

UCLA

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies

Title

Toward a Definition of Development: The Nigerian Case

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4kd9990t>

Journal

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies, 13(2-3)

ISSN

0041-5715

Author

Otakpor, Nkeonye

Publication Date

1984

DOI

10.5070/F7132-3017094

Copyright Information

Copyright 1984 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

TOWARD A DEFINITION OF DEVELOPMENT: THE NIGERIAN CASE

by

Nkeonye Otakpor

What are the parameters involved in the strategies and plans for economic development? To what extent may individuals be exposed to the "fallouts" resulting from such development? These and other questions form the contention here that the economic transformation of a society must parallel its social and moral transformation. Even if economic transformation (development) can be regarded as an end, this end may still require some justification. This justification should be based on the human interests which social development selects to serve and promote - by an appeal to the Kantian notion of the autonomy of the individual, or from straightforward utilitarian considerations.

Nigeria with a geographical land mass (area) of 913,072.64 square kilometers - 356.6 thousand square miles and an estimated population of 80 million in 1974, is a very large country possessing an enormous potential of both human and natural resources for development. Over the past two decades, however, Nigeria's economic development efforts have only emphasised economic growth - material things - rather than authentic development which means and involves Nigerians as a people. This inverted notion of development has had notoriously serious implications in terms of the Nigerian national ethos, environment, values and moral soundness.

Concept of Development

The term "development" is multidimensional as it applies to a living organism. A country, any country, is like a living organism, with many parts, each with an essentially important role within the entire system. All the parts are by no means of equal importance. Some are of primary importance while others are merely subordinate and secondary. Yet all the parts work mutually towards the well-being of the whole. If any of the parts become malfunctional the whole organism is bound to become entirely disoriented. While all the parts are coeval, the secondary parts help to nurture and lubricate the primary parts, thus contributing to the well-being of the whole. Consequently, the development of the secondary-subordinate aspects becomes valueless to the extent that the primary aspects are not duly accounted for.

Applying this concept of organism to a country, the primary parts correspond to the human component while the secondary parts correspond to the infra-human aspects. The latter include the land, and its natural resources; buildings, offices, roads, railway, air and water transportation systems; the means of production and distribution, etc. In other words, it means what is usually referred to as the economy.

The development of a country means the development of both the human and infra-human aspects. The infra-human aspects are, however, secondary, subordinate and instrumental, yet actually indispensable. The human component is the primary issue involved in development. The development of a country, therefore, is primarily the development of the human beings. It is primarily the development of human persons.¹ Put much more succinctly, the development of a country is primarily and primordially the moral and intellectual development of its citizens.

The development of man (i.e., the human race) refers to the changes which increase the capacity for self-fulfillment, ensuring an enhanced control of the natural environment of the ability to understand, communicate with, co-operate with, or even use fellow human beings. This amounts to an effort directed towards the building of a more civilized culture. To these goals, all other aspects involved in the eventual development of a country are subordinate and instrumental.

In addition, society should be thought of here as a cooperative venture among its citizens for mutual advantage, and it should be taken that some form of centralized authority is required for coordinating the activities of the members of society. In fact this central authority may be as limited as Nozick's minimal state, as an agency designed solely to prevent a Hobbesian war of each against all. But it may also be desirable to allow it more functions, as Rawls would have it. It must be admitted, though, that if liberal philosophers have in the past longed for the friendly neighbourhood state, the state in the economist's model of development is most often, essentially, an efficient computer, programmed to solve complex optimization exercises while merely adumbrating the social issues: a direct consequence of the meaningless usage of what is a precise mathematical concept reflecting the cavalier manner in which economic development arguments and plans are conducted. Economic development strategists and planners, however, often forget that "the basic structure has to be arranged to maximize the worth to the least advantaged of the complete scheme of equal liberty (opportunity) shared by all. This defines the end of social justice."²

Dynamic Economic Growth and Static Social Progress

"One of the side effects of two decades of planning for growth in Nigeria, without planning for the human factors and consequences of growth, is the current prevalence of societal lust for economic prosperity at the expense or to the neglect of the effects of such cravings on the peoples' moral and dominant value."³ This is the direct consequence of the undue emphasis placed on economic growth, and thus on material acquisition and well-being, as if Nigerians are only Homo Economicus. The training and perfection of individual character which is the ultimate end to which community life and law-making are the means, has been completely abandoned in Nigeria's march towards economic development. Hence, in spite of the enormous and commendable economic growth, social maladies of various kinds have simultaneously afflicted Nigerian society - armed robbery, misuse of power, urban congestion, environmental decay, thuggery, delinquency of both youth and adult, pursuit of individual achievement and financial success at any costs, lack of patriotism, and above all cultural nihilism.

To put it more concretely, economic development planners in Nigeria have been successful but only to the extent that they have adumbrated the social problems without any discernible effort at working out solutions. Nigerians are, thus confronted with the classic tension between dynamic economic growth - achievements and static social progress. The problems created by the massive economic expansion are formidable - they are obviously not difficult to identify:

(a) Uncollected rubbish lies everywhere in high fetid dumps, infested with flies and vermin. Drainage, which is usually open gutters designed to carry away tropical downpours, is often blocked by garbage and ordure.

