and the manifestation of its eventual failure to reduce the incidence of poverty, inequality and unemployment in many low-income economies such as Nigeria [64; 65]. The third route is the interconnection between social entrepreneurs and the government, which we call the *nexus*. This *nexus* shows the interaction between the government and the social entrepreneur in collectively addressing societal based problems. In this context, the relationship *nexus* is collaboratively driven by social entrepreneurs and the government, wherein the social entrepreneurs are recognized as having a better grasp of the knowledge and innovation in proffering solutions to the existing social problems given their expertise, albeit not holistic when addressed alone. As for the State, their role is to create the enabling environment by formulating policies that better acknowledge the specificities and potentials of the role of social entrepreneurs in carrying out their social responsibility of addressing societal social problems. This study averred that it is the nexus between the two sectors that provides optimal and attainable solutions to societal problems that will ultimately results to sustainable socio-economic development for the country as it is done in the developed countries of the world. This nexus emphasized the need for interconnectivity, partnership and scaling innovative solutions if social problems are to be addressed, since social change is participatory [26].

This is very fundamental given the fact addressing a social problem such as poverty requires social inclusiveness. Poverty is a multidimensional problem embedded in a complex and interconnected political, economic, cultural and ecological system [56]. Owing to its large scope and multiplicity of actors, there is no single guaranteed approach to the eradication of poverty. Within this context, therefore, solutions are as multifaceted as the causes. Problems and solutions are not isolated phenomena but occur within an interconnected system in which actors and actions have reciprocal consequences and ramifications. Thus a system's approach which incorporate both the government and social entrepreneurs is critical in creating an enabling environment for sustainable poverty eradication to subsist. Thus, the fact that poverty eradication is a complex mission, requires the commitment, cooperation and cohesion at all levels-individual, household, community, local, national and global collaboration. It will encapsulate the efforts by government, Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs) such as social entrepreneurs and international development agencies directed

towards improving the conditions of the poor. This will create a general condition which allows people to live in dignity where they are free to make their own decisions in life and participate actively in social, economic and political activities.

#### **2.4 Theoretical Framework**

The attainment of socio-economic and national development requires the application of innovative approach, engaging appropriate systems and strategies in addressing societal problems. Tackling challenges such as poverty, unemployment, inequality, poor infrastructure and low enterprise growth requires the institutionalization of viable social policies by the government to create a better society. When public social policies are properly conceived and implemented by government and its institutions, they go a long way to influence the social conditions of the people and the entire society at large [66]. This will invariably determine the state of economic development in most societies including Nigeria. Without the provision of pro-poor social policies, sustainable growth and development cannot be attained. As such, the roles, values and attitudes of the political and economic elites is fundamental in interrogating the question of poverty, inequality, unemployment and its attendant consequences for individuals and the society at large. This fact is corroborated by [67] who averred that poverty occurs due to inability of individuals to achieve the minimum capacity needed to gain fundamental freedoms of life, including economic freedom. Available data revealed that over 100 million Nigerians live below the poverty level of US\$1.90 per day and unemployment has reached double digit of 30.9 percent [13]. Though certain social policies such as the People's Bank, National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), NEEDS, Sure-P and the National Social Investment Programme, to mention but a few, have been implemented by successive governments in Nigeria, however, issues of poverty has not abated, with the country declared as the poverty capital of the world [21]. Besides, most of the policies formulated to address the challenge of poverty always tend to subscribe to a top-bottom approach rather than a bottom-up approach in conceiving and implementing them. To properly situate the success or failure of governmental social policies in the Nigerian context, the Conflict and Elite theory was employed to evaluate the processes of decision making by the political elites in order to interrogate whether those decisions made by them were in the interests of the larger society or for their own narrow selfish interests. This is quite different from

the activities of social entrepreneurs, whose goal is to tackle social and economic problems in the society, thereby creating enabling economic opportunities for the poor and thereby combating poverty [68].

The conflict theory as developed by Karl Marx, focuses on how power and domination operate in the society and ultimately influence social policies in most societies [69] [70]. Conflict theory sought to explain a wide range of social phenomena, including poverty, inequality, discrimination, wars, competition and conflict that exists among different socioeconomic classes. The theory investigates the causes and implications of social class conflict arising from the continual struggle for scarce resources. A basic premise of conflict theory is that individuals and groups within society will work to maximize their own wealth and power. According to the conflict theory proponents, power imbalances exist in all human relationships and societal structures, and social order is maintained by economic dominance and power rather than by consensus and compliance [71]. The theory views social and economic institutions as tools of the struggle among groups and classes, used to maintain inequality and the dominance of the ruling class. From the conflict theory perspective, power can be seen as the control of material resources and wealth accumulation, control of politics and institutions that make up societies.

