Spatial Inequality in Nigeria: The Imperative of Geographic Perspectives in the Development Process

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is on regional inequality in socio-economic standards in Nigeria. The inequality in the country is not only known to have persisted and widened over the years, but is also known to have a spatial dimension. In this study, the magnitude of the inequality has been determined by the mean logarithmic deviation index using data from the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey of 2003, while the influence of geography has been assessed through regression analysis. The results show total inequality indices of 0.260 and 0.321 for rural-urban and regional decompositions respectively and indicate that geography is a significant determinant of socio-economic conditions in the country. The southern regions, which are more favoured geographically, have advanced more than the northern. Therefore, a geographic perspective in development policies and planning is required in order to reduce or eliminate inequality in Nigeria. Accordingly, recommendations have been made to redress the adverse effects of geography so as to achieve even development in the country.

Introduction

Inequality is the dispersion of a distribution in terms of income, consumption or some other welfare indicator or attribute of a population. Accordingly, spatial inequality refers to uneven distribution of income or other variables across spatial location (World Bank 1999; Kanbur et al 2003). An appreciation of the patterns of inequality is important for the analysis of direction of economic growth and development (Henderson et al 2001; Kanbur and Venables 2005). This is because recent empirical works have established that a link exists between inequality and growth. Moreover, high level of income inequality produces an unfavourable environment for economic growth and development (Alayande 2003; Erubami and Young 2003; Oyekale et al 2004). More importantly, if inequality within countries exists because of barriers to competition, it can foment internal tension, and economic and social development within countries is negatively affected (Anderson and Pomfret 2004).

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The awareness of these relationships has combined with increased social and political pressures and academic interests to give impetus to the study of spatial inequality. This has led to a growing recognition of the importance of space to socio-economic development, which, in turn, has been reflected in theoretical, policy and empirical developments (Goodchild et al 2000; Kanbur and Venables 2005; Rey and Janikas 2005; Shorrocks and Wan 2005).

Geography affects development through the interaction between environment, space and society. As a result, spatial disparities in living conditions exist both within and between localities since these variables vary spatially. Thus, inequality exists between regions as it does between individuals and this has to do partly with spatial variations in institutions and endowments and partly also to do with the spatial relationship between economic units (Deichmann 1999; Henderson et al 2001).

Specifically, the most significant channels of influence of geography on economic development are the productivity of the land, presence of endemic disease, natural disasters, the location of countries and their population in relation to the coast, and the concentration of population in urban areas (Gallup et al 1998; 2003). However, in some instances, spatial location is often not of interest itself, but rather because of its association with many other important influences, such as natural resources, weather conditions, infrastructure, cultural traditions and even institutional arrangements, some of which may contribute positively to the between group component of inequality (Shorrock and Wan 2005).

In stressing the import of geography in development, one is not trying to re-introduce environmental determinism. Rather, it is understood that some geographical factors are a constraint to development so that by understanding them and designing appropriate policies to deal with them can help countries liberate themselves from the constraints. Therefore, policies and development strategies can be designed to turn geography into an advantage, but only if as a first step there is an understanding of the different channels through which geography influences the potential for economic and social development (Gallup et al 2003).

In Nigeria, the study of inequality is not new. A lot of effort has been devoted to the documentation of differences among Nigerian citizens’ standards of living and access to opportunities over the last decades by various authors and institutions. Several of the studies have shown that inequality is increasing and has led to a growing dimension of poverty in the country (Aigbokhan 2000; Ipinnaiye 2001; Thomas and Canagaraja 2002; Erubami and Young 2003; Oyekale et al 2004). A majority of the studies have indicated that geography or space is correlated with inequality in Nigeria (FOS 1999; Okojie et al 2001; Alayande 2003; Erubami and Young 2003).
One limitation of the studies is that while extensive analyses in income inequalities exist in the country, relatively little analyses are available on inequality in other dimensions of human development. More importantly, despite the acknowledgement of the importance of geographic factors on inequality, little or no effort has been made to establish the strengths of the geographic variables. The present study arose out of the necessity to close this research gap. Thus, the study aims at ascertaining whether the persistence inequality in socio-economic conditions in Nigeria is related to geographical factors.

