



Afro-centric Ethics of Development in a Global Capitalist Order

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Abstract. As African scholars interested in Africa's development, we have consistently attributed the problems and complexities of Africa's development to the exogenous programmes and policies from the West. There is always the claim that the values that promote development in the African continent are foreign and strange to African cultures and that accounts for the slow pace of development in Africa in spite of the enormous efforts towards improving Africa's situation. This work acknowledges such sentiments of foreign invasion on African cultural values in the quest for Africa's development. But the problem that Africa faces in this situation and the subsequent goal to overturn the present development logic in which foreign parameters are exclusively applied on African situation is that Africa has no articulated development ethics as we find in the West as being advanced by Denis Goulet and Des Gasper. Theories, policies and programmes of development in Africa which originate from the Western-based multilateral and multinational organizations have conformed to the logics of development advanced by these scholars. Adopting the analytical approach, we argue that African cultures are rich in values and have capacity to drive Africa's development with their own standard ethical framework that can answer the questions of development confronting Africa. This way, African agents of development would embrace policies and programmes with more commitments towards Africa's development activities.

Keywords: African situation, development logic, cultural values, Afro-centric ethics development, Africa, Indigenous values

1. Introduction

The quest for Africa's development has become unending with proposals and actual implementations of numerous programmes and policies geared towards ensuring that the African situations improved from a seemingly ignominious level of economic underdevelopment to a level that measures up with the

so-called advanced countries of the world. A concise reason for such level of underdevelopment is seen as the uncivilized and primitive nature of the African continent that is characteristically devoid of technological advancement. Africa must therefore follow the path of utilitarianism which is encapsulated in modernity and civilization. This is what Njoku calls the "modern project and western logic of development" (2004, p. 22).

Development therefore is synonymous with industrialization which is a trickling down phenomenon from the west to Africa. The implication is that development will now gradually spring up from a onetime primitive orientation and builds up until Africa and other Third world countries catch up with the First world.

In view of the above, African leaders established regional bodies which adopted strategies to handle economic issues that are expected to transform Africa. However, the bodies and strategies promoted development based on economic orientations, with the obvious implications of estrangement of peoples and their cultures. This kind of development model never really changed Africa's development status and its Third world. In response to the obvious lapses of 'economistic' development plans for Africa, the idea of development with the people as the agents and end took the front burner. There is therefore a shift from one ethical orientation to another; an orientation that began from 'economistic' ethics as the foundation of development and purported to improve on its initial orientation of competition to a participatory ethics. The yawning gap created between the development strategies and the African values therefore needs to be filled by advancing an Afro-centric ethics of development which addresses the concomitant issues of the western logic of development that has not really developed Africa.

2. Ethics of Development: A Conceptual Discourse

The idea of ethics of development came about as a reaction to the failures of the theories and actual practice of development to effectively address the issues of underdevelopment in many countries of the world. Its origin is generally traced to Denis Goulet whose goal is to examine development from a value-laden perspective; an ethical questioning of the idea and methodologies of development. Another prominent scholar on this is Des Gasper who wrote several tributes on Denis Goulet's contributions towards redefining development from an ethical framework. Both scholars agree that development without ethical goals and strategies can inevitably lead to growth devoid of development, which in real terms, is the defeat of the true purpose of development. This is because, for them, the essence of development is the well-being of human beings.

As a recent field in development studies, ethics of development covers certain areas of interest which include: culture, politics, economy, social life in general, environment, issues of resources, technology, spiritual and mystical aspects of human life, amongst others. All these areas mentioned are clear indicators that it is a multidimensional approach to the quest for development. This is the point Dennis Goulet made when he wrote that ethics of development is "the conceptual cement that binds together multiple diagnoses of problems with their policy implications..." (Goulet, 1995, p.27).

The ethics of development therefore deals with the following: (i) ethical questions on development (ii) ethical evaluation of goals and strategies of development; and (iii) delimitations of issues on development.

