

## Modernization Theory and African Development in the 21st Century

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**Abstract.** The issue of development in Africa has called for the interrogation and explication of development theories to be able to explore and situate properly the nature and condition of African development in the 21st century. Continents like Asia and Latin America who were at one point or the other at the same level of development with Africa have overtaken the continent. The dependency theory is of the view that African underdevelopment is traceable to its contact with other continents like North American and Europe in the form of slave trade, imperialism, colonialism and neocolonialism. While these factors cannot be completely ignored as responsible for Africa's underdevelopment, this paper thinks differently in the sense that in the 21st century, the above mentioned factors can no longer be tenable as factors responsible for the underdevelopment of Africa. It is against this backdrop that the modernization theory is interrogated to find out its utility in understanding African development. Data for the study were obtained through secondary means which include textbooks, journals, magazines and newspapers. Historical and analytical methods were adopted as the analytical tools for the study and also the political economy theory was adopted as the theoretical framework. This paper found out that there are many internal factors in Africa that hinder her development. This paper recommends amongst others that there should be effective

leadership in Africa and also efforts should be made to fight corruption and adhere to the principles of rule of law.

**Keywords:** Development, Underdevelopment, Colonialism, Neo-colonialism, Imperialism.

### 1. Introduction

The issue of development in Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has become a source of major concern not just for Africans but the rest of the world. This becomes necessary because of the interconnectedness of the countries of the world in this era of increased globalization to the extent that what happens in one part of the world one way or the other affects the rest of the world. This explains why Offiong cited in Oddih (2009:190) defined globalization as the "aggravation of global interconnectedness". It is very obvious that issues of terrorism, HIV/AIDS, Ebola virus infection, democracy, human rights, etc., have become worldwide phenomena and of global concern. While European countries, America, and Asian countries have been working so hard to make life of their citizens much better by investing heavily in education, health, agriculture, technology, etc., same cannot be said of most African countries.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Africa still lags behind in virtually all indices of development. This situation has made it difficult if not impossible for most African countries to be given the needed attention, recognition and respect in the comity of nations. This condition also invariably contributes further to the underdevelopment of Africa. That Africa is underdeveloped or developing is not in doubt, the cause of Africa's underdevelopment is what has generated intense debate between the dependency and modernization schools of thought. The dependency school of thought is of the view that the underdevelopment of Africa was caused by Africa's contact with Europe and America through slave trade, imperialism, colonialism and new-colonialism. The major proponents of this perspective are Andre Gunder Frank (1976, 1981) Samir Amin (1976), Rodney (1972), Ake (1981), and Offiong (1980). According to Dos Santos (1970) cited in Jack etal (2016:206), dependency is:

*“an historical condition which shapes certain structure of the world economy such that it favours some countries to the detriment of others and limits the development possibilities of the subordinate economies.....a situation in which the economy of a certain group of countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy, to which either their own is subjected”.*

In a similar vein, Ezeibe (2015:255) opines that *“majority of the literature on development argues that Africa's underdevelopment is caused by European colonization. Hence, the integration of the African economy into global capitalism driven by Adam Smith's free market ideology created the framework for the exploitations and exploration of Africa and their resources”.*

To the modernization school, the underdevelopment of Africa is as a result of factors inherent in Africa. This school is of the view that Africans underdeveloped Africa. This paper seeks to interrogate modernization theory with a view to using it as a point of departure for understanding African development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## 2. Conceptual Clarification

At this juncture, attempt would be made to clarify certain concepts in this paper. This becomes necessary in order to have a lucid understanding of the subject matter. In this vein, the concepts to be so clarified are “modernization theory” and “development”.

As we have noted earlier, modernization theory is one of the theories of development which is useful in the explanation of African development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as well as how development can be achieved in Africa. According to Ekpe (2013:31), “the first classical economic development theory that emerged from the ruins of World War II was the modernization theory”. According to Offiong (1980:14), “those who espouse the theory of modernization can be identified by their almost tenacious addiction to the concept of ‘modern’ and its permutations and by categories such as ‘institutional differentiation’, ‘development’, ‘nation-building’, ‘economic growth’, ‘advanced industrial societies’, ‘westernized’, ‘backward’, ‘primitive’, ‘tribal’, ‘detrribalized’, and many more”.