Geographical Characteristics and Diversity of Nigeria

Nigeria lies roughly between longitudes 30$^\circ$ and 15$^\circ$ east of Greenwich and 4$^\circ$ and 14$^\circ$ north of the equator. It has a total area of 923,768 sq km and shares borders with French-speaking countries, namely, Benin Republic to the west, Niger to the north, Chad to the northeast and Cameroon to the east. In the south, the country is bounded by the Atlantic Ocean.

The position in relation to land and Ocean makes it face in two directions -- towards land in the north and Ocean in the south. This position, as seen later, has important implications for the geographical variations in the country. One major outcome is the diversity in both physical and human activities.

In terms of physical features, there is a diversity of relief. For instance, there are the Jos Plateau, which rises to over 1,830 m above the sea level and other impressive mountains like the Cameroonian, and Adamawa highlands on the eastern boundary. Apart from these highlands, most of the northern Nigeria lies between 305 and 915 m. In contrast, the land drops to under 15 m over much of the Niger Delta in the south. Similarly, significant variations exist in terms of rock types. There are Precambrian basement rocks across the country together with quaternary rocks in the Chad Basin, the coast and the Niger Delta.

There are also variations in rainfall amount and duration of rainy seasons across the country. Rainfall averages over 200 cm per annum in the south, 100 cm in the middle but only 60 cm in the northern parts of the country. The dry season increases from four months in the south to eight in the north. The range of temperature also increases inland from the coast.

Diversity also exists in terms of vegetation. Mangrove and freshwater swamp vegetations are well-developed on the coast followed by moist forests further inland. In the centre, wide expanses of moist woodland savanna are found followed by dry woodland savanna and scrub vegetation in the north.

The human variation is also remarkable. Nigeria has a total population of 136 million and this ranks 9th in the world. It is the most populous country in Africa. However, the concentration of major ethnic groups that make up the population show regional variation. The Yoruba are concentrated in the southwest while the
major groups in the north are Hausa, Fulani and Kanuri. The ‘Middle Belt’ has diverse and often non-Islamic peoples of varied cultural levels, including Tiv, Idoma and Nupe. The Ibo dominate the southeast while the south-south are dominated by Urobo, Ijaw, Efik, Ibibio and Edo. The greatest population clusters are, however, found around the Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani and Ibo heartlands.

The strength of Nigeria lies in the diversity of its resources and the large market, which its population offers. The south is largely responsible for the economic products and indeed for the bulk of the export trade of the whole country. The products include oil, which is the main export commodity of the country, timber, rubber, cocoa, oil palm products and coal, which for now is not being exported although efforts are being made for its revitalisation.

The Middle Belt of the savanna is a mixed crop zone producing grain crops (maize, rice, beans, beniseeds) and surplus yams and some livestock. The Sudan savanna of the north is rich in products like grain crops, irrigated cane sugar, vegetable crops, cotton, groundnuts and livestock. Figure 1 shows the vegetation, mineral distribution and diverse agricultural products in the country.

Figure 1: Nigeria: Geographical Diversity
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl No.</th>
<th>Zone</th>
<th>Land Area (Km²)</th>
<th>Mean Altitude (m)</th>
<th>Mean Temperature (°C)</th>
<th>Average Rainfall (cm)</th>
<th>Arable Land (ha / Person)</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Population Density (per cent)</th>
<th>Urban Population (per cent)</th>
<th>Average Distance from the Coast (km)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>North Central</td>
<td>242,425</td>
<td>572</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1,157</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>12,590,655</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>North East</td>
<td>272,395</td>
<td>702</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>865</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>13,407,442</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>715</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>North West</td>
<td>216,065</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>926</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>22,264,182</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>South East</td>
<td>29,525</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2,506</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>10,712,675</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>South South</td>
<td>84,587</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1,888</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>12,939,226</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>South West</td>
<td>78,771</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1,300</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>17,600,641</td>
<td>473</td>
<td>66.0</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Diverse.
The figure clearly shows that tree crops and root crops are found in the south, mixed root and grain crops in the middle and grain crops in the north. This crop distribution is mainly governed by rainfall distribution. Similarly, Table 1, which is a summary of key geographical characteristics of the country, captures the diversity. The table indicates that regions in the south have lower elevation and temperature, more rainfall and greater percentage of urban population than those in the north.