Those who benefit from a particular structure of society tend to work to maintain those structures as a way of retaining and enhancing their power. In this way, individuals and groups inherently develop more power and reward than others. Adherents of these this theory tend to believe in a pyramid arrangement in terms of how goods and services are distributed in society. At the top of the pyramid is a small group of elites that dictates terms and conditions to the larger portion of society because they have an outsized amount of control over resources and power. Conflict theory assumes that the elite will set up systems of laws, traditions and other societal structures in order to further support their own dominance while preventing others from joining their ranks. Conflict theorists believe that competition is a constant, and at times, an overwhelming factor in nearly every human relationship and interaction. Competition exists with respect to material resources such as money, property, commodities etcetera and intangible resources which include lecture time, dominance, and social status. An important position of the conflict theory is that human relationships and

social structures all experience inequalities of power. Following this, those individuals and groups who benefit from a particular structure of society tend to work to maintain those structures as a way of retaining and enhancing their power.

Consequently, this theory is further complemented by the elite theory, which seeks to interrogate the role of the State and political elites in the advancing national and socio-economic development in Nigeria. The Elite theory seeks to describe power relationships in contemporary societies as uneven. The theory lays out a blueprint for a healthy society, one in which competent elites can promote individual dignity, widespread social welfare, and political stability when they adhered to prescribed rules of engagement. The Elite theory proposition is based on Pareto's and Mosca's work on wealth, distribution of power and the impact of the ruling class in driving societal development.

Political elites, according to this theory, are individuals who are able to significantly influence political and economic outcomes at the national level due to their strategic positions in government, powerful large-scale organizations and social movements where they are the main decision-makers. These elites are a separate group of people in a society who have privileged status (i.e. they are at the top of the pyramids of political, economic and social ladder) and have control over how the society is constituted [72].

To understand the nature and dynamics of development in most societies, nation-state, institutions and institutional persistence or decadence, we must consider the motives, coherency and overall dynamics of these elites. While elites are frequently the unavoidable result of competing interests in social systems and complex collectivities, their composition changes depending on existing political and social circumstances. Because political elites in different societal cultures wield disproportionate power, their decisions have disproportionate societal consequences and effect, and they almost always enjoy excessive benefits and protections. Thus, the basic stability or instability of political regimes, the shapes and workings of political, social and economic institutions, and the principal policies pursued by national governments are all outcomes that elites influence [73].

### 3 Discussion

From the foregoing theories, we can assess the nature and state of growth of social entrepreneurship development in Nigeria since independence given

that the country has not made considerable progress in social and economic development as earlier mentioned.

At the core of the many reasons adduced for the dismal development performance including the lack of promotion of social entrepreneurship development in Nigeria is the issue of bad leadership, lack of pro-poor policies and poor governance, which are critical elements necessary for advancing the processes of national development. This is fundamentally so given the fact that governance is seen as critical factor in tackling poverty, inequality and unemployment. The fact that political power is concentrated within the state, it is incumbent on political elites in positions of 'leadership' to devise social policies that are responsive to people's needs and aspirations which will result in improved living conditions for the populace.

This is significantly so as the goal of development interventions is to move society from a perceived condition of deprivation to a one of prosperity. Thus, development discourse has grown multidisciplinary, incorporating policy analysis that focuses on the key symptom of failed development, and asserting that development is not an objective in itself, but rather a method of improving the living conditions of humans. Unfortunately, the Nigerian "leadership" since independence has not been able to deliver on this premise. The Nigerian 'leaders' have not been able to see the people as key stakeholders with collective mindfulness in the running of the affairs of the nation [74].

Mindful leaders are "courageous", they perceive the 'big picture' and "create environments of trust and safety", which would ignite innovation [72]. It has been argued that no nation has overcome the challenges of poverty reduction and development without proving its ability to be creative and innovative. In the case of Nigeria, the leaders appear to have a fixed mind-set that do not accommodate alternative ideas. The leaders do not seem to understand that empowering the people will change the future of the society for better. It has been stressed that no society can separate poverty from the political and economic forces of the society as well as the mind-set of the leaders because they determine the state of human condition in every country [74].