(b) Lagos has been ringed by an impressive network of flyover expressways. Ironically, homeless Nigerians have successfully turned the underneath of these flyovers into make-shift homes. The ghettos are no longer limited to the officially "government rejected areas" (G.R.A.) of Ajegunle, Maroko, Itire, Shomolu, etc., but has gradually been transported into the metropolis. It is perfectly normal to find an entire family of six, eight, or more people dejectedly crammed into a single room. Other Nigerian cities are not better.

(c) Twenty years after independence, Nigerians still use the bucket for toilet facilities. Worse still, fellow Nigerians are employed to empty the faeces at very extremely low wages.

(d) Accurate statistics about the crime rate are difficult to come by. If one were to go by the news media accounts, the crime figures must be exceedingly horrific. While the list is endless, it must be emphasised that despite the high petrodollar earnings and the commendable economic expansion, Nigeria has not in its twenty two years of independence, been able to provide its citizens with the basic social amenities: nourishment, shelter and medical care.

What is disturbing about economic growth in Nigeria is that in emphasising material considerations, strategists and planners, have, like the single-minded monists of old, arrived at a political economy in which one particular end - here, the end of economic welfare, narrowly defined, overrides all others. They are thus, subtly hostile to any end involving state principle of social welfare and social justice.

Moral Soundness And Economic Growth: The Nigerian Dilemma

"If in the conscious pursuit of progress the economy is littered with the debris of the unsuccessful and offspring of the unsuccessful, it would not seem to matter." The ethical status of this statement by Hayek is, if anything, superfluous. Even then Hayek's position mirrors accurately the essentially important aspect of the complex problem brought about by Nigeria's economic growth mania. The fundamental theorem of welfare economics tells us that under certain circumstances the full optimum in the light of a chosen criterion of social welfare which includes, among other things, a conception of justice, is a competitive equilibrium allocation associated with an appropriate (development) and distribution of initial endowments of resources among the individuals in society.⁵ For such optimum to be fully realizable in this way it must be supposed that the state knows, somehow, the preference and initial endowments of its citizens.

Where the emphasis on a socially beneficial end state is inverted, as it is in the Nigerian case, the fact is, of course, that Nigerians do not expect individuals to earn a minimum of merit but to achieve a maximum of material welfare through various anti-social behaviour patterns. This, usually, is achieved with a minimum of pain and sacrifice and therefore a minimum of merit is earned in terms of the moral standard.

The Nigerian economy is, consequently, not simply littered with the debris of the unsuccessful and their offsprings, there is a slow march towards an inevitable disaster - moral and cultural nihilism. This will result from the blinders of the economic development Nigerian style to the short-comings of applied welfare economics which presupposes a perfect government - one which faithfully goes about its economic development tasks without ethical goals.

The point so difficult to capture is that ethical goals cannot be brought about by legislation.* Legislated or promulgated morality is law. What characterises human societies and distinguishes them sharply from animal groups is that human societies are normative, i.e., they are moral societies, and are made possible by the observance of moral norms. This, of course, derives from human nature. The point that Hobbes drove home with his theory of the State of Nature is that civilization, progress and development derive from society which enforces morality. But enforced morality is not genuine morality, it is rather law.

Herein lies the Nigerian dilemma: do Nigerians have to enforce a national ethical standard through an ethical revolution in the light of the unfathomable moral crises brought about by the unprecedented but misdirected economic development policies (gains), that are littered with the debris of human suffering, hunger, disease, black apartheid, and lack of faith in both self and nationhood?

Where Nigeria's economic development has floundered is in any discussion of something far more elusive - the kind of social ethos that enable man (human beings) to command self-respect and dignity; respect and dignity not only in their own values...., but also the self-respect that comes from being secure in the knowledge of the respect of others. 6 When one talks of the end-states of social organization, it must be taken that to be included in such characterizations are not only the development, provision, distribution and allocation of goods and services but also the actions that people choose and those that they are entitled to choose. Any social organization that cannot assiduously strive to sustain the latter is aberrant - "it is acknowledged that the prosperity of society depends on the moral disposition of its members.7

The claim, here, however, is not that a society must first perfect its morals, otherwise, it cannot develop. The idea is not that everything - science, technology, training of scientists, building of factories, banks, roads, governmental changes, etc., are to stagnate or have to wait the prior development of morals. While this is not the claim, implicitly or otherwise, it must be emphasised that evidence of the decay of civilizations exist all over the world - à la ancient Rome.

* President Shehu Shagari recently announced the setting up of a Committee on the "National Ethical Revolution." The sole aim is to find solutions to Nigeria's acute moral crises.

The hall mark of the claim is obvious - that the effect or possible effects of the high incidence of egoism, imported and undigested individualism, corruption and other laxities can, inherently, render the building of a new Nigerian culture impossible.