Methods

The Data Source: The socio-economic data for the study were obtained from the National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) conducted in Nigeria in 2003 and jointly published in 2004 by the National Population Commission (NPC), Nigeria, and ORC Macro, USA. The survey, which used 7,225 households, is the most recent of such surveys in the country. It shows the economic and social conditions aggregated at both rural-urban and geo-political zones. The data for the geographic variable were, however, obtained from various sources.

Indicators of Socio-Economic Conditions: An analysis of spatial inequality typically begins with a measure of living standards for a population of individuals or households. For this study, the measure used is socio-economic conditions at the household level, which were aggregated at the regional levels using the six geo-political zones in the country.

The 2003 NDHS gathered information on housing characteristics such as source of water, electricity, cooking fuel, type of toilet facilities, number of sleeping rooms in the house and housing material. These characteristics are correlated with health and are also an indicator of socio-economic status. Similarly, the availability of durable consumer goods is an indicator of a household’s socio-economic status. Moreover, particular goods have specific advantages. For example, having access to a radio or a television exposes household members to innovative ideas, a refrigerator prolongs the wholesomeness of foods, and a means of transport allows greater access to services away from local area (NPC 2004).

Accordingly, aggregating the performance of a household on the housing characteristics and the durable consumer goods gives a measure of living standard of the household. By aggregating these indicators, the socio-economic status of a region was determined by the weighted rank on the variables. The performance of the regions on the indicators were ranked 1 – 6 since there were six regions and rank 1 weighted 6, 2 weighted 5 and so on. The weights of a region in the indicators summed up to give aggregate socio-economic status for the region. This method of aggregating ranked variables has been used successfully in Latin American countries (Deichmann 1999).

Decomposition of Inequality: The decomposition of inequality, according to a partition of the aggregate population into geographical regions begins with the
choice of an entropy index (Shorrocks and Wan 2005). For this work, the mean log deviation index (Eo) was employed and the inequality measured was the static decomposition (i.e., inequality in one year). This was done since we were only concerned with the assessment of household specific attributes with a view to determining the influence of geography.

Accordingly, the inequality was computed, using the following formula by Shorrocks and Wan (2005) as follows:

\[
W = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{k=1}^{M} \frac{1}{n_k} \sum_{i \in N_k} \ln \left( \frac{\mu}{y_i} \right) + \frac{1}{n} \sum_{k=1}^{M} \sum_{i \in N_k} \ln \left( \frac{\mu_k}{\mu} \right) = W + B \quad \ldots \ldots \quad (1)
\]

Where \( n \) is the population of all the region or both urban and areas, \( n_k \) is the population of a region or urban/rural area, \( v_k \) is the population share of a region or urban/rural area = \( nk/n \), \( \mu \) is the mean score on the socio-economic indicators for all the regions, \( In \) is the natural logarithm, \( y_i \) is a region or urban/rural score on the individual indicators (Shorrocks and Wan 2005).

For this study, therefore, \( B \) was obtained using the average of each geopolitical zone or urban/rural areas in the country. This was done because the data were aggregated at geo-political zones and rural/urban domiciles. This kind of analysis is typical for representation at high level of aggregation (Elbers et al 2005). It provides the most immediate answer to the counterfactual question; how much inequality would occur if there were no inequalities within regions? Or how much inequality would occur if inter-regional income differences were the only source of inequality (Shorrocks and Wan 2005).

**Influence of Geography:** Regression analysis was employed to determine the influence of geography on the socio-economic conditions. The dependent variable is socio-economic status by geo-political zones while the geographical variables are the independent variables. Geographical variables used are location, climate, land resources and urbanisation.

**Results**

**Spatial Inequality:** The results of the analyses reveal that socio-economic conditions varied spatially in the country. A high level of inequalities was found to exist between urban and rural areas as well as between geo-political zones. The analyses show that on the average, 40.5 per cent of the urban dwellers surveyed enjoyed the socio-economic indicators selected while only 19.6 per cent of the rural dwellers
enjoyed the same socio-economic indices. The imbalance was partly due to the fact that urban dwellers usually earn more than rural dwellers as a result of their higher literacy level and better jobs and partly due to rural neglect by successive governments in the country. This provided the push factor for rural-urban migration in the country.

