

Nigerian National Assembly Committee Background Guide

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The Federal Republic of Nigeria is a federal constitutional republic composed of thirty-six states and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, governed by a separate administration called the Federal Capital Territory Administration (FCTA). Unlike the states of Nigeria, which are headed by elected governors, a minister that is appointed by the President heads the FCTA.¹ A British protectorate since 1901, Nigeria was originally divided into a northern and southern protectorate and the Lagos Colony. The different interactions and environments of each division resulted in economical and cultural imbalances that continue to influence Nigeria's political life today.

Located in West Africa, Nigeria borders the Republic of Benin, Chad, Cameroon, Niger, and the Gulf of Guinea in the Atlantic Ocean. In addition, Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, and the seventh most populous country in the world, with approximately 174 million inhabitants. The country's three largest ethnic groups are Hausa (21%), Yoruba (21%), and Igbo (18%), with a diverse religious community dominated by Christianity and Islam. Its capital is Abuja, which the Nigerian government resides.

In the events following World War II, a growth in Nigerian nationalism and demands for independence augmented, leading to a series of constitutions that granted Nigeria independence in 1960. After several years of corruption and discontent, Nigeria experienced its first military coup in 1966. Later, a counter-coup commenced, along with the declaration of a new state called the Republic of Biafra. This succession led to the Nigerian Civil War, which ended in 1970 with a siege of Biafra and isolation from trade and supplies.

The years after the civil war turned slightly for the better when Nigeria struck oil and joined the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). However, despite huge revenues from the oil boom, the military administration refused to improve the population's standard of living.

Moreover, the lack of other sources of economy and the increase of oil production and sales caused the Nigerian to become heavily dependent on oil revenues, resulting in economic instability.

Finally, in 1999, Nigeria regained democracy when the new President, Olusegun Obasanjo, was elected, ending almost thirty-three years of military rule. Today, Nigeria is considered to be an emerging world market and is a member of MINT (Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Turkey), the Next Eleven, the Commonwealth of Nations, the African Union, OPEC, the United Nations, and more. The current head of the executive branch of the Nigerian Government is President Goodluck Jonathan and his Vice-President, Mohammed Namadi Sambo.

The Nigerian government is influenced by the Westminster System and is modeled after the United States, with the president as the head of both the state and the government. Additionally, the president is elected by popular vote and is allotted two four-year terms in office. The president's power is checked by both Senate and the House of Representatives, a bicameral legislature established under Section 4 of the Nigerian Constitution, also known as the Nigerian National Assembly.

The Assembly is the highest elective law-making body of the country, and consists of a 109-member Senate, with three votes from each state plus one from Abuja, and a 360-member House of Representatives based on proportional representation. The members of both houses are elected to serve four-year terms at the Nigerian general election. Moreover, the current 7th National Assembly (2011-2015) was inaugurated on June, 6th 2011. Out of 109 Senators, 36 were re-elected while 73 were elected for the first time. Out of 360 members of the House, 100 were re-elected while 260 were newly elected.

Currently, the Nigerian National Assembly is under the leadership of David Mark, President of the Senate since June 2007, and Aminu Waziri Tambuwal, Speaker of the House since June 2011. In this government, at any joint session of the Assembly, the President of the Senate presides with the Speaker of the House next in line. Nigeria also has a multi-party system with two or three

stronger parties and an electorally successful third party. Both the leaders of the executive and legislative branches identify themselves with the People's Democratic Party (PDP), a conservative political party that has won every Presidential election since 1999.

Favoring free-market policies that support economic liberalism and limited government regulation, PDP works toward reducing government spending through conservative fiscal policies. In social issues, PDP discourages same-sex relations and sponsored a bill to outlaw homosexual relations in 2007, making such actions punishable by law. Moreover, the party advocates state-autonomy and religious freedom for all Nigerian provinces, which slightly contrasts with their strict perspective of religion.

