The Question of Development in Africa: The Way Forward

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Abstract: This paper looks at various indices for addressing a nation as developed and concludes that Africa is far behind developing let alone being developed. Besides economic factors, the paper highlights that human development, the environment and safety are major indices of a developed country. While not denying the potentials and abilities for rapid development, this paper argues that the social, political and more importantly, moral climate of Africa is a clog in the wheel of achieving development and that Africa does not currently have the political consolidation and improvement in governance necessary to achieve this end. Drawing examples from Nigeria, the paper highlights particular problems affecting the development of the nation. Addressing corruption, which is a not only a bane in the society but a stumbling block of any developmental project, is one of the major concerns of this paper. The paper finally advocates that Africa should develop in its own interest by emphasizing internal development through a commitment to political will, both by rulers and the ruled.

Key words: Development • Africa • Corruption • Moral • Political

INTRODUCTION

This paper looks at various indices for addressing a nation as developed and concludes that Africa is far behind developing let alone being developed. Besides economic factors, the paper highlights that human development, the environment and safety are major indices of a developed country. While not denying the potentials and abilities for rapid development, this paper argues that the social, political and more importantly, moral climate of Africa is a clog in the wheel of achieving development and that Africa does not currently have the political consolidation and improvement in governance necessary to achieve this end. Drawing examples from Nigeria, the paper highlights particular problems affecting the development of the nation. Addressing corruption, which is a not only a bane in the society but a stumbling block of any developmental project, is one of the major concerns of this paper. The paper finally advocates that Africa should develop in its own interest by emphasizing internal development through a commitment to political will, both by rulers and the ruled.

What Is Development?: Development according to Longmans Dictionary of Contemporary English is the gradual growth of something so that it becomes bigger or more advanced [1]. This definition defines a developed country or nation as a rich industrial country, nation and so on, with a lot of business activity. By contrast, a developing country, nation, or society is a poor country that is trying to increase its industry and improve trade. When a country is found to be developing then it is assumed that it is making progress.

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Countries with low levels of material and technological well-being are usually described as developing. They are also countries in which most people have a low economic standard of living. The concept of underdevelopment is that a country that is not developed is underdeveloped. However, a developing country is one that is making some progress at development. Consequently, development is about progress but while the former is negative development, the latter is positive.

The term ‘third world’ refers to the concept of political non-alignment with either the capitalist or communist bloc. It was a concept that gained ground during the Cold War to define countries that were not in line with either capitalism or communism. This became a broad definition provided to categorize the nations of the earth into three groups based on social, political and economic divisions. In other words, the term ‘third world’ arose as a political idea rather than as a term that describes a developed nation. Coincidentally, the ‘third worlds’ are also considered underdeveloped because of the low level of technological development, low gross national product (GNP), lack of industrialization and per capita income—which is the most common view of what constitutes development. It is assumed that in all that a developing nation does, it must catch up with the industrialized West.

There are various views and types of development. We have development in the areas of the economic, social, political, spiritual, educational, scientific and so on. In short, development cuts across all areas of life. There are many development theorists, hence, we shall engage in a brief conceptual clarification of some of their ideas on development in order to relate it to the African situation.

On one hand, development can be technology based. In this regard growth theorists such as Pearson [2], state that development is partly a process whereby a country can achieve reasonable self-sustaining growth, which facilitates and enhances industrial and technical progress in the interest of the people. By this definition, a nation’s progress is measured using technological advancement. It also assumes that technological development leads automatically to the progress of the people. The advancement of technology or industrialization does not automatically lead to societal self-advancement especially if the drivers of such advancement are capitalists and profit oriented to the core.

On the other hand, development can also be linked with artifacts. Rostow for example, says that development is determined by the rate at which a country accumulates social, cultural, industrial, technical and other artifacts [3]. The implication is that countries that do not have these artifacts are not developed. Rostow’s view, though more detailed, can be considered an extension of Pearson’s. However, in like manner, it also does not consider how the accumulation of the various artifacts leads to the development of the people.