On (i), we refer to the moral probing into development theories, programmes and practices. Among the questions asked are: whose responsibility is it to bring about development: individuals, markets, states or a combination of two or more of these agents? What constitute the virtues and vices of these agents of development?

Every development programme and policy ought to spell out the goals it is meant to achieve and the strategies to adopt towards achieving them. Both the goals and the strategies are, however, seen as largely descriptive by development ethicists and this is very antithetical to the actual achievement of goals of development programmes and policies. To attain these goals, the ethics of development is interested in their evaluation. Goulet had earlier advanced the need for ethical consideration of development in this field when

he talked about ethical goals of development to include the values of life sustenance, esteem and freedom while the ethical strategies of development are the provision of the abundance of goods, engaging in universal solidarity and full participation of individuals (1995).

Finally, another area of the ethics of development is that of exposing the boundaries and issues to be covered on development. It is primarily centered on addressing the issues of poverty reduction in and powerlessness of the Third world countries. On the basis of this initial objective of ethics of development, there is the question of whether it is appropriate to address the poverty in the South at the exclusion of poverty in the North. Or is there a wrong assumption that poverty only exists in the South?

Beyond the roles of the ethics of development above, there are contentions about other areas that are covered to include: distributive justice, environmental degradation, among others.

It would therefore be appropriate to define ethics of development as an ethical study of the various dynamics, methodologies, planning and theories of development as practiced in the different spheres of life such as politics, economy, religion, science, technology and other areas of life with special consideration on the why and how of development itself.

3. Policies and Programmes of Africa's Development: Insights to Underlying Ethics

A few years before 1960, there were attempts at regional integration, in line with the industrialization focus on development, to ensure that the African continent united in trade and economic policy formulations. In 1957 precisely, African leaders established the *Economic Commission for Africa* (ECA) for the purpose of not only aligning with the goals of industrialization but also for the purpose of protecting infant and domestic industries. Another integration attempt that was made within this period includes the formation of the Equatorial African Customs Union in 1959. These policies were aimed at attaining development through industrialization and they involved various strategies such as "... a shared currency, a regionally coordinated infrastructure, harmonized economic policies, a system of common institutions, and unrestricted labour mobility" (Rempel, 2008, p.136).

In the 1970s, there were other economic bodies established to take care of the underdevelopment problems confronting the African continent, especially West African countries. Africa must therefore embark on development policies that promote self-reliance, especially by paying attention to "...genuine indigenous search for technological solution of problems posed by and corresponding to the level of the various practical tasks that confront them in their daily life" (Ogundowole, 2011, p. 121). In 1975, two major bodies were further established: WAEMU (West African and Economic Monetary Union) and the ECOWAS (Economic Community for West African States). The former mainly opines that development problems of Africa could be addressed by taking care of the political crises that hamper growth through regional integration. The latter on the other hand was an attempt to bring together regions that had been bifurcated by French, Portuguese and English influences. Every activity of ECOWAS was built around three major objectives which include: cancellation of imposed tariffs on the primary products of member states, total obliteration of import duties on trades within and among member states and the creation of a common external tariff, with tariff concession among member states whose products satisfied the aim to ensure members' standard of living improved, shore up economic stability and worked towards achieving closer bond (Zagaris, 1978, p.93).

The economic strategies of the 1980s were generally regarded as the decade of structural adjustment programmes which began with a strategy that has been adjudged as the core African economic consciousness, the *Lagos Plan of Action* established in 1980. African Heads of States pointedly observed that the global development approach had not yielded the African continent her expected benefits. There is the recognition of the fact that most global approaches jettisoned differences in cultural values and as a way of correcting this anomaly, the African continent must become self-reliant both individually as countries and collectively as a continent. This is expressly stated in the preamble of the document that we, as policy makers and leaders in Africa (both individually and collectively), must make sure that policies of Africa's development are in tandem with our societal and cultural values for the purpose of promoting and preserving our African identity (OAU, 2000).