Moral transformation must go side by side with economic expansion, in the strict sense, for the simple reason that moral transformation is nothing but an essential aspect of the building of a new culture or a new civilization. It is utopian to think that a society can be transformed and developed economically without evolving morals corresponding to that socio-economic epoch. The Nigerian society, as it is now, where individuals are dehumanized and made into tools for the wealth and well-being of a few is not simply a society - it is not even a human society that can promote, ensure, safeguard and enhance understanding of those essential values that are central to human existence: dignity, self-respect, autonomy and self-knowledge. Nigerians need to be liberated from a society that is precariously sitting on an economic growth tinder-box. (Editorial emphasis). That means seeking an authentic social antithesis to the present order. The realistic direction of search is that of rediscovering the African/Nigerian spirit, which, for example, emphasises the community welfare rather than the individual.* The struggle for the victory of the moral law implies on the part of all Nigerians a practical, though critical, involvement in rediscovering the traditional Nigerian mind that will ensure a humane society, by way of evolving a pattern and life-style, consonant with the traditions and cultural heritage.

This search becomes urgent upon the realization that Nigerians, like all human groups, live in a complex society, but have no choice except between adjusting themselves to the blind logic and forces of economic growth rather than development and sheepishly obeying the orders of the almighty and supreme Naira - the national paper currency.

What Kind of Development?

Our argument can thus be paraphrased: 'man' is the centerpiece of any development effort. After two decades of dis-oriented attempts at economic development, Nigerians would appear to have taken a radical departure, a U-turn, in terms of emphasis: "the new emphasis...of the people in the process of development is a product of experience. In our previous

*In traditional Nigerian Ethics every man is regarded as his brother's keeper. (Author) Cf: "In this world you become your brother's keeper" Micere Mugo on "The Battle of the mind, in this issue. (Ed. K.M.).

plans, we seem to have focussed attention primarily on strategies for economic growth, rather than development. The plans have, of course, to some extent succeeded in laying the necessary infrastructure for development; but they should not be mistaken for development. It is time we raised the fundamental question: What kind of society are we evolving?"

There is an answer, for the Guidelines also argues that: "true development must mean the development of man - the unfolding and realization of his creative potential...It is a process by which man's personality is enhanced, and it is that enhanced personality - creative, organized and disciplined - which is the moving force behind the socio-economic transformation of any society".⁹ This new emphasis, though belated, is nonetheless gratifying and welcome. It can only be hoped that this does not eventually turn out to be merely a façade or degenerate into evanescent economic growth triumphs; for when a society is properly oriented, organised and disciplined, it can be prosperous on the scantiest basis of natural resources and wealth. (Editorial emphasis).

With the debris of human suffering still there and ever fresh in the recesses of the Nigerian memory, the outcome of the immediate past disorientation in terms of strategies for economic growth rather than authentic development must be rectified. It must now be taken that the new approach to development with its emphasis on people rather than material things should lead to the rediscovery of the traditional Nigerian mind: the rediscovery of self-confidence, of dignity and self-respect. "A programme aimed at developing people, such as this, is bound to enhance in the population the capacities to initiate, organize their own concepts, and even devise their own technologies for achieving self-sustaining socio-economic transformation. Doubtless to say a concerted effort as this, cannot but also lead to transformations of experience and to new moral standards.

Conclusion

We have argued that economic growth, social progress and moral soundness must be pursued as the ultimate end-state for Nigeria, for the simple reason that they are all necessarily concomitant. The efforts at the top hierarchy of government must essentially be directed at the full assessment of this ultimate end-state as a basis for socio-economic decision making.

The development of a country in our view is primarily the moral and intellectual development of its citizens. Economic development is but a means to this end. Therein lies national progress which - "is a process of formation and modification of human intellect, a process of adaptation and learning in which

not only the possibilities known to us but also our values and desires continually change." ¹¹

NOTES

¹For the analysis of the term - "development", I am indebted to Dr. Joe Omoregbe. See his Monograph Series: Philosophy and National Development," Department of Philosophy, University of Lagos, 1978, p. 12-15.

²Rawls, J. A Theory of Justice, Oxford University Press, (1972), p. 205.

³Sanda, A. O. "Development Planning and Nigeria's Thirteen Years of Military Administration," Nigerian Behavioural Sciences Journal, Vol. 3, No. 1-2 (1980) p. 159-171.

⁴Hayek, F. The Constitution of Liberty, London (1960) Routledge and Keegan Paul, p. 130.

⁵For a proper account of this theorem, see, for example, Malinvaud, E. (1972) Microeconomic Theory, North Holland Press, Amsterdam.

⁶Rawls, J. (1972), op. cit., Sections 67 and 79.

⁷Schewitzer, A. Civilization of Ethics, London, Unwin Books, (1961) p. 76.

⁸Guidelines for the Fourth National Development Plan, 1981-1985, Federal Ministry of National Planning Publication, Lagos, 1981, p. 20.

⁹Ibid, p. 20.

¹⁰Ibid, p. 21.

¹¹Hayek, F. (1960), op. cit., p. 40.