The opposition party is the All Progressives Congress (APC), an alliance of Nigeria's four biggest opposition parties; the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the Congress of Progressive Change (CPC), the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP), and the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA). APC endeavors to instill change in the Nigerian government, starting with the end of PDP's 15-year reign of power. This party strives to provide the Nigerian people with the security, improved welfare, education, employment, and other promises the PDP made but never upheld. They hope to eradicate what they believe to be a corrupt, inefficient, and dangerous government that is using divisive politics to stay in power.²

Furthermore, the Nigerian National Assembly has broad oversight functions over the executive and judicial branches, and establishes committees to review and pass legislation and scrutinize the conduct of government officials. The Senate also has the power to impeach judges and other high executive officials, but is limited in this power because it is subject to a prior request by the President. Moreover, the Senate confirms the President's nomination of federal judicial appointments, senior diplomats, and members of the federal cabinet. In addition, both houses of the legislative branch must agree on a bill and receive the President's approval before it can become a

law. Similarly to the American government, if the President delays or vetoes the bill, the Assembly has the power to pass the law with a two-thirds majority of both houses and overrule the veto.

Due to allegations of corruption since the restoration of democratic rule in 1999, the Assembly has witnessed the removal of several Presidents of the Senate, harvesting further legislative inefficiency. Ironically, despite the more than two-thirds PDP majority of the Assembly, disagreements between the President and the legislative branch has been more frequent than cooperation. This delay in the government is largely believed to be the fault of President Goodluck who has yet confirmed many bills from as long ago as 2007.

Child Marriage

Overview

Child Marriage is an international phenomenon, occurring when the bride or groom, or sometimes both, are under the age of 18. Often these marriages are not consensual, and many human rights activists believe that the legal age for marriage should be set at 18. Women are much more frequently involved in child marriage, and the institution comes with a plethora of consequences. These marriages are often accompanied by domestic violence, poverty, and early pregnancies leading to life-long medical afflictions. In some countries, children will be married off from 3 or 4 years old. In countries where child marriage is an accepted practice, the government often will not criminalize domestic violence and marital rape.

Child marriage is typically arranged by the parents without the girl's knowledge, and this results in the girl being taken out of school permanently and are often expected to take on responsibilities at home instead. It is evident that taking away a girl's right to education limits girls' choices and opportunities throughout their lives, not only when they're children. It most often occurs in poor, rural communities where girls are twice as likely to be married before entering adulthood.³ Destitute families who cannot provide basic needs for their children may give a their

daughter away in marriage, so they have one less mouth to feed and this way they know she will be taken care of. Sometimes, poor families will use marriage to settle debts, and some have been known to sell their daughters into prostitution. Educated families are more likely to practice family planning and thus many people see educating women as being a good start to tackling the issue of child marriage.

Current Issues

Nigeria itself has taken a stand against child marriage, though the success is questionable. The Child Rights Act bans marriage or betrothal before the age of 18. However, this competes with local customs, as well as decades of sharia law that governs Muslim states. Sharia law does not prohibit child marriage, and thus this act has not been enacted in 13 of Nigeria's 36 states. It must be noted that child marriage is far more prevalent in certain regions rather than others. The Northwest region of Nigeria, a location largely populated by Muslims, is a hot spot; 48 percent of girls were married by age 15, and 78 percent were married by age 18. In all of Nigeria, 20 percent of girls were married by age 15, and 40 percent were married by age 18.⁴ While the problem clearly cannot be attributed to religion alone, this religious conflict will pose a large issue when handling child marriage.

According to the International Center for Research on Women, 100 million girls will be married before the age of 18 in the next decade, and most will occur in sub-Saharan Africa or South Asia. UNICEF reports that 36% of women aged 20-24 were married, forced or consensual, before they'd reached the age of 18.⁵ Child marriage, resulting in early sexual activity and pregnancy, leads to many often devastating health risks for women. Girls are expected to have sexual intercourse with their husbands promptly after marriage, no matter the age gap; if they should choose not to willingly, they are often forced. However, these girls likely do not have a pelvis at full capacity to accommodate the passage of a child. Pregnancy is consistently among the leading causes of death for

girls ages 15 to 19 worldwide, and complications from pregnancy and childbirth are the main cause of death among adolescent girls aged 15-19 in developing countries. Girls younger than 15 are five times more likely to die in childbirth and an estimated 14 million girls between the ages of 15 and 19 give birth each year. They are twice as likely to die during pregnancy or childbirth than women in their 20s. The devastating effects of child marriage are in the statistics. Not only is a difficult pregnancy an imminent problem, but domestic violence is far too common among these marriages. A study conducted by ICRW in two states in India found that girls who were married before 18 were twice as likely to report being beaten, slapped or threatened by their husbands than girls who married later. These aren't just physical injuries, but also emotional ones. Young girls are still in a formative stage in their psychological development, and non-consensual sexual intercourse can have devastating consequences for her mental health. Child brides often show signs of sexual abuse and post-traumatic stress such as feelings of hopelessness, helplessness and severe depression. Not only is the livelihood of women at stake, but also their health.