As a quick response to the drive of the African continent towards withering the link between her and the global development project (as evident in the *Lagos Plan of Action*), the World Bank with their universalism published what is called the *Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Agenda for*

Action in 1981. This document contains the structural adjustment policies of the World Bank which were handed to African leaders and policy makers in the name of helping Africa out of underdevelopment. It classified the problems of African economies into two broad types: "internal 'structural' problems and external factors" (The World Bank, 1981, p.4). Foundational to the two broad problems, according to this World Bank report are three critical inadequacies of domestic policies which include: over protection of local industries using policies of exchange rate, neglect of the administrative hindrances that weaken planning, and policy and resource management; and finally, the prejudice against agriculture which negatively impacted on the prices of agricultural products (The World Bank, 1981).

What the solution is, for them, is making adjustments on African economic policies. Expectedly, all the adjustments are to be made on all those areas of interest in the *Lagos Plan of Action* such as agriculture, human capital development, production and productive activities, terms of trade and balance of payments, export growth, aid and donor policies, trade and exchange rate policy, and administrative factors. On all these areas that were focused on in the *Lagos Plan of Action*, the *Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa* rather than addressing Africa's development problems in line with the idea of pursuing self-reliance, opines that Africa as a continent has failed to order her priorities right, not that external factors were primarily responsible for her woes. This declaration on the preliminary page of this document shows that the agitation for self-reliance by African leaders meant little or nothing to the World Bank. This why rather than addressing the problems pointed out in the *Lagos Plan*, the World Bank committee embarked on structural adjustment plans.

The 1990s were the period in which the United Nations redefined development to involve human beings. It was the beginning of the annual document by the body which is normally tagged "United Nations Human Development Report". Specifically in 1990, the United Nations titled its report "Concept and Measurement of Human Development" and examined the possibility of how economic growth affects the people such that it can constitute economic development. Standards for measuring development in this report include life expectancy, access to quality education and access to desired resources. "Financing Human Development" is the title of the 1991 report and its conclusion is that finance is not the challenge of development but the lack of political will is. In 1992, the report was titled "Global Dimensions of

Human Development” while in 1993, it was christened “People’s Participation”.

In the 2000s, development programmes as usually determined by the United Nations began with the introduction of the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs). Specifically in the year 2000, the United Nations came up with what she called the Millennium Declaration which was later transformed into ‘goals’, hence the name *Millennium Development Goals* which is a fifteen-year development plan. Principally, there are eight goals which further split into eighteen targets to be implemented across the globe, especially in developing countries of the world. The latter are pictures of what to expect in global development while the former are practical steps to perform for the realization of such pictures. The goals and strategies of the MDGs set the stage for the *New Partnership for Africa’s Development* (NEPAD) in 2001. This initiative as launched by African Heads of States and governments was aimed at self-reliance in handling Africa’s development problems. It was unanimously accepted that foreign strategies towards solving our development challenges had not yielded the expected results. We must therefore establish and promote a home-grown strategy that would address the identified challenges of the African continent. Basic among these challenges are poverty and unsustainable development. NEPAD is therefore an African grown approach to development aimed at eradicating poverty, bringing about sustainable development of the continent and ensuring the full participation of the continent in the global market economy (NEPAD, 2001). There are what the documents call priority areas, each with defined strategies termed programme of action in order to ensure that the major goals of this approach to development are achieved.

Among all these priorities as outlined in the NEPAD document, African leaders are of the opinion that part of the reasons the continent is economically underdeveloped is because of the jettisoning of African cultural knowledge and values by the colonial powers. The indispensability of culture in the NEPAD framework shows that “culture is an integral part of development efforts on the continent. Consequently, it is essential to protect and effectively utilize indigenous knowledge that represents a major dimension of the continent’s culture, and to share this knowledge for the benefit of humankind” (NEPAD, 2001, p.35). Although African leaders and Heads of State and Government emphasized the importance of African cultural values and indigenous knowledge, they also realized that the kinds of partnership entered into with bilateral and multilateral countries in the global

economy still exclude these values advocated for by the African continent, for neoliberal interests.

