

4-1-2011

Philosophy as a Tool for Sustainable Development: A Contemporary Issue in Nigeria Educational System

E.D. Nakpodia

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.fhsu.edu/alj>



Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Nakpodia, E.D. (2011) "Philosophy as a Tool for Sustainable Development: A Contemporary Issue in Nigeria Educational System," *Academic Leadership: The Online Journal*: Vol. 9: Iss. 2, Article 27.

DOI: 10.58809/YIZQ4109

Available at: <https://scholars.fhsu.edu/alj/vol9/iss2/27>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Peer-Reviewed Journals at FHSU Scholars Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Academic Leadership: The Online Journal* by an authorized editor of FHSU Scholars Repository. For more information, please contact ScholarsRepository@fhsu.edu.

Academic Leadership Journal

Introduction

The place of Philosophy as a discipline in our world today cannot be overemphasized. It is a truism that the present day Nigeria is a product of what the colonialists handed over to the Nigerian rulers on Independence day, 1st of October 1960. It was a government that was born in a state of uncertainty and was soon to manifest clearly in a bloody civil war which nobody prays to ever witness again. In our world today, people talk about various models, theories, and other strategies towards achieving development. Nigeria is certainly not an exception.

The Concept of Philosophy

One cannot define philosophy from a single author's point of view. This is because there are many definitions of philosophy in the world as there are scholars. What this entails is that different philosophers have different views on what philosophy is, its subject – matter and method.

However, the word philosophy comes from two Greek words namely, *philos* and *Sophia*. *Philos* means love of, while *Sophia* means wisdom. From these two Greek words, we derive the etymological or literary meaning of philosophy as “Love of Wisdom”. Invariably then, the Philosopher is a “lover of wisdom.” Hence, Nakpodia (2010) points out that philosophy is the common property of all, and it is not difficult to see why philosophy is traditionally regarded as the “love of wisdom” or “the search for knowledge”. The meaning for it is actually the search for the ultimate ground or knowledge and rounds of truth, reality, and value, which ultimately brings us to the point that philosophy is an activity in three modes or styles, the speculative, the prescriptive and the analytic.

Today many perceive philosophy as a discipline that came from the Greeks. This assertion is not true. A more ancient derivation of philosophy is the Egyptian word *sbo*, also meaning love of wisdom. The Greeks actually studied in Egypt under the tutelage of the Egyptian mystery system's priests.

The first known philosopher in the world was Imhotep. He was an Egyptian who lived 2000 years prior to the rise of Greek philosophy in the 6th century B.C.

Development Defined

Development as a concept has different definitions. Some persons see development as one in which the Gross National Product (GNP) or per capital income experience sustainable growth. Some other definitions see development from the perspective of people's ability to live modern or civilized lives through access to such facilities as good roads, qualitative health care services, pipe borne water, qualitative education and even abundance of food. For other scholars, development implies equitable distribution of goods and services.

Anikpo graphically brings out the point that development has different meanings depending on who is attempting to define it. He explained this in his inaugural lecture, where he presents its various

characterizations according to intellectual disciplines. He opines that classical economists see development as growth in income and infrastructural facilities, while to political scientists, it constitutes in its essence, political stability and liberation from oppression.

The fundamental contrasting term for development is “envelopment”. Envelopment is putting of something, for instance, a letter, into an envelop. It is cover, fold or veil in. For the Etymologists, development comes from the French word: *developper*. This means to bring out from the envelop something that was enveloped. It is to “de”, “un”, and “velopper”, wrap. From these, “to develop” literary means to un-wrap. Thus development entails the un-wrapping, unfolding, un-velopping, unveiling, outgrowth, or growing out of what was enveloped, hidden or latent. Development is the unwrapping of potentials.

An earliest theories in the field of development, Schumpeter in his “*Theorie de Wirtschaftlische Entwicklung*” (1912), made use of the concept of innovation to identify development. Innovations are symbolically both techno- economic and politico- social. To both he gives the name “*Entwicklung*” (unfolding, evolution, development). The Frenchman Francois Perroux, defined development as “the combination of mental and social changes of a people, which enable them to increase, cumulatively and permanently, their total real production.” He further advances that development is achieved fully in the measure that, by reciprocity of services, it prepares the way for reciprocity of consciousness.