Analysis

Women are much more frequently involved in child marriage, and the institution comes with a plethora of consequences. These marriages are often accompanied by domestic violence, early pregnancies leading to life-long medical afflictions, and poverty. Although studies conducted by the International Center for Research on Women found no connection between child marriage and religion, we know that child marriage is a product of cultures that devalue and discriminate against women. It often takes the form of domestic violence, marital rape, and limited access to both healthcare and education. We also know that the 13 states of Nigeria that did not enact the Child Rights Act were Muslim, so there is a clear correlation within Nigeria, though perhaps not universally in the world. It is extremely difficult to attack child marriage without interfering with a religious group in Nigeria because the states ruled by Sharia law do not prohibit it. Also, there is a problem in simply

defining 'adulthood.' Most of us quantify 'adulthood'; when you are 18, you're legally an adult woman, and can be married. However, in some cultures, they believe that you have not reached womanhood until you are married, in which case the concept of child marriage is not applicable. Other cultures believe that you are a woman once you begin menstruation, meaning that most girls would be a 'woman' years before reaching the age of 18. The conflict of defining adulthood itself causes many complications. However, child marriage ensures that these young brides will not be properly educated or be able to take part in the workforce. This practice results in a cycle of poverty, as women miss out on educational opportunities.

The issue of child marriage extends far beyond just the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Child marriage doesn't just take a girl from her family, but also from her right to education, and often puts her in a life of poverty. The global phenomenon may occur in any country, developed or undeveloped, but the change begins one country at a time.

Environmental Issues

While Nigeria is well known for its oil deposits, rainforests still remain as a large part of Nigeria's environment, which house hundreds of different types of animals. However, as expansion and industrialization increase, so does the deforestation of these rainforests. From 1990 to 2005, 80% of rainforests were deforested, contributing to the large amount of deforestation in the early 2000's.⁶ These actions may cause, and are possibly responsible for, an increase in desertification within Nigeria. Along with the lack of proper irrigation and with the increase of dams, desertification is becoming a serious issue within Nigeria, a region enshrouded with rainforests.⁷

Fortunately, many activists within Nigeria are campaigning for preservation of environment. Working together with other countries such as Chad, Cameroon and Niger, Nigeria has been able to aid itself, along with other countries, with many environmental issues.

However, the lack of laws and programs that enforce such preservation are causing the increase in environmental destruction. With the influence of foreign oil companies to continue extracting oil, many governments are not able to refuse their demands, thus causing a deficiency in laws with regard to the environment.

Before Nigeria is able to progress with the ever-expanding problem about its environment, it must deal with its oil problem. In order to pass more laws regarding the preservation of the environment, Nigeria must better its own economy due to its high reliance on oil exports.⁸ While many plans have been incorporated, such as the creation of new farming techniques or an increase in industrialization, oil has still remained a large portion of Nigeria's economy. Without dealing with the problem of Nigeria's heavy reliance on oil first, most environmental policies are bound to fail, causing no progress to be made in terms of environmental preservation.

First discovered in the 1950's, the Nigerian oil industry has remained a large part of Nigeria's economy, with 35% of Nigeria's gross domestic product (GDP) coming from oil exports. However, because of the high reliance on oil exports, Nigeria has become susceptible to foreign influences from large companies such as Shell, ExxonMobil, and Chevron.

Starting in the mid-2000's, Nigeria has experienced an increase in kidnappings, theft and vandalism from rogue groups that desire oil. From 2009 to 2011, Nigeria reported to have lost \$10.9 billion in oil revenue because of these oil thefts, thus showing how important oil is to Nigeria's well being.

One major source of oil conflict is within the Niger Delta. While foreign oil companies continue to invest money into extracting oil, other minority groups, mainly the Ogoni, feel that they've been cheated out of the oil that lies within their jurisdiction. These ethnic conflicts have caused an immense increase in corruption and violence that occurs within the region.