It is also commonly assumed that development is about the economy of a nation. According to Arthur Lewis, development revolves around world-market or profit instead of man [4]. So the level of economic indices such as per capita income, gross domestic product and so on, determines the level of development. Thus, a country with high per capita income is more developed and vice versa.

The above views of development are rather material. They do not take into consideration other aspects of development such as the humanistic, moral and spiritual. It is assumed that development leads to progress when scientific and technological progress is achieved. From their analysis, this aspect of development measures a nation’s progress by its technological and industrialized advancement. The measure of a country’s development then is in such things as: types of building highways, forms of transportation, communication and telecommunication, sources of energy, computer awareness and so on. The more we conform to these Western ideals, terms and standards of living, the more the society is assumed to be developed. This is a narrow view of development and it is not all encompassing.

When development programs are preoccupied with economic development, there is great danger of losing the concept of development that fosters real humanity, humanness, fellow feeling and concern for others. Due to this, there will be a tendency to forget the other aspects of development in our national development plans. There will be no national policy that emphasizes human values. In other words, the neglect of human resources and the morally good can thwart efforts to bring about development even in the economic or political sense.
A broader view involves not only technology, economic, or artifacts but a kind of growth between society and individuals. Walter Rodney argues that development in a human society is a many-sided process. At the level of the individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. Though he states that some of these factors of development are virtually moral categories and are difficult to evaluate depending, as they do, on the age in which one lives, one’s class origins and one’s personal code of what is right and what is wrong. He however considers that the achievement of any of the personal development is very much tied in with the state of the whole society [4]. Be that as it may, society can help to make or mar one’s progress and level of development. As such, we need a concept of development that is all-encompassing, all-involving and takes care of all areas of life.

Some other scholars place their emphasis on human development. Olusegun Oladipo, in his analysis, claims that development is nothing but human development and it can be described as a process whose primary goals are human well-being, both in its material and moral dimensions [5]. He argues that the development process is not an abstraction, the integrity of which can be measured simply in quantitative terms, such as the rate of growth in GDP per capita. It is not even the process of social change whose primary goal is to ‘catch up’ with the more developed societies-a process pervasively, but mistakenly, called the process of modernization. Rather, it is a process of social transformation, which involves the replacement of those factors that inhibit the capacity of the individual for self-direction and the promotion of social cooperation with those which promote these ideals. It is in short the essence of the quality of life of the people.

According to Oladipo, development is a social concept standing for the process through which human beings strive to improve the conditions of their lives. To this end he identifies two broad dimensions of development as the tangible or technical and the intangible or moral aspect. The tangible aspect is concerned with material progress and it involves the control and exploitation of the physical environment through the application of the results of science and technology. The primary goal of this process is human well-being, which involves among other things: the eradication of certain human-demeaning social phenomena such as poverty, illiteracy and low life expectancy and the creation and maintenance of what can be called ‘livelihood opportunities’ [7]. The intangible or moral aspect of development has to do with improvement of the qualities of human relations between people. It involves the promotion of positive social values, such as freedom, justice, tolerance, compassion and cooperation, as well as the reduction of social inequity, which globally is a major source of conflicts.

Oladipo analyzed further that the tangible aspect appears most visible but the intangible aspect is crucial. This is because it is that which enhances the capacity of the individual to actually shape his or her own life without being insensitive to the common good. In other words, any development goals and initiatives that do not take into consideration the capacity to shape the individual and the concerns of the common good is not an all-encompassing form of development.