A socialist holistic definition holds that development is man’s ability to appropriate his total essence in a total manner, as a whole man. It is a holistic vision in which mankind assumes control of his destiny. For medical scientists, development occurs when mortality rates have been reduced and diseases have been eradicated. It involves doing away with illiteracy as far as the educationists are concerned, while engineers and technologists view it as involving the acquisition of sophisticated technology. For sociologists, development is seen as progress towards desired social goals. Though these definitions of development which are not exclusively incompatible are correct in their own right, their general conceptual validity are severely vitiated by their narrowness.

Ake sees development not from the perspective of economic growth, even though economic growth in large measure determines its possibility.

Development is also not a project but a process. Development is the process by which people create and recreate themselves and their circumstances to realize higher levels of civilization in accordance with their own choices and values. Development is something that people must do for themselves, although it can be facilitated by the help of others. If people are the end of development, as is the case, they are also necessarily its agent and means. Africa and the global environment are to be taken as they are and not as they ought to be.

Sustainable Development of Education

‘Sustainability’ in relation to educational development is not a novelty. Recently, it started to gain grounds in development circles because of its vital nature in a wide range of development projects (Ogunkpa, 1997)

The World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) defined sustainable development as development without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own need.

Sustainable development according to Omoyibo (1998) recognizes three important aspects of development namely:

1. Raising people's living level. That is, their income and consumption levels of food, medical services, education etc. through relevant economic growth processes.
2. Creating conditions conducive to the growth of people's self-esteem through the establishment of social, political and economic system and institutions which promotes human dignity and respect and
3. Increasing people's freedom to choose by enlarging the range of their choice variables. For example, increasing varieties of consumer's goods and services.

However, in producing goods and services for man's benefits, the environment needs to be preserved in the present in order not to affect future generations well-being

Lack of Development of Education in Nigeria

Many persons are of the view that Nigeria just like many countries in Africa is underdeveloped in several areas. Many reasons have been floated as being responsible for this. They are colonialism, ethnicity, corrupt leadership, capital flight, poor planning and inefficient management, falling commodity prices and unfavourable terms of trade, inadequate saving and investment, insufficient inflow of foreign capital and technical assistance, the stifling of market mechanisms, lack of entrepreneurial skills, inappropriate politics, geographical environment and many others'.

In any case, all these can be compartmentalised into the internal and external factors militating against development in Nigeria, quite similar to those of other parts of Africa.

Developmental problems from within in Nigeria

Among the internal factors which have become a hindrance to development in Nigeria is politics. Politics is a form of struggle or competition to control the commanding heights of the state where the major decisions about policies are made and enforced. Those persons who have been in the forefront of political power in Nigeria since independence in 1960 till date are products of the colonial system. This ruling class belongs to the elites of different ethnic groups and economic interests. When these elites fought against the colonialists, they came together under common grievances but they have continued to remain disunited. The struggle they waged against the colonial system, however, was not waged with the aim of changing it but to inherit it. They did this successfully but the colonial state which the elites in Nigeria took over was an oppressive, exploitative and omnipresent state. The logic of the colonial state was to produce a ruling class which was economically weak and has been so till today.

It is important to point out the fact that during the colonial era in Nigeria, it was the colonial state that arbitrarily took the important economic decision of what to produce, how to produce and for whom. Thus, it solely determined what cash crops was to be produced in each territory and decided how the products were to be sold. Even in the post colonial Nigeria, just like in so many other African states, the upshot of the colonial experience is a situation where power is sought with unmitigated intensity and made use of without restraint. This brings about the issue of development. In an environment where power is rapidly pursued, political competition becomes warfare because of the great value attached to power. This is more so largely due to the fact that there is an absence of the institutional mechanisms

for moderating competition. The struggle for power becomes the overriding preoccupation so much so that every other thing including is relegated to the background. What this amounts to is that the political context, in which the development project is being pursued in Nigeria, seems to make development unrealizable.

Another dimension to the Hobbesian politics practiced by the ruling class in Nigeria, is that as public officers revel in their corrupt practices, looting of public funds, especially in time of political campaigns into governmental positions, insensitivity to the welfare of the masses and their pathological preoccupation to reproduce the prevalent pattern of domination, many citizens who are unhappy with the state of affairs gradually withdraw their support from the ruling class as it appears in many PDP states in Nigeria using Delta State as a case study history of the recent re-run election in the State.

