

African countries and the need for a sustainable culture of development



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ABSTRACT

Development has always been measured in terms of per capita income; level of political consciousness, availability of social amenities and the extent of guarantee of fundamental human rights. In other words development can only be 'cured' in a culture (a people's way of life). This paper in full awareness and understanding of this proposes to establish that the present culture of most African countries-obviously colonial inheritance- cannot sustain the developmental thrust needed by the African to be where the developed countries are. The paper identified the indicators of underdevelopment. The paper also established with ample evidence that oriental culture may be far more suitable for a sustainable culture of development in the African countries.

I. INTRODUCTION

Development has always been measured in terms of per capita income; level of political consciousness, availability of social amenities the extent of the guarantee of fundamental human rights. Hence, "Development refers to the integrated gradual and orderly unfolding which include emergence and/or expansion of capacity of provision of greater functioning ability" (Asogwa and Okwudili, 2009: 47). In other words development can only be possible in a culture (as a way of life). Therefore, in full awareness and understanding of this, there is the purposeful need to establish that the present culture of most African countries- obviously colonial inheritance- cannot sustain the developmental thrust needed by the African to be where the developed countries are. There should be noted the indicators of underdevelopment in most African countries- wars, hunger, high level of illiteracy, corruption, crimes, near absence of required infrastructure, lack of power and near absence of social amenities and the lack of all antecedents that necessitated the evolution of modern states. It could also be established with ample evidence that cultures other than western may be far more suitable for a sustainable development in the African countries.

There are certain categorical imperatives of development, whichever way one would want to look at development from. These imperatives include (but should not be restricted therein) the following facts:

- Every idea of development must be about increase in per capita income.
- It is about the chances of members at any given time in a state or any given polities have to reach self-actualization.
- It is about having what it takes to be fully functional as normal human beings.
- It is about (a process) of moving from the past, to the present and then to the future via science and technology.
- It involves changes, modernity and improvement in the social life of the individual members of a state and the society in general through adequate provision of social amenities.
- It is about the guarantee of everyman in the state the wherewithal of active political life with attendant preservation and respect for fundamental rights of citizens of the state.
- It is about security of life and properties of individual members of the state and more to that provision of freedom to engage in legal economic activities.

Hence, if one should use the above imperatives of development as indices of measuring development then it would be seen as obvious that most African countries are classified as under-developed, undeveloped or developing countries. It is obvious that development is culture imbedded. This is so since the idea, understanding and pursuit of development must stem from 'peoples' way of life'. that is to say that a people's ideas of living values, religion, ethics, metaphysics, ideals (unseen aspects of culture) and their practices of living- the houses they live in, foods they eat, their utensils, their means of transportation, their clothing, which forms the material aspects of every culture propel and continuously shape a people's idea, understanding and pursuit of development.

In this fast-changing (dynamic and/or ambivalent) world of ours it would smack of vanity if one were to recommend or make a proposal that the Africans and most African countries should retrace their steps back to the time before their contact with the west in order to initiate a bona fide and befitting idea, understanding and pursuit of development. But, if the current culture of development was offered to the African or forced

on him which he willingly or willy-nilly copied and has ever been struggling but ever-failing to implement by the west then it is either the case that the west offered Africans a counterfeit or a dummy culture or that the Africans copied wrongly. However, that African countries got the wrong culture for development from the western colonial powers-Britain, Germany France, Portugal and Belgium is unarguably so. Asiegbu (2005: 1) puts it more succinctly thus, "the traces left by short-sighted colonial policies play a role; like focusing economic development only on what helped the colonial empires... (and) the post independence meddling of Europe and north America contributes especially when they keep or try to keep their Nigerian surrogates in top positions." A plethora of evidence could be used to substantiate this.

II. THE UNDERDEVELOPMENT INDEX

Most African countries lack sustainable system of justice and means of maintaining peace. There is also no security. The order, in order to preserve life is to instinctually (by most men) to return to the situation status quo ante (that is before the formation of the state through may be a social contact or in most cases force of colonization) in terms of justice by might. This securing of justice by might leads to violation of rights and breakdown of peace. And, in absence of peace group or social harmony dies, the bond of togetherness and the condition of one identifying with the society collapses as sharing of benefits and speedy resolution of conflicts become nearly impossible. Where the above is true of most African countries development is almost nearly impossible.