Finally, though not exhaustively, the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) as a development programme is the last of the approaches we shall briefly examine here. It is largely seen as a strategy of development that will accomplish achievements in certain areas the *Millennium Development Goals* failed. And the expected achievements are supposed to be recorded within fifteen years, from 2015 to 2030. A major area that was the focus of the MDGs is the eradication of extreme poverty. Not meeting this goal for the developing countries, a new strategy of development to consolidate and improve on the little progress made by preceding approaches and strategies became fundamental. The failure of the MDGs in Africa is captured in the SDGs and it shows that “almost 15 years ago, the Millennium Development Goals were agreed...but the progress has been uneven, particularly in Africa...” (The United Nations, n.p).

Development indices in Africa make her a point of focus for the Sustainable Development Goals. There seems to be an upsurge in the level of poverty in Africa, an essential part of what the SDGs aimed at addressing in order to solve the entire problem of development in the continent. There are seventeen of such goals with 169 targets. In line with those goals and targets, the opening paragraph says the agenda should be to engage people and the environment for the sake of prosperity so that extreme poverty can be eradicated for the purpose of achieving sustainable development (The United Nations, n.p). From this introductory part of the programme, one can see that development in this strategy is focused on social and economic development as well as care for the environment.

4. The Dearth of African Indigenous Values in African Development Policies

The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and even the Economic Community for West African States are all bodies responsible for mapping out strategies for the economic growth and development of the African continent. From the 1950s to the 1970s, both the ECA and UNECA designed what they termed the *Import Substitution Strategy* (ISI). The goals of this strategy for Africa’s development were in line with the Commissions’ idea of industrialization and the protection of domestic and infant industries in Africa. This is to address the trade imbalance between the West and Africa and ensures the transition to technological advancement and

development for the African continent. It is in line with this goal that Babatunde opines that the strategy of the ISI seems to be the blue print for development because of the massive development which took place in the areas of technology and manufacturing in the so-called First world countries. Structures of production from the period of colonialism must therefore be modernized among African countries (2012). The ISI is an indication of the catch-up syndrome that Africa is known for but would become like the West once there was monumental growth in the macro-economic policies of the African continent. Examining this strategy, it should be noted that there was marginal growth in the economy because of those industries, the favourable trade policy and the oil boom that characterized the 1960s. Again, as a result of the viable agricultural sector inherited from the colonial powers, there was also growth in per capita income across the continent. Yet none of the attendant economic policies gave priority to African cultural values as capable of having a place in the quests for the development of Africa.

In the 1970s, there were indications that Africa's economy was nose-diving and economic indices showed that there was poor management of Africa's economy. In the 1980s, such signs of economic decline practically showed themselves. For instance, "the results of the ISI model were initially seen in an average annual industrial growth rate of 5.5 per cent during the 1970s but fell to 2.5 per cent between 1980 and 1984, and 0.4 per cent between 1984 and 1987 respectively" (Babatunde, 2012, p. 152). On the basis of this decline in the economy, it became clear to the Commissions that development is more than just addressing the challenges of industrialization and the protection of infant and domestic industries.

The Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) were neo-liberal approaches established by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on a tripod strategy: trade liberalization, deregulation and privatization. Again, there is a Universalist assumption that there are perfect structures in the advanced world, which is primarily neo-liberalist in orientation, and which African countries must adjust to if they must be developed. Examining this programme, it is not strange that the foreign institutions were more interested in structural/material development than human development.

There is a mistaken acceptance that the satisfaction of the basic needs of the individual is human development and that is one of the indices that makes the foreign bodies pride themselves as having been successful in Africa's development. Even at that, these basic needs are not met by all standards of the indices

for individuals to live above the level of poverty. SAPs is also said to be a programme that made Africa to adjust to the economic interest of the West and their neo-liberal policies. As long as countries served such interest, it does not matter how democratic such countries are constituted. All of these neoliberal interests exclude African cultural values.