In line with the above, Amartya Sen argues that development is a process of expanding the real freedom that people enjoy. It focuses on human freedom rather than other views of development such as growth of national product, or with rise in personal incomes, industrialization, technological advance, or social modernization. Although he does not deny the importance and relevance of growth of GNP or of individual income to expanding the freedoms enjoyed by the members of the society, he avers that freedom depends also on other determinants, such as social and economic arrangements (for example, facilities for education and health care) as well as political and civil rights (for example, the liberty to participate in public discussion and scrutiny) [9]. Amartya Sen opines further that Human Development, as an approach, is concerned with what is the basic development idea: namely, advancing the richness of human life, rather than the richness of the economy in which human beings live, which is only a part of it [10].

Similarly the Human Development Report (HDR) asserts that: “People are the real wealth of a nation,” and maintains that the objective of development should be to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives may appear self-evident today. But that has not always been the case. A central objective of the HDR for the past twenty years has been to emphasize that development is primarily and fundamentally about people [11].
The basic purpose of development is thus to expand people's choices, though in principle, these choices can be infinite and can change over time. However, people often value achievements that do not show up at all, or not immediately, in income or growth figures. Greater access to knowledge, better nutrition and health services, more secure livelihoods, security against crime and physical violence, satisfying leisure hours, political and cultural freedoms and a sense of participation in community activities are also cherished. The objective of development is thus to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives.

The Human Development approach originated as a result of growing criticism to the leading development approach of the 1980s, which presumed a close link between national economic growth and the expansion of individual human choices. Many scholars such as Sen and Mahbub ul Haq, who played key roles in formulating the human development paradigm, came to recognize the need for an alternative development model. This was due to a number of reasons which included the following four factors. Firstly, there was the growing evidence that did not support the then prevailing belief in the ‘trickle down’ power of market forces to spread economic benefits and end poverty. Secondly, the human costs of the Structural Adjustment Program became more apparent. Thirdly, social ills (crime, weakening of social fabric, HIV/AIDS, pollution, etc.) were still spreading even in cases of strong and consistent economic growth. Fourthly, a wave of democratization in the early 1990s raised hopes for people-centered models [12].

The basic objective of development, according to Mahbub ul Haq “is to create an enabling environment in which people can enjoy long, healthy and creative lives” [13]. This vision retains a powerful resonance over the years. By dismantling the idea of development that emphasizes the economic, it is considered above all that people are the real wealth of nations. It is said that the simple truth is sometimes forgotten. Mesmerized by the rise and fall of national incomes (as measured by GDP), we tend to equate human welfare with material wealth. However, the importance of GDP growth and economic stability should not be understated in that both are fundamental to sustained human progress, as is clear in the many countries that suffer from their absence. Thus the ultimate yardstick for measuring progress is people’s quality of life.

The Human Development Project is very rich and all-encompassing. It cuts across other themes and issues that are considered central to it. They include: social progress in terms of greater access to knowledge, better nutrition and health services and the importance of economic growth as a means to reducing inequality and improving levels of human development. [14] It also addresses efficiency in terms of resource use and availability, whereby human development is pro-growth and productivity as long as such growth directly benefits the poor, women and other marginalized groups.

Equity in terms of economic growth and other human development parameters is also one of its concerns. Participation and freedom-particularly empowerment, democratic governance, gender equality, civil and political rights and cultural liberty (particularly for marginalized groups defined by urban-rural, sex, age, religion, ethnicity, physical/mental parameters, etc.) are further considerations. In addition, sustainability for future generations in ecological, economic and social terms; human security in daily life against such chronic threats as hunger; and abrupt disruptions including joblessness, famine, conflict, etc. are major concerns of this project.

But how can a nation achieve all these without a well-organized political structure and good leadership? Who is responsible for the organization of the society and how will it be achieved? In a corrupt society where selfish motives and moves characterize the leaders, how then do we achieve these human development goals or any other developmental goals for that matter? Everything boils down to leadership and leadership qualities. There is no doubt that these are the key missing factors in African development.