The people sever the initial solidarity which they gave to the nationalist leaders during the struggle for political independence. When the people are alienated from the rulers and refuse to render their cooperation in the development enterprise, there is certainly no way that development can take place, since the people are the means and end of development.

External Influences to Nigeria's underdevelopment

One big factor leading to underdevelopment in Nigeria is the strong influence from the Western world. The Nigeria political elites are fully aware that the country is far behind in terms of development, and they believe that to achieve the desired development they need to lean on the Western nations for assistance. The common paradigm floated by the West is the modernization theory. What this theory posits is that every society started with an original state of backwardness or underdevelopment, which had as its principal features a low rate of economic growth, which could be changed via capitalist process. This theory also posits that the industrialized nations have passed through that stage. What this implies is that there is every possibility for other nations to come out of backwardness if they adopted proper measures. By implication, the modernization theory essentially means Westernization.

One very big problem with the external world view is the fact that it defines development not from the African perspective. With this type of worldview, the panacea to the development crisis in Nigeria or some other African countries is considered to lie in changing the vertical relation between Africa and the industrialized countries in terms of giving Africa more favourable aid, opening Western markets to African goods on more favourable terms, more transfer of technology, more investments, more forgiveness of debts and others. This kind of worldview was aimed at externalizing development, thereby making it impossible for Nigeria and Africa in general to have a genuine development agenda. Besides, due to its negative view of Africa, the external concept of development infused invariably African leaders an inferiority complex concerning their ability to take their destiny into their own hands and a belief that the industrialized nations were superior. The implication of this trend was that it produced a mentality which regarded foreign-made goods and foreign experts as better, while the only thing Nigeria can do is to strive towards reign input so as to catch up with the West.

How Philosophy can assist in Sustainable Development of Nigeria

It is a truism that the concept of "sustainable development" met unanimous backing at the World Summit in Rio-de-Janeiro (1992). Since the Rio Summit, the word "sustainable development" has been used to designate the following categorical imperatives:

- i. to sustain stable biosphere and its diversity.
- ii. to sustain just distribution of material and spiritual values.

Although conception of sustainable development has got worldwide recognition, there are some scholars who still hold the view that some uncertainty exists in the philosophical content of this conception. Such uncertainty, in their opinion, is grounded in vague ontological premises that determine the statement of the problem of sustainable development as law of universe.

However, there is the need to point out at this juncture the importance of philosophy in the realization of sustainable development in Nigeria. This paper may not assess all areas of philosophy. It would simply approach this issue from certain philosophical perspectives.

In the area of epistemology, development is in the order of contingency, not of necessity or eternity. This is the argument of Oleko Nkombe. This refers to the human, passing and not eternal order of life. Let us recall here the adage that says "necessity is the mother of invention". This is evidently true. But it is not all, for we come to realize also that invention is after all equally the mother of necessity. Oleko is not asserting that we cannot work for our eternal salvation developmentally. What he means is that development can only operate within the empirically human sphere, the areas of human action, needs, facilities, talent deployments and conveniences.'

Also, development is a process that translates human ingenuity from potentiality to actuality. What this implies is communal and effectual relationships among human beings. Here, there is an identity of 'who develops' with 'what is to be developed'. The process correlatively involves three orders: the existentialist, the essentialists, and the progressive/becoming without self-contraction

Therefore, on epistemological grounds, one must know the essence, function and content of the developmental data in question. This entails being relevant to one's concrete and existential situation. Let us take the example of architecture in sub-Sahara Africa. In designing and constructing our houses and work place,

1. We cannot build as in the West. The reason for this necessary difference must be obvious to all of us. There is the different geographical, climatic, environmental and cultural situation between both places. Heat and cold are taken into account in architecture.

2. We must know how to develop our textile construction and clothing habits. To be clothed as if we are in the Western world is nothing but a smack of the remains of colonialism or at best imitational blindness. Imagine a young man clad in a heavy black suit with a tie to match, big black winter shoes on a sunny dry and November hot weather in tropical Nigeria. This is nothing but a ludicrous and infantile aping of a developmental model, a developmental primitivity. The person concerned may not be conscious of this incongruity. But it is there more or less inherited and playing an anti-developmental role in the society and among the individuals in it.