There is still no other better way to understand how underdeveloped most African countries are than to look at how poor they are. The African poverty derives from the inability of most African states to make provision of the basic necessities of life (food, clothes and shelter) for citizens. Every required thing for good living is below normal level in African countries. This is real poverty, an indicator of underdevelopment because whereas the state has no employment to offer the masses; those who endeavor employment on their own are discouraged by the state and its agents through bureaucratic red-tapes.

It is only in a developed society that health is wealth. Underdevelopment displays its own negation in the level of attachment or importance placed on the health of the citizenry. Most African countries form the anchor of debilitating diseases such as child mortality, maternal mortality, HIV/AIDS scourge, malaria, SARS, Bird and recently swine flu. Life is really cheap in developing countries such that whereas it occupies prominently fourth, 5th and sixth positions respectively in the United Nations millennium development Goals it is only being given lip-service in most African countries. The irony is even that whereas our fore-fathers were able to manage some of diseases like malaria these diseases are overstretching coping-mechanisms in our modern society-states in Africa.

Corruption is another indicator of underdevelopment. No one can reasonably debunk the claim that in most African countries corruption reigns supreme. In Africa only the down-trodden is not corrupt because he has no chance to exhibit this. However a close examination of corruption in African countries would show this off as emanating from deep rooted fear of slipping or sliding back into penury after having a glimpse of wealth: the need for corruption arises as a survival instinct in the face uncertainty, poverty and fear occasioned by underdevelopment. For instance, why should a public servant embezzle public funds and launder such if he is sure that his family would never go hungry, that his electricity, water, etc. bills are sure to be paid, that he has good accommodation, transport means, good pension arrangement and all else required of life, a life equal to his status. Obviously, necessity and fear drive corruption in every underdeveloped economy.

Even in South Africa, recently xenophobia was an issue. Hence, it is only in underdeveloped countries like Africa that tribalism, ethnicity and sectionalism are issues. In Rwanda history may not forget the genocidal waves of the Hutus and the Tutsi in a hurry. Religious interest has torn Sudan apart, just as Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Chad, etc. have not been spared the orgy of petty clannish politicking that smacks of stinking forms of underdevelopment. Development ushers in a higher form of patriotism in which ethnicity, section and tribe cease to be issues rather science, humanism, technological advancement and human empowerment become issues of commitment for which people are willing to live and die.

Another serious indicator of underdevelopment in most African countries is how insecure life is. Insecurity is a bed-fellow of underdevelopment. The police are ill-equipped to protect lives and properties just as the judiciary struggles to survive not as the last hope of the common man but as the spurious arm of the holder of the executive office. Judges are only appointed to implement the wishes of the person or groups in power.

It is also in underdeveloped countries that education is placed on reserve or “K. I. V.” – keep in view and non-priority projects such as construction of walk sites, building and renovation of residences of public servants and other such trivial issues are executed with dispatch. Functional education is side-tracked and delusive attempt at dancing to the gallery is always orchestrated.

In the search for a new world-order by countries of Africa sincerity in the attitude of the mind, attitude of conceptualization and mentality of approaches to issues which ultimately translate into a change in world-view, philosophy of life or culture is a categorical imperative. This underwrites the need for oriental philosophical ethics which galvanizes as it emphasizes the power of the individual in self-mastery.

III. TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT CULTURE

It is an imperative also to emphasize that in search of a sustainable development culture a very first important step is to know that the world as seen if properly understood is the idea of emptiness. Put differently, imperceptibles (sunyata) is the matching description of that which portends to be the real world even though this may not be readily perceptible to the human senses, especially those molded in western cultural orientation. This is akin to Eboh’s idea of practical materialism “the ideology that places emphasis on the material rather than on the spiritual side of us”, (1994: 16). Regrettably, it should also be known that ‘forms’ as we make of the world are man’s formation (perception of these imperceptibles hence ultimately man uses these ‘forms’ to represent the world as it is. These are only representations. Towards a sustainable culture of development the African needs a cultural orientation that would enable transcend these representations and be ushered into adamant positive core values. According to Pirsig, “value, the leading edge of reality, is no longer an irrelevant offshoot of structure. Value is the predecessor of structure. It’s the preintellectual awareness that gives rise to it. Our structured reality is preselected on the basis of value, and really to understand structured reality requires an understanding of the source from which it’s derived” (1981: 255). This is however only possible in the culture of oriental world and oriental ethics to be precise.

IV. ORIENTAL PHILOSOPHICAL ETHICS

Oriental refers to that which is from China, Japan or East Arian countries. Hence, orient refers to the eastern parts of the world. This is to say that oriental philosophy refers to the philosophical thoughts typical of Japan, China and other such eastern countries of the world. Orientalist is the term used to denote one who studies oriental thoughts. The converse oriental is the occidental which refers to that which is from the western world or Europe and America.