Leadership and corruption are one of the key problems affecting development in Africa. Idakwoji emphasizes the inability of most organizations in Nigeria to achieve their desired objectives, stating that this often stems from corruption among leaders on the political and administrative levels [15]. Corruption today he says “Stands like a ruin in the societal and political landscape of most African countries. Leadership entails being a builder of special values, a definer of societal mission, a setter of societal goals and a facilitator for goal attainment” [16]. No meaningful development can take place when
the country and its citizens are corrupt. Idakwoji, in his detailed analysis of the nature and effects of corruption in Nigeria, succinctly asserts that, “Corruption not only undermines authority but it displays selfish moves that are counterproductive to development” [17].

Lawal rightly observed that corruption in Africa is costing the continent so much and restricting its development [18]. In Nigeria for example, corruption ranges from the handling of elections in an unprecedented way by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), to the weak nature of the national assemblies and legislatures who are the key organs of government, INEC being the major force that institutes these key organs. The various inadequacies of these key organs have had gross negative and degrading effects on the economic, education, health, road and networks, water and energy resources and virtually all the aspects of the society. Yagboyaju highlighted the ripple effects of weak governance caused by corruption as: lack of security, armed robbery, abduction, kidnapping, unemployment and collapse of manufacturing and technological sectors of the economy, to mention a few. Consequently, there is a total denial of development [19].

Thus, the argument of this paper tilts towards good leadership and moral development in order to achieve development in Africa. Africans and their leaders currently place emphasis on foreign aid and assistance. If there are no committed, patriotic leaders to plan in a particular progressive direction, even when the aid comes they may not be utilized to achieve desirable goals of growth and development of individuals and the society at large.

**The Moral Factor in Development:** It will be grossly inadequate to say that the moral factor is the problem responsible for underdevelopment in contemporary Africa. The factors that militate against development are many. There are economic, ideological and political factors such as political instability and intrigue, lack of continuity and lack of clear and coherent ideological policies; economic factors such as level of industrialization, problem of balance of payments and international economic problems; demographical factors such as ‘brain-drain’, which is presently affecting our universities, whereby the current highly skilled migrant program and visa lotteries all drain away experts and people at the top of their chosen professions and careers; socio-religious and cultural obstacles such as tribal wars, cultural inferiority, irrational adherence to custom and tradition and disunity among states etc. Here we single out the moral factor in development. Although it is certainly an aspect of development, it must be contended that it is an all-encompassing form of development.

Morality is unique in a number of ways. It is morality that can help government to make policies capable of bringing development to the society. It is also on moral grounds that we can criticize bad governments and bad policies. It is morality that can prevent government from enacting arbitrary and socially iniquitous or inhumane laws that can deprive citizens of their fundamental human rights. It is also morality that can define duties and responsibilities of the government and citizens. But for morality we would have engaged in irrational social acts. Immanuel Kant says that an effort to be immoral is an effort to be irrational [20].

Morality promotes love, truth, harmony and social peace, which will breed security and stability in our states. When individuals are stable, a collection of individual stability will lead to a general stability in our countries. Creating a community of moral individuals will enhance the quality of life of the individual himself and consequently of the wider society. An adequate engagement with this moral factor would necessitate dealing with the total person and seeking to make the best of him as a physical, psychological, social, spiritual and rational being. So, with the development of the moral aspect one will not only be useful to him or her self but to the community and the human race at large.

**The Way Forward in the Development of Africa:** There is no gain in saying that political and economic stability can enhance positive development in Africa. However, if the necessary ideals or processes are not put in place to fight corruption then development cannot be achieved. To this end, the mind-set factor which can be described as a set of ideas that shapes one’s behavior and outlook and places the interest of the society far above that of the self is crucial [21]. It includes the shunning of corruption, acts of patriotism and national identity. Most leaders in Africa have self-centered mind-set and lack discipline. They also lack self-mastery of the situations of their country, be it on the political, economic, or social level. Even when they do, the self-centered mind-set will not allow this to manifest.
It is an understatement to say that we have not had development modules in Africa over the years. Apart from individual country’s attempts at development in terms of trade and industrialization, leading to economic growth and reflecting in economic indices such as increasing GNP, there are also attempts at securing foreign aid, particularly the raising of funds from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and The World Bank to enhance developmental projects. There has also been an attempt by Africa as a continent to come together to discuss and solve developmental problems. The Organization of African Unity (OAU), Economic Commission of West Africa (ECOWAS) and African Union, with its peer-review mechanism, are attempts in this direction. Suffice to say that most of these initiatives both at the internal and external levels have begotten the monster of colonialism, neo-colonialism, imperialism and most importantly corruption.