The challenges facing Nigeria today appear to be deep-rooted in the mind-sets of the leaders and the nation's extractive political and economic institutions, which has consistently fail to

incorporate the activities of the social entrepreneurs into the mainstream economy and see them as key stakeholders in the process of proffering solutions to the myriad of social problems confronting the country. The failure of our leaders to change their mind-set and embrace creative and innovative ideas which the social entrepreneurs can engender to transform and restructure the system, will continue to threaten the growth and development of the nation, including the touted drive for economic diversification. Thus for the country to advance, there is the necessity for the leaders to create inclusive political and economic institutions to empower the citizens to reach their full potentials, of which social entrepreneurs can play a pivotal role when incorporated into the mainstream of the national economy.

Furthermore, evidence abound of how the political elites and their collaborators in the private sector use state power to promote their self-centered interests and exploit the masses through policies formulation and decision-making such as adoption of SAP reforms, increases in the price of electricity, gas and petrol, basic foodstuffs, social goods and services, which ultimately hurt the people and further plunge them into worsening poverty [15]. In Nigeria, there is no national community, only a groups of political elites competing among themselves to capture power and use it to appropriate state resources for their personal aggrandizement, thereby exacerbating the condition of poverty and inequality in the nation. This condition virtually nullifies any prospect of evolving and carrying through any national project including development. Where any attempts are made to seek development, policies tend to be hampered by political and social contradictions such as the divorce of public policy from social needs of the people.

Furthermore, the ruling political elites in Nigeria have consistently failed to play the role of a development entrepreneur in promoting the social transformation of the country. The country lacked a determined developmental elite, a powerful, competent and insulated economic bureaucracy that can explore for opportunities internally for setting up industries and enterprises that are engine of growth such as social entrepreneurs and non-state actors in the agriculture, textiles and SMEs sectors. This goes to explain the apparent failure of successive government to have the political will to incorporate social entrepreneurs into the mainstream of the economy to help chart the process of structural and economic transformation, by tapping into their expertise, ingenuity and innovation in

designing policies that address the core social problems of poverty and unemployment. As such, the historical record of most developing societies including Nigeria shows overwhelmingly that politics normally approximate an unrestrained struggle among distrustful elites to defend and advance their interests with little regard for the costs and consequences of their actions, impropriety, including the welfare of the populace.

These realities ultimately explain why the various attempts by successive governments to address the prevailing incidence of poverty through the enunciation of various poverty reduction initiatives such as NAPEP, SURE-P and the National Social Investment Programmes since 1999 have consistently failed to deliver on their mandate, as they do not directly target the poor, such that today Nigerians are more impoverished, disadvantaged and socially bankrupt [75]. There are more jobless graduates today than ever, poverty is on the increase, and many children are out of school as the parents cannot pay their tuition even in the perceived free education scheme. In addition, the value of the naira is at its lowest ebb, prices of food and commodities is on the high side. Many have gone into the field of armed robbery, kidnapping, banditry, money rituals and other vices.

Consequently, all efforts at poverty alleviation in Nigeria are essentially ad hoc in nature and not integrated into a well-defined national development objective that directly target the poor [76]. Much more critical is the issue of lack of social inclusion which undermined the energy and resourcefulness of the target population in seeing themselves as key stakeholders in the poverty alleviation programmes which heightened the mistrust of whether their interests are being promoted or ignored. Also, some of those programmes addressing poverty do not focus on the vulnerable groups particularly women and children that constitute a greater majority of those who suffer more from the poverty trap. This is so as gender relations constitute a prime factor in explaining social differentiation and inequalities in the Nigerian society and provide the platform for social/policy reforms in the pursuit of national, social entrepreneurship and sustainable development [77].

#### 4 Conclusion

From the foregoing discourse, it has become imperative that social entrepreneurship development can foster a sound sustainable approach towards national and entrepreneurship development in

Nigeria. This is imperative because social entrepreneurship's goal is to advance human and social well-being. Given the complexities of the social challenges such as poverty, housing deficit, unemployment, inequality, urban congestion, out of school children, poor electricity access, etcetera that requires meticulous construction of antidote in societies, the task seems too weighty to be solely dealt with by the state. It needs the input of social entrepreneurs who are strategically positioned to provide unique innovative solutions and intervention to societal challenges and stimulate economic revitalization and diversification.