The *Lagos Plan of Action* was the first known development strategy that expressly talked about African traditional values in the development of the African continent. This way for the African Heads of State, we can actually attain the level of self-sufficiency, self-sustainability and self-reliance. The emphasis on values and identity is reflected on the preamble of the document which states that we appreciated that self-reliance can yield economic growth and self-sustainable development once the necessary support is provided (Adedeji, 2002). However, it does appear that the central focus of African governments were politics and economy. These for them were the fundamentals of development in spite of the fact that they had earlier recognized that such approach did little to improve Africa's search for development.

On the *New Partnership for Africa's Development* (NEPAD), there is also less emphasis on African cultural values in the quest for Africa's development by the architects of NEPAD. For instance, when we examine the "conditions for sustainable development" as contained in the document from articles 72-85, there is no place Africa's traditional values are mentioned in the goal of development. On the peace and security initiative aspects of the conditions which run from articles 72 to 78, the strategic actions to be taken in order for certain objectives to be achieved do not in any way accommodate indigenous values and perspectives. One obvious observation here is that there is no place for an initiative to peace and security that is African. In fact, one can see clearly that there is an erroneous assumption that economic indices are determinants of peace and security. Hence, the strategic actions for the achievement of such goals are basically market driven and aimed at economic development.

The question of the place of traditional African values in the achievement of the *Millennium Development Goals* is not a difficult one to address. This is due to the fact that in conceiving the idea of development in this document in the first place, African Heads of State and government were not even partakers in the mainstream of its formation. It was primarily an agenda with Western origin and foundation. Therefore, it is easy to find the Ricardian economic

orientation of development when we look at the goals and targets of the development agenda with emphasis on donor agencies and organizations focusing on areas with comparative disadvantages on particular challenges of development.

5. Towards an Afro-centric Ethics of Development

The economic programmes we have considered so far are mainly from the perspectives of individualism and liberalism which culminate in the promotion of the spirit of competition, no matter how unhealthy such competitions can be. Let us take the ethical principles of communal responsibilities and common good and how such principles can contribute in addressing the development problems of Africa. What common good and communal responsibilities fundamentally bring to the fore is the attendant ethical principle of co-operation. In this hyphenated form, etymologically it simply means operating together as partners. When we consider the development policies handed to Africa, even the so-called indigenous ones as seen above, it would be discovered that Africa has never been mutual partners in their formulation. The policies prioritize competition over cooperation thereby undermining a basic principle that defines African perspective of the human person. Mawere and Mubaya emphasizing this aspect of African culture explain that “the traditional African community was a small one, and the African could not think of himself apart from that community in which he lived” (2016, p. 154).

As result of the root foundations of such western programmes, there has been minimal level of cooperation between the locals and the West who are the real originators. Those that should therefore benefit from development policies as they participate in them should drive the policies as long as such policies do not undermine their nature, nurture and culture. This is not to say that cultural practices that are anachronistic and consequently antithetical to development of Africa should be romanticized. The idea of self-reliance in the *Lagos plan of Action* (LPA) and *New Partnership for Africa's Development* (NEPAD) was never a bad one. Unfortunately, these policies were not driven by these home-grown ethical values which should regulate us as human persons beyond our economic aspirations. This position is already captured by Nisbet in his view that the essence of coming together as associations and groups is for the accomplishments of tasks that cannot ordinarily be done by isolated individuals. Individuals therefore group themselves to deal with their challenges internally, but where external powers influence decisions, alienation becomes the outcome (1962).

From this perspective, it becomes clear that African governments should re-evaluate the different partnerships they have entered into with some other countries of the so-called developed world in order to ensure that the capitalist order promulgated by the global North does not continue to make Africa occupy the lower rung of human and humanistic development.