Oriental philosophy has sometimes been referred to or studied as Eastern philosophy. This is a broader term. This includes sundry philosophies of Asian countries such as India, China, Persia, Japan and Korea. The study of oriental or Eastern philosophy may also include Egyptian or Babylonia and Arabic or Islamic philosophy, which have also in many studies been considered as western philosophy.

Oriental philosophical ethics refers to principles of conduct as based on the worldview, philosophy and sometimes religious orientation of the people of the geographically eastern parts of the world. These geographically eastern parts of the world include India, China, Japan, Korea, Thailand, Singapore, etc. Another way of rendering oriental philosophical ethics could be rules of conduct made in oriental philosophy. These are bred and imbedded in oriental philosophies of Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism etc, which are in the main ethno philosophical. These shape the beliefs and practical lives of the people as they shaped the cultures of these people.

Take Buddhism for instance, central to every Buddhist philosophy is the cardinal idea that every individual is chained to Maya (evil) which one has every need to be liberated from. This is on the basis that the individual needs to be aided towards escape and total emancipation from worldly sufferings as put in place by man’s own desire and ignorance- Hence, the four noble truths of Buddhism that there is suffering in the world, that the cause of man’s suffering is his ignorance, that an end can be put to suffering and that there are sure ways to put an end to suffering.

Sequel to the above, the ultimate end of every Buddhist ethics is helping the individual reach beyond earthly pains and sorrows as occasioned by inordinate desires. The Buddhist ethics exhorts every man thus: eliminate your desires and you will have eliminated anxiety. Hence, “The way of Gautama Sakyamuni (Buddha) is called the ‘middle path’; for it avoids extremes...Buddhism eschews the blind alleys to either side and conduces to an attitude that will of itself lead one to the transcendental experience... Buddhism attaches no serious importance to such knowledge as entangles men more tightly in the net of life” (Zimmer in Munitz 1958: 308)

Upholding right conduct (Dharma in Buddhism) and consequences of actions are central to most oriental philosophy. Thus, the commitment of oriental philosophical ethics is enthronement of individual and/or personal responsibility which accounts for collectivity, unanimism, harmony, group or community orientation and commitment as the ideals of conduct. These are to evolve as part and parcel of life, and as regulators of actions of everyman. There could be no better expression of ethics as a practical science, it is a lived ethics. No doubt, Buddha discovered that the reality behind phenomena of the universe was the idea of non-permanence and co-existence of everything hence interdependence is life’s greatest truth. More so as craving is the cause of human suffering.

V. EVOLUTION OF A NEW DEVELOPMENT CULTURE

(1) Conquering the self

The first role of oriental philosophic ethics in the evolution of an ideal development culture in underdeveloped nations as found in Africa is helping man in Africa to conquer the self. Annihilation or conquest of the self in its desires will put an end to human suffering. For oriental philosophy man is man only in mastery of himself and in having the ability to conquer the desires and passions he has for the material: man must seek the riddance of egoistic delusions, freedom from the chains of worldly things and endless rebirth as brought upon him through the cravings of the self for the material in order to attain ‘release’ or eternal bliss or nirvana. Emphatically oriental ethics would help man in Africa towards conquering his unlimited attraction to and inordinate love of material things. “As in the teaching of the sankhya, an involuntary state of mind common to all creatures is

indicated as the root of the world-disease. The craving of nescience, not knowing better (avidya), is the problem-nothing less and nothing more”, (Zimmer in Munitz 1958: 307). Nobody, force or thing can have the force to conquer or thwart the right convictions of the man who has conquered himself. To conquer oneself is to impose the correct value on oneself. A conquered self is free from the imprisonment of Maya (evil) which worldly things symbolize. The conquering of the self is a necessity that even alone can free the African countries from short coming which hamper the emergence of the idea development culture. Oriental philosophy is essential in helping one to gain ultimate control or freedom from oneself. No other philosophy teaches in a better way how to develop a good way of life more than the oriental orientation. It encourages moderate livelihood, and enthrone virtuous living.

(ii) Oriental philosophical ethics will eliminate the basis of corruption.

Oriental philosophical ethics will eliminate the basis of corruption. People in most African countries do whatsoever they liked with public funds. These are mainly in the forms of stealing, laundering, embezzlement and squandering. Regrettably they normally get away with such acts. They seldom account for their actions of crimes of corruption, and betrayal of trust and confidence because they are above the laws.