In regional context, southern regions were generally better off than the northern regions. Figure 2 clearly shows that the northern regions were disadvantaged with the northeast being the worst hit. The southeast and southwest were, by contrast, the most developed with indices of 123 and 81 respectively. Even though our analysis was not on poverty, the result was in line with earlier findings by World Bank (1996), UNDP (1997) FOS (1999) and Erubami and Young (2003), which established that both poverty and inequality were severest in northern Nigeria and that they were increasing.

**Figure 2 : Level of Socio-Economic Development by Geo-Political Zones in Nigeria**

Some explanations have been made for the inequalities. According to Erubumi and Young (2003), spatial poverty rate correlated fairly with the distance from the ocean. Similarly, Alayande (2003) asserted that geography or location was one of the factors determining earnings and, therefore, inequalities in the country.

The decomposition of spatial inequality shows that total rural-urban inequality index was 0.260. Out of this, the between group rural-urban inequality index was 0.110 representing 42 per cent of the total inequality. This extra-ordinary high value of between group inequalities again confirmed the state of rural neglect
in the country. It was quite unfortunate that three decades after Olatunbosun (1975) wrote his popular book, *Nigeria’s Neglected Rural Majority*, the rural areas in the country have not been able to extricate themselves from the shackles of neglect and poverty. As a result, rural-urban migration has continued unabated in the country.

Also, the decomposition of inequality by regions shows abnormal high contribution of inter-zonal inequalities to the total inequality in Nigeria. The decomposition shows that the total inequality index was 0.321 within and between groups contributing 63 per cent and 37 per cent respectively. This again shows a clear evidence of lack of serious efforts to achieve even development in the country. This situation portends danger to the survival of the country as an entity. As noted by Kanbur et al (2003), the importance of between group inequality lies in the fact that if its existence coincides with the division of socio-economic groups, it could lead to severe consequences such as discontent, conflict and even war. As is well known, conflicts and agitations have become common features in Nigeria due mainly to the awareness of neglect and marginalisation of some sections of the country.

**Geographical Determinants of Inequality:** The results of the regression analyses show that all the four geographical variables have statistically significant associations with socio-economic conditions (Table 2). The table indicates that they had co-efficients of determination of 0.821, 0.791, 0.919 and 0.971 respectively. This means that urbanisation was the most important determinant of socio-economic status in the country, accounting for 97 per cent of the variation in levels of socio-economic conditions. This was closely followed by land resource (92 per cent), location (82 per cent) and climate (79 per cent).

The channels of influence can, however, be better appreciated by examining the contribution of each variable in the regression using the standardised coefficients and confidence intervals (Table 3). This table shows that the distance from the coast was a very important contributing coefficient in the regression. It reveals that a percentage increase in the distance from the coast brought a decline in development by 1.387 per cent. This was in agreement with worldwide experiences and findings which showed that coastal areas achieved greater development than inland locations (Gallup *et al* 1998; 2003; Demurger *et al* 2002). The location advantage of being closer to the ocean, therefore, gave southern Nigeria the initial development lead which enabled localities there to finance education from their own resources. This, in turn, affected the rate of growth and investment in human capital. Again, the coast-interior dichotomy highlights the importance of transport costs in determining a country’s participation in the international division of labour; hence the initial concentration of infrastructure in southern Nigeria.
Table 2: Geographical Determinants of Socio-Economic Status in Nigeria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Dependent Variable: Socio-Economic Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altitude</td>
<td>0.442 (-0.795)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latitude</td>
<td>0.102 (1.770)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance from the coast</td>
<td>0.002* (-4.070)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temperature</td>
<td>0.008* (-3.112)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rainfall</td>
<td>0.008* (3.109)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land area</td>
<td>0.000* (-7.70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arable land per hectare</td>
<td>0.030** (2.431)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urbanization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population density</td>
<td>0.000* (6.98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban population</td>
<td>0.001* (4.265)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.821</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant at 5 per cent ** Significant at 10 per cent

The influence of latitude can be explained in a similar way to that of the distance from the coast. Nigeria as already noted lies between 4°N and 14°N. The 4°N lies on the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of the country. Therefore, an increase in latitude will correspond to an increase in distance away from the coast, which will have a corresponding decrease in socio-economic condition. In the same way, a percentage increase in altitude has a declining effect on socio-economic status in the country by -0.165 per cent. Although the impact of this factor was minimal, it affected negatively development in the northeast where the topography is rugged and transport and communications difficult.