While oil influences the economic prosperity of minority groups within the region, oil's influence has also affected the political affairs across these groups. Ranging from stuffing ballot boxes to distributing illegally obtained oil to certain politicians, these rogue groups attempt to influence general elections through force or bribery in order to benefit themselves.

Even though there have been attempts to deploy military personnel into the region in order to reduce the amount of violent conflicts, not much progress has been made with appeasing these minority groups. Although attempts have been made to appease other minority groups, such as the formation of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), other minority groups have already hanged and murdered countless numbers of these activists, thus only increasing the amount of violence within the region.

Analysis

Nigeria's oil resources are the main sources of the country's economy. In 2012, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimated that oil export revenue accounted for 96% of total export revenue. In 2011, the total primary energy consumption was about 4.3 quadrillion British thermal unit, and of this, traditional biomass and waste consisting of wood, charcoal, and manure, accounted for 83%. Currently, the majority of Nigeria's major oil projects are funded through joint ventures between international oil companies (IOCs) and the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC).

In 2008, the Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB) was initially proposed, expected to change the organizational structure and fiscal terms governing the oil sectors. IOCs are worried that proposed changes to fiscal terms may render some projects commercially unviable, especially deepwater projects that involve greater capital spending. Moreover, the Ministry of Petroleum Resources submitted the latest draft of the PIB to the National Assembly in July 2012. However, this delay in passing the PIB

has resulted in a decrease in the investment of new projects due to the lack of a licensing round since 2007.

IOCs participating in onshore and shallow water oil projects in the Niger Delta region have been affected by the instability in the region. Thus, there has been a general trend for IOCs to sell their interests in these onshore and shallow water oil fields to Nigerian companies and smaller IOCs, and focus their investments on deepwater offshore projects. Nigeria's goal is to have a licensing round for marginal onshore and shallow water fields by 2014.

Foreign companies have contributed to these trends. From 2010 to 2013, Shell has sold its share in eight onshore licenses, and in June 2013, Shell has announced their new strategic review in considering potential divestment in some onshore leases in the Niger Delta. In addition, Chevron has decided that it will sell its 40% interests in five onshore and shallow water leases in June 2013 due to project difficulties. The company also plans the start-up of the Escravos Gas to Liquids (GTL) plant.

In total, Nigeria has the second largest amount of proven crude oil reserves in Africa, an estimated 37.2 billion barrels. Current exploration activities are focused in the deep offshore with some projects concentrated in the Chad basin. Nevertheless, Nigeria's oil reserve estimates have been declining, and the government is hoping to increase proven crude oil reserves to 40 billion barrels over the next few years. The end success of this goal depends on the current strategies and efforts of the Nigerian Assembly.

Conclusion

In sum, Nigeria is in dire need of efficient solutions in their social and environmental issues. Though Nigeria's economy has become the largest in Africa, placing them as the world's 21st largest economy, their future prospects could falter if their ambiguity towards human rights and heavy dependence on oil are not resolved. It is up to you, the delegate, to produce strong, directed legislation

and solidify Nigeria's stance on these prominent issues. The stability of Nigeria's future is in your hands.

Questions to Consider

1. With the highest rates of child marriage in Nigeria occurring in the Muslim regions, what is the best way to tackle this issue and remain secular?
2. What is the best way to encourage all states in Nigeria to enact the Child Rights Act?
3. What is the best way to ensure women's rights are being upheld? How can we ensure that rape and sexual violence gets reported, and how can we help prevent it from happening?
4. Should Nigeria incorporate better sexual and health education into their school system?
5. How much would international aid help in the construction of adequate school systems in Nigeria?
6. Should Nigeria continue its rate of deforestation on the account of larger oil productions despite its harmful environmental effects?
7. What other methods and exports could Nigeria become involved with to alleviate their dependency on oil exports? Is this precaution even necessary?
8. Do foreign parties hold too much of an influence over the Nigerian oil business? How can this issue be resolved?
9. Are environmental regulations necessary concerning the deforestation of rainforests and the oil industry? Or should existing regulations be altered?
10. Should Nigeria considering joining other international organizations to solidify their stance in the oil industry? Will this augment Nigerian control over their oil exports or increase foreign influence?

Endnotes

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