As Oladipo rightly mentioned, there are no indications till now that both the African Union and NEPAD have made African development a reality [22]. Thus, there is an urgent need to secure the conditions for political stability in most African states. In this sense there is a need to develop on the side of the leaders but also on the side of the people. Commitment is needed on both sides, that is, a will to organize the society in order to achieve human development. The factor of the group mind with corporate social responsibility is essential to development [23]. At this level, the masses also need to fight corruption too.

Within the limits of this paper, the way forward to Africa’s development can be highlighted in the following ways:

Firstly, there is a need to terminate imperialism by rejecting dependence on foreign aid and develop from within. This will make our development internal. Baah, in his analyses of the history of development, highlights some initiatives in Africa add considered the ones made from within and not from without as the most effective and beneficial to human development in Africa. According to him, country owned initiatives designed and implemented by African countries rather than the ones designed for Africa have yielded more developmental goals [24]. He argues that Africa should not continue to deceive itself. Rather, Africa should take her destiny into her own hands and develop her own policies based on the needs of her people. Africa’s future lies in her own ability to take bold development initiatives. Africa’s future does not lie in spurious and neo-colonial partnerships [25]. McBride in this regard makes an urgent call for Africa to develop in its own interest, which is crucial here [26]. This is a type of development that considers not just mere growth, but the emancipation of the people. This again is where the human development indices are relevant and meaningful.

Secondly, our leaders should also be morally sound by showing good examples. As shown earlier, this is lacking in contemporary Africa and it is one reason for its failure. Our leaders most of the time get to power because they are wealthy economically, not morally and they use their wealth to buy others over. Political leadership is required to both set an example and to demonstrate that no-one is above the law by setting a high profile focus on specific actions which can be extremely useful in sending a strong signal that corruption will not be tolerated [27]. To achieve social stability our planners and policy makers should evolve urgent educational policies that emphasize the moral, rather than the economic, aspect of development.

Thirdly, as Ogunleye and Adebayo suggests, we can also view corruption as a learned behavior and what is learnt act can be unlearned, through some forms of situational and environmental manipulations such as reinforcements and public enlightenment campaigns. This will enable Nigerians learn to appreciate social values and change their orientation through moral value judgments [28].

Fourthly, the issue of National Identity and patriotism, which is a subject for further research, is also crucial. There is no doubt that the destruction of our economic and political structures due to colonialism and modernization has destroyed our culture. There is a loss of cultural, national, political and collective identity. However modernization needs not necessarily mean obliteration of all elements of traditional culture. Modern African identity does not have to reject aspects of traditional culture which are useful, but it can take note of the good aspects and do a critical and reconstructive self-evaluation. In this sense whatever evolves will not be out of cultural traditionalism but will be an authentic identity based on a conscious and deliberate effort and is a reflection of both the new and old ideals of life.
CONCLUSION

I have attempted to show that the emphasis on technological and economic development is a narrow and unacceptable view of development. I have also established that of all the various types of development, the moral is very important as a variable in the development of Africa. With regard to contemporary Africa there are a number of factors hindering its development, the principal of which bothers on the moral. A number of concrete steps have been highlighted and it is my fervent hope that we start from there in other to achieve the desired goals of true development in contemporary Africa and to contribute to world politics.

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