Temperature and rainfall are climatic variables that influence development in Nigeria. Again, the south is more favourable than the north in terms of these variables. The northern regions have higher temperature figures and range because of greater distance from the ocean. The rainfall also decreases northward. There are, therefore, lower annual rainfall amounts and longer duration of dry season in the north. Accordingly, socio-economic status declined by 0.496 of additional degree of temperature but increased by the same amount of additional rainfall. As a result, the land use systems in Nigeria were correlated with the major eco-climatic zones in

Source: Author’s calculations.
the country, the climate being the limiting factor for geographical range of crops and livestock production (Areola 1982; Madu 2002).

Table 3: Standardised Coefficients and Confidence Intervals of the Independent Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Standard Coefficient (Beta)</th>
<th>95 % Confidence Interval for B</th>
<th>Lower Bound</th>
<th>Upper Bound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Altitude</td>
<td>0.165</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.331</td>
<td>0.154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latitude</td>
<td>0.676</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.545</td>
<td>5.260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance from the coast</td>
<td>-1.378</td>
<td></td>
<td>-1.151</td>
<td>-0.348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temperature</td>
<td>-0.496</td>
<td></td>
<td>-11.683</td>
<td>-2.109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rainfall</td>
<td>0.496</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.091</td>
<td>0.505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land area</td>
<td>-1.302</td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.134</td>
<td>-0.075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arable land per hectare</td>
<td>0.411</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.122</td>
<td>2.069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population density</td>
<td>0.610</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.202</td>
<td>0.424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Urban population</td>
<td>0.426</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.389</td>
<td>1.186</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Author’s calculations*

The regression also shows that an increase in land area brought about a decline in socio-economic status by 1.302 while an increase in arable land per hectare brought about an increase in development by 0.411. This indicates that land mass is an obstacle to development in the country, particularly in the north. Sparsely populated settlements widely separated from each other do not make for viable socio-economic investments. This results in large space of empty lands dotted with small settlements that are highly under-developed. The long distances also result in weak interactions between urban and rural areas, which are necessary for economic integration and development.

Finally, the regression analysis shows that the population density and urbanisation were very important determinants of socio-economic development in Nigeria. The results show that an increase in population density brought about a corresponding increase in development by 0.610. In the same way, an increase in percentage of urban population increased the level of development by 0.426.

This was expected because there was a considerable evidence to show that only at higher population densities that one found more intensive and efficient land use (NRC 1999). Also, there was a strong relationship between economic growth and urbanisation. This was because as urbanisation increased, good openings such as increased political participation, gender equity, industrialisation, diversification of economic activities and indeed national development increased (World Bank 2000).
In line with the global trend in development, population density and urban
development accounted for higher level of development in southern Nigeria. In
some parts of the southern regions, urbanisation was so rapid that not only were
cities expanding beyond their administrative boundaries but also several individual
urban centres coalesced to form conurbations (Okoye 1996). In the Ibo heartland of
southeastern zone, for instance, one could hardly know when one entered another
town without the sign-posts or the street names. Figure 3 shows the level of
urbanisation by geo-political zones in the country.

The figure together with Table 1 shows that urban development
corresponded very closely to the area of high population densities and these explain
why south eastern geo-political zone ranked first in socio-economic development
as earlier shown in Figure 2.

Measures to Reduce Spatial Inequality

The significance of geography in the development of the country requires
that a number of steps be taken to address the adverse impacts and turn them into
advantages. The following measures are proposed to that effect:

Incorporation of Geographic Perspective into Development Policy and Planning:
It is obvious that there exist some inherent differences in the characters of the
component units of locations. As a result, the development of the units requires an
incorporation of spatial or geographic perspective into the development process.