Let us have yet another example though only posited as what should not be. It would smack off epistemological backwardness, and ideological manipulation, for Nigeria of the early twenty first Century, to engage in the nuclear race when the major part of its population is still below the poverty level. Such will end up stifling its dynamism and would involve a self-contradiction that will render it

impotent for many more centuries.

Humanism, as a philosophy, is in its proper place if it focuses on integral humanism. This is the expressed argument of the old but renowned foremost 20th century Thomist Jacques Maritain. He opines that any civilization that neglects any important aspect of the human person is only being unfair to man as man. He made a proposition to the effect that both the social, political, human-environmental as well as the religious aspects of the being of man be put into consideration in any model of development that will succeed in shaping the human person appropriately (299).

Another area that is most likely to lead to sustainable development is the protection of our natural environment. How the humankind should assist in protecting the natural environment for herself and ensure the survival of future generations is quite difficult to determine. A fundamental question that is always asked is: "Is any moral necessity laid on the present human generation to think and act in the interest of people that do not exist yet?" Humans cannot live in such a way as to threaten other life forms: whether or not people exist does not really matter in so far as people can be harmed or aided by an action'.

Sustainable development also includes the human moral response to think and act in the interests of themselves and their posterity, especially by protecting earth's natural habitats. It is an approach to protecting natural environment, which is urgently required now for human continuity or perpetuity. Sustainable development means minimizing our exploitation of the environment in such a way that we would meet the present human needs without jettisoning a provision for the future generation's needs. One of the requirements is checking the various avenues of pollution that threaten the earth and conserving the natural resources. It also requires a conscientious effort at controlling human population growth.

Ethical theories are instructive in redefining our general morality, but particularly environmental morality in this case. The ethical theory of utilitarianism, for instance, is applicable to sustainable development as an all-encompassing pursuit of the developmental goals that will be the greatest good of everybody in our global community. Utilitarianism itself theorizes that an action is good if it promotes for the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. What this implies is that a utilitarian will be committed to sustainable development if shifting to it will increase the total of the world's population and the future generation. Utilitarianism entails that the right course of action is the one that will produce of the greatest number of people.

When we apply Kant's ethical theory of categorical imperative to sustainable development, it would imply that there is no rationality and justification for not adopting a policy of sustainable development. The theory of categorical imperative underscores and demands that human persons need to be treated with respect and thus promote their interest. Sound environmental ethics is to the good benefit of all; anything otherwise not only mortgages our immediate future but also imperils, the future generation. Taking large scale-nuclear waste dumping for instance, the health and lives of the people are at stake and only little time is needed to unseal the fate. Human relationship with the natural environment must be governed by sound ethical orientation for the sake of human happiness as well as perpetuity.

Assessing development from the educational point of view, it would be interesting to adopt Jean Rousseau's basic argument in his book, "Emile" (on Education named after and dedicated to his son), is that the positive instance the child Emile should constitute the starting point of educational

development. In Nigeria, the mass number of uneducated, illiterate and unalphabetised populations remain the bane of Nigeria developmental backwardness. This has constituted major hindrance to growth. The educational conscientisation of the populace is a prerequisite to any constructive developmental step-forward. Without good moral and human conscience, Nigeria will remain imprisoned in its present quagmire of mal-administration, tribalistic and chauvinistic national mmeidcrotiy. What is implied here is that sound education is one key to serious workable development. In the words of late Prof. Pantaleon Iroegbu, then we are invited to take a look at our lamentable educational situation. Who sincerity to do this, can with certitude announce the distance of our starting year of serious integrated and functional development. It requires hard thinking, hard planning and hard work.

If philosophy means the love of wisdom, if philosophizing entails that one means, but more so that we fashion out primordially acceptable reasons for loves wisdom, and if one is interested in the sustainable development of living and dying even as we develop. We could frame basic developmental Nigeria using philosophy as a tool, it invariably means that wisdom in all that questions thus: Why are we Nigerians? How can we develop properly as we do in Nigeria should be an imperative. Nigerians? There is an ontological and contributive reason why we are so

If philosophy means the love of wisdom, if philosophizing entails that one loves wisdom, and if one is interested in the sustainable development of Nigeria using philosophy as a tool, it invariably means that wisdom in all that we do in Nigeria should be an imperative.