Oriental ethics would be useful in this respect. It eliminates extreme individual which nurtures corruption and replaces it with the required collative spirit. Enriching oneself at the cost of others is the bane of individualism. More, so oriental ethics frees one’s mind from the negative emotions of worry, fear and depression occasioned in lives in Africa by material cravings. These have occasioned greed, which in man grooms corrupt tendencies. This could be achieved through a good training of the mind. As Prabhupada puts it “by training the mind, one actually attains tranquility, for the mind is always dragging us over nonpermanent things just as unbridled horse will pull a chariot on a perilous course”, (1990: 31-32). Oriental ethics replaces the laws with norms which transforms into rites or rituals of good living thus providing the wherewithal for greater craving for the common good which is the source of true happiness.

(iii) Eliminating the Basis of Poverty

Poverty is like any dreaded disease. Nobody wants or wishes poverty. It is treated much more like accurse. It is a Yoke in African countries which nobody fails to seize any opportunity of casting off. Material poverty is worrisome but even much more is the mental or psychological poverty. This is because when poverty becomes psychological endless cravings, aggrandizement, etc. attend it.

Reducing the pains and sorrows of poverty is every man’s responsibility since harmony of nature ought to be maintained. There is no gain in the bewitching conviction that most African leaders are corrupt. Even African leaders are natural; Africa runs in their blood and undoubtedly the greatest sufferers of psychological poverty. Oriental philosophy is handy here. It places less emphasis on God or gods and how he will punish or reward but places the emphasis rightfully on prudently enhanced virtuous living in individuals, people’s attitude towards nature and productivity. These will make for greater dividends. The Yoga, for instance, is only a form of enlightening experience which even requires one to believe in nothing and no commandments but an undertaking of one’s responsibility. It is experimental and invaluable in techniques of change of consciousness. It is useful as a way of helping one to come off base desires, chains of hallucinations and other base egoistic predicaments. In oriental ethics suffering is made clear as poverty, which is measurable in man’s increase in greed, desires or cravings.

(iv) Eliminating the Basis of political instability

The sophist Thrasymachus looked at justice as the rule of the stronger. This no doubt is a perversion. Unfortunately

justice as the rule of the stronger is the definition of political power in Africa. The correct idea of rights, conduct and consequences of every action, which oriental ethics reverberate are essentially necessary if our judiciary, legislature and executive must get their functions right. In Confucianism, for instance, one notices the stress, on merit based on performance in written examinations as the best means of determining who is what.

Oriental ethics addresses in no small way the whatness of man. An aspirant to leadership should be a self governed person, have filial piety, loyalty and has rites as rituals and not just as laws. That is, according to Confucius it is better to do good out of conviction and not out of fear of punishment as implied in laws. Good leadership requires self-discipline. Imperfection in man is a product of lack of enlightenment.

There is no doubt that enthronement of selfless service, probity, resourcefulness, humility and the spirit of sacrifice will eliminate the spirit of injustices and corrupt enrichment-noble teachings of oriental philosophy. Oriental philosophy will help individuals form themselves properly which makes governance easier and life would be the better managed and individuals would be happier. Oriental philosophy emphasizes the fusion of social, political and religious power thereby eliminating unnecessary bottlenecks.

VII. CONCLUSION

Science and technology has in no small way reshaped man’s concept of his ultimate end. Embracing science and technology for advancement requires a good foundation as prerequisite- a peculiar way of life or culture. The African countries have not got the required culture. Hence, from the study, oriental ethics is proffered to the African as a better culture for development. This is because Buddhist or every oriental ethics is aimed at enabling the individual to attain nirvana happiness or state of enlightenment, bliss or blessedness. Such worldly attainments; things of the world matter only a little if at all to he who has attained nirvana or enlightenment. In nirvana one unites, as it were, with ultimate happiness and salvation from those base desires that hamper development.

Every oriental philosophy emphasizes the need to cultivate self-discipline through enthronement of those virtues that are of ultimate importance in self- realization and actualization. No doubt, it should be stressed with emphasis that engendering the culture of development lies in good harmony of matter, nature and human resources, which only can be done with right attitude; knowledge and favorably disposing conduct which oriental ethics inculcates. Most oriental philosophies emphasize self and human development. They seek to preoccupy man’s thoughts with most positive means of acquiring and using the resources at his disposal for the highest development of the common good and not for the development of the selfishly personal. This is more so as most oriental philosophies are characterized by an ardent pursuit of higher knowledge for enhanced development.

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