A geographic perspective involves an understanding of the spatial patterns
and processes on the earth surface. It can also be described as seeing meaning in
the arrangement of things in space, seeing relationship between people, places and
environments (Geography for Life 1994). It entails using geography or location
information to gain new insights and make better and more informed decisions
(ESRI 2002). As a result, most development projects require geographical analysis
to ascertain their suitable locations. For example, agriculture and rural industrial
projects should not be randomly located because of the spatial variation in both
physical and human resources that are required for their development. Consequently,
some developments projects in Nigeria can best thrive in certain zones but not in
others (Madu 2003). There should, therefore, be an agency or institution responsible
for the identification and setting up of capital-intensive development projects in
Nigeria. The agency should be very knowledgeable in the geography and characters
of the country. Fortunately, there is in place the Federal Character Commission,
which should be strengthened for that purpose.

Emphasis on Integrated Regional Development: It is a fact that most development
activities in the country are concentrated in the urban centres. This followed the
initial adoption of a regional development strategy in which urban centres were
regarded as growth centres or poles that were meant to spread development to the
surrounding settlements within the regions. However, the urban centres in Nigeria rather than spread development have become parasitic, thereby exacerbating economic dualism between urban and rural areas, with the latter being marginalised.

Rural areas in Nigeria have continued to experience low quality of life, despite various efforts by the government to address these disparities. This calls for an integrated regional development that gives equal and simultaneous attention to both urban and rural development.

**Proper Management of Existing Urban Centres:** We have seen that there were efficiency gains associated with population density and the concentration of urban centres. Also, it has been shown elsewhere that de-concentration did occur at a certain stage in a country’s development so that policies that promoted this – positively, rather than by damaging the existing centres -- could be effective (Henderson *et al* 2001).

To achieve proper development of urban centres in the country, an urban development policy was launched in Nigeria in 1997. The aim was to ensure regional balance in the growth and development of urban systems in the country. However, much of the work has been on paper rather than on the ground. This calls for a concerted effort towards its implementation as it holds good promise for urban management and the achievement of a balanced regional network of towns and cities in the country.

**Agricultural Land Development:** Nigeria is blessed with abundant lands that are wasting especially in the northern regions. Proper development of the lands will increase the income of farmers and enhance their socio-economic status. For increased utilisation of agricultural lands in Nigeria, it is recommended here that the National Agricultural Land Development Authority (NALDA) or equivalent institutions be re-established. The goal of NALDA was to ensure the optimal use of the nation’s land and human resources to uplift the quality of rural life. One of its specific objectives was to provide strategic public support for land development including agricultural mechanisation and provision of irrigation facilities. This strategy should be vigorously pursued if inequalities between the regions are to be reduced.

**Human Capital Development:** Human capital development is above all the most important aspect of development. This is because it determines how far human ingenuity can be applied to combat adverse conditions, including geographical conditions. This calls for the development of education, improvement in health, sanitation and nutrition, gender equity as well as skill acquisition and training. Adequate attention should be paid to education, especially school enrolment, and adult literacy and women empowerment in the northern regions if they are to ‘catch up’ with their southern counterparts.
Conclusion

It is evident from this paper that geography is a crucial factor in Nigeria’s development. This explains the greater achievement in socio-economic conditions in southern regions when compared to northern regions. However, the fact that geography influences development does not mean that geography is necessarily a destiny (Gallup et al 2003). Rather, geography provides an underlying explanation for the regional arrangements, which require policy initiatives to shape the desired changes. Therefore, the failure of the relevant institutions to transform the initial endowments into economic resources has led to the inter-regional disparities and their accentuation in Nigeria. This brings to the fore the importance of geographic perspectives in development policies and planning.

A geographical perspective enhances the appreciation of the importance of linkages and diversity of activities and the difficulties of developments in some locations. Such an appreciation will equip planners and policy-makers with the necessary knowledge to tackle the problems creating gaps in well-being. Therefore, identification of the geographical determinants of inequality in Nigeria is a necessary step in the right direction towards the achievement of even development in the country.

References