Aware of the pitiable condition of the developmental standard of Nigeria, and conscious of its rich natural and human resources, I am of the that all developmental projections in this country be governed by the principle of Integrity. Integrity in this context means that holds that the entire developmental plans, projections, allocations and executions for the development of the society be governed by an inclusion of all essential constituents of the whole person. This includes the socio-cultural, intellectual-scientific, moral relational, as well as the religious-spiritual aspects of his being. The integral developmental model also necessarily envelops the dynamism of his culture. His culture indeed is the font and foundation of the developmental imperatives of the society. In culture, development unfolds authentically.

Caught in its history of being a victim of Western discovery, colonialism, neo-colonialism, international rapport-de-force (relationship of force), present day lag-behind economic de must identify their own situation historical and presentist. Then, they must forge a consensus and with a unified front, confront the challenge for developmental survival. This is because non-development leads to non-existence.

For Nigeria to achieve sustainable development, we need to go beyond mere theories and be pragmatic. We must be ready as a people and as individual Nigerians to ay the expensive price of development. This includes the bill of committed hard work, sustained discipline, transparent honesty, altruistic sacrifice, universal justice and communal justesse. Other indispensable qualities are prayers and patience, continuity and perseverance to the end.

Development is originatively from within, not even a copyism. It is not the importation of foreign cars and machines to a given developing count Development is the conscious, articulate and beneficial unveiling of the inner potentials of the resources of a given society. Genuine progress is the continuation of this developmental program in a balanced fashion. It is balanced if it is integral.

Auto-development demands that we give ourselves not only the material means, but more so that we fashion out primordially acceptable reasons for living and dying even as we develop. We could frame basic developmental questions thus: Why are we Nigerians? How can we develop properly as Nigerians? There is an ontological and contributive reason why we are so positioned, why we are Nigerians. This question must be answered and correctly too by each Nigerian and by Nigerians collectively. Again, Nigerian must see themselves in the context of Africa and the larger committee of nations, the international community, and not outside of it. If these few analytical reflections are taken seriously by the men and women of action, including the Nigerian political class and various economic leaders, it would result in an auto-creation of a developmental consciousness of all the people, one that can move Nigeria forward Let us note the words of Claude Ake that development is not what is done about a people, it is what people do by themselves and for themselves.”

REFERENCES

- Anikpo, M. (1996). Inaugural Lecture Hegemonic Legacies: Issues in Sociology of Nigeria's Underdevelopment, University of Port Harcourt.
- Bracalow, E. (1994). Moral Philosophy: Theory and Issues. Belmont, California: Wadsworth.
- Igwilo, M.C. (2009). "Environmental Ethics, Human Condition and the search for Sustainable Development in Africa", in Enwisdomization Journal, Vol. 4, Nos. 1 & 2.
- Iroegbu, P. (2005). "Ethics of Progress and Development" in Iroegbu, P and Echekwube, O.E Kpim of Morality ETHICS: General, Special and Professional. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Iyoha, F. (1996). "The Meaning and Theories of Development" in Iyoha, F.E. and Onwuka E.C (eds), Administering Development in the Third World: Theory, Practice and Constraints. Ibadan: Stirling- Holden.
- Izibili, M.A and Enegho, F.E. (2003). "Development in Africa: The Challenge of the African Philosopher," In Enwisdomization Journal, Vol. 2, no. 1.
- Marx, K. (1964). Economy and Philosophic Manuscript of /884, New York: International Publisher.
- Menc, C. (2002). "Ake on the obstacles to Africa's Development" in Efemini, A.O. Ake and African Development. Selected Issues. Port Harcourt: Paragraphics.
- Nakpodia, E.D. (2010). *Philosophy of Education: An Introductory Text for Nigerian Undergraduates*, Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing.
- Nwula, T.U. (1997). A Modern Introduction to Philosophy and Logic, Nsukka: Niger Books and Publishing.
- Perroux, F. (1964). La notion du development, in L'econornie de XXS, Paris: PUF.