Therefore, it is imperative for the Nigeria government to put in place proper legislation and sustainable implementable social policy at the core of its development agenda that addresses interlocking factors with strong connection to social issues, such that can stimulate the emergence of highly inspired social entrepreneurs. The causal loop towards socioeconomic underdevelopment in Nigeria can be addressed by adding more social enterprises to the economy that can boost social innovation and impact through creation of social services and addition of value to products in the agricultural, extractive, communication, educational, health, and environmental sectors. The social benefits of social entrepreneurs in Nigeria, however, remain a source of substantial uncertainty when the political will of the leaders of the nation to diversify the economy of Nigeria is lacking. To this end, the government's involvement in social entrepreneurship finance in Nigeria will help to draw more individuals, institutions, and organizations to the field.

Similarly, it is instructive to state that the engagement method of social ventures are community based. Thus, government should employ the bottom-up approach to development, where government policy makers engage the services of social entrepreneurs to scientifically ascertain from members of various communities across the country what their needs are and then examined where further support can be created or leveraged on to solve them.

Consequently, the leadership of the country must realize that the development of entrepreneurship spirit in the populace will not come by wishful thinking but through the promotion of human capital development which will require active government intervention in investing massively in funding education and research, infrastructure, vocational training in partnership with industries and

organization with the requisite capacity for skills development in technology and social services. It is also imperative to state that making development work in ways that enrich the people particularly the poor and vulnerable in society is to make the economy work for all the people. Thus, the success of any public social policy is measured by how many jobs it creates, improvement in health and life expectancy and literacy rates of the citizenry. Finally, the incidence of poverty, inequality and unemployment is an issue that needs dedicated and on-going action that includes but is by no means limited to growing social enterprises.

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### Contribution of Individual Authors to the Creation of a Scientific Article (Ghostwriting Policy)

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-John Smith, Donald Smith carried out the simulation and the optimization.

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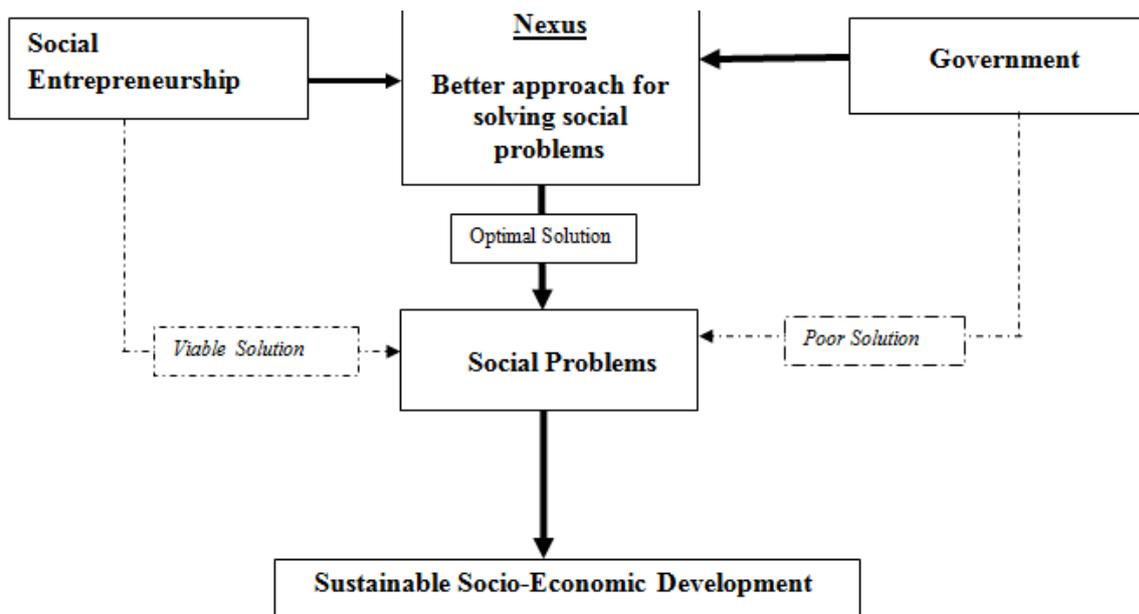


Fig. 1: Egharevba-Ukenna Social Entrepreneurship-Government Nexus Model

Source: Authors compilation 2022