The twin concepts of reciprocity and mutuality can also be of help in dismantling the garbs of neo-liberalism that coloured the various agreements that the African continent has entered into and also discourage an uncritical acceptance of both internal and international motivations leading to such agreements in future. Much of our discussions on the neoliberal policies which have been touted to aid Africa's development are indicative of seeming deceit as far as their implementations of are concerned. The *General Agreements in Tariffs and Trade* (GATT) was meant to be guided by reciprocity and mutual interactions among countries of the world in the establishment of development policies. In the promotion of such trade tenets, it became a precursor to the emergence of the *World Trade Organization* (WTO) whose transactions go beyond cross borders on tangible goods (like the GATT) to intangible services while stipulating the determining conditions for the permissibility of policies and practices that place restrictions on trade options for member countries in the most liberal terms of trade (Shukla, 2005). Both the GATT and WTO have therefore the mixed description of liberalization on the one hand and mutuality on the other hand. However, it has become clear that the liberalization aspects are the ones that are considered more crucial and beneficial to the First world countries on whose instance the multilateral institutions are established. Mutuality and reciprocity are among the Afro-centric ethical principles needed to redefine these partnerships and make development participatory in Africa.

Covenant and consensus as Afro-centric ethical principles are also crucial in addressing the problems of the policies of development which jettison African cultural and ethical values. The various nature of covenant among Africans may not necessarily satisfy the western model of agreement and could be dismissed as superstitious, but it is our position that such principles cannot be overlooked if we are to get Africans to participate fully in policies of their development. If we have been experiencing the many problems that accompany most of the agreements entered into by African countries for the purpose of their development, it would not be out of place to realize that development policies and agreements must

factor in the nature and culture of the people that are meant to be beneficiaries of such programmes. In African societies, there are discussions on different kinds and hierarchies of life forces that connect man to God. Covenant and its related activities are supposed to show the oneness of the individual parties involved and by so doing detest dehumanizing any of the parties. The question of being unscientific should not make us abandon a traditional activity that has been working for us in some other areas of life. We must not understand the workings of the spirit behind the covenant we enter into in the course of working out policies and agreements for our development as Africans. Gregory Ogbenika highlighting Foucault's support for this view said that "Foucault seems to have pointed out a key idea about spirit possession, namely, that a spirit's ability to prevail corresponds to its ability to conceal the mechanisms behind its effects; in other words, that mystery is essential to its functioning" (Ogbenika, 2011, p.78). When we apply this approach, among others that we have suggested in this work, parties to agreements and policies are conscious of the facts of a potent 'force' behind such bond and would not want to conceal certain intricacies of the policies.

The idea of the vital force among Africans in general is also relevant in ecocentric development. Every object of nature is said to possess some kind of spirits with the attributes of some form of personality. The environment in Africa and the world generally has so much suffered abuse and degradation. On the basis of such inconsiderate treatment of the environment leading to its development problems which ultimately affects man, the United Nations and many countries of the world have enacted laws that prohibit devastation and degradation of nature and the environment. For instance, there are environmental laws in Nigeria such as the *Environmental Impact Assessment Act (EIA)* of 2004, *Harmful Wastes Act* of 2006 and *National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency Act (NESEREA)* of 2007 which are supposed to regulate the activities of human beings on the environment. However, environmental protection laws are not effective in most African societies, most likely because violations are not perceived as criminal acts but simply as acts of negligence, nuisance, trespass or poor attitude towards environmental art (Izibili, 2005). As these legal approaches have failed and appear to be continuously failing, we turn to our African perspective and reconsider the relationship between the person and the environment to see how much of such relationship can be explored in bringing about development of the environment and by extension other areas of development in human lives and endeavours.

6. Conclusion

We have shown in this essay that Afro-centric ethics of development has full potentials of putting Africa back on the genuine path of development, without pursuing inimical economic interests. It is clear that this homegrown development model is an alternative, better and more holistic as it touches many aspects of human existence. The Afro-centric ethics of development is that area of study that puts the human person at the centre of development and examines development from an ethical perspective based on African cultural values. It addresses the question of who should be the initiator of Africa's development, who the benefactors and beneficiaries are, the propriety of extending development beyond human person, for instance to nature and environment, and how much recognition development strategies and programmes give to African traditional values.

Therefore, it is the submission of this essay that when genuinely adopted to tackle Africa's development issues, the obstacles posed by the Western individualistic/capitalist models of development and their alien programmes and strategies would not only be overcome but Africa would be aiding the global capitalists' initiators in embarking on genuine and humane development policies across the world.

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