The major point of departure of the modernization theory is that the factors that either promote or hinder development are present in the countries in question and this means that the modernization theory does not believe that external forces are responsible for the underdevelopment of Africa. Modernization theory can be said to be an eye opener to the effect that for Africa to develop it has to look inward and put serious effort to achieve development instead of expecting Europe and America to help them to develop. According to Naanen (2015:61), “the assumptions of neo-classical development analysts that was prevalent at the time was that lack of economic development in much of the non-western world was attributable to the continuous dominance of traditional structures and attitudes which hindered the penetration of market forces that are so critical to economic development. These countries were poor because of the inadequate development of the market, lack of savings and investment, scarcity of entrepreneurial capacity

and the prevalence of attitudes which emphasized consumption and redistribution instead of thrift, investment and production". This view represents the position of the modernization theory which believes that the underdevelopment of Africa and indeed the rest of the third world countries is a result of internal factors and that the only way they can develop is to understand and follow the footsteps of the developed countries. According to Tipps (1976), "Western Europe and the United States are seen as the models of development and if the other parts of the world that are traditional, local, backward and underdeveloped must develop, they must follow the footsteps of the west." This explains why Ezeibe (2016:243) opines that "modernization therefore refers to the process of Europeanization or Americanization".

The major theorists of modernization are Walt Whitman Rostow, David McClelland, Everett Hagen- status withdrawal, B.F. Hoselitz- assignment and reward and Piero Gheddo- the four revolutions (differences in wealth of nation equate difference in experience of nations with major revolutions). Rostow (1960) in his book "stages of economic growth" identified five stages of economic growth which are- traditional society, pre-condition for take-off, the take-off stage, the drive to maturity, and high mass consumption society. According to Offiong cited in Ezeibe (2016:245), "Rostow argued that traditional societies have pre-Newtonian science and technology. Such societies are Peasant based, custom bound, hierarchical, authoritarian and unproductive. Pre-condition for take-off witnessed the emergence of new elites who consider economic modernization as desirable and possible. These new elites were also willing to mobilized savings and take economic risks. This leads to rise in capital accumulation. At the take-off stage, resistance to steady growth is destroyed and growth becomes an integral part of society. It lasts for only about 20 years after which the stage of drive to maturity which lasts for another 20 years sets in. At this stage, the economy demonstrates that it has the capacity to produce whatever it chooses to produce. At this stage, the economy invests, on a regular basis, between 10% and 20% of its national income, and its output continues to outstrip the increase in population. Another significant indicator at

this stage is the decline in the relative economic importance of agriculture. Thirdly, there is a growth in the urban population in terms of skilled and semi-skilled workers. This stage is followed by high mass consumption when leading sectors shift to production of durable consumer goods and services. At this stage, income for feeding, clothing and shelter ceases to be major concerns of the worker".

McClelland (1961) developed the need for achievement (n-arc) theory to explain development. To him, nations that possess more citizens with high level of need for achievement will produce micro-energetic entrepreneurs who will in turn produce rapid economic development. He also argued that class, religion, family upbringing, societal ethos and values affect achievement motivation. It therefore means that the developed countries are developed because they possess more citizens with high level of need for achievement while the Third World countries Africa inclusive are underdeveloped because they do not possess enough citizens with high level of need for achievement. Ezeibe (2016:246-247)

Piero Gheddo in his book, why is the third world poor? Offers an explanation for the development of the rich Western (North America included) nations and the poor third world countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. His answer according to Offiong (1980:44-46) is that the west has undergone four crucial revolutions while the third world countries have not.

The first revolution is on the plane of ideas. This is the revolution that ignited the concepts of the equality of all man and the dignity of each individual person. According to Piero Gheddo , the west was radically transformed by the Judaeo-Christian religion which taught man that he was created in the image of God; that man was the king of creation, and with an end superior to that of any other creature; and that man was free to determine and shape his own destiny. To Gheddo in the undeveloped countries, the idea that man is centre of creation is not accepted or known.

The second revolution is that of the idea of progress. This second aspect of Gheddo's four revolutions is of the view that if man is the king of creation, if man is made in the image of God; he ought to dominate nature and make it serve his needs. He contended that the west developed because at a certain point in time discovered "the sovereign dignity of man over all creation, the fundamental equality of all men, and the messianic vision of a better world to be constructed with his own hands and the help of others. This idea of progress has given western culture an ideal, has broken down psychological barriers and created a dynamic tension towards the future" Offiong (1980:46). To Gheddo, what keeps the third world underdeveloped or static, is because they lack the "progressive mentality" that characterizes the western man.

The third revolution is that of population growth. Man created in the image of God became the centre of experimentation to improve the conditions of, and to prolong his life. Medicine assured man better health and in addition upset the economic balance of mere subsistence which characterized the traditional society. In western societies, population increased in situations conducive to efforts towards a better organization of its productive forces, thus unleashing a series of powerful causes and effects in the area of economics and it is this process that has brought about material progress to their society. But in the third world, population growth has not led to productivity or greater social justice, and the reason for this is that these men are unaware of their dignity and equality.

The fourth and final revolution concerns science and technology which have made possible western economic development. Like in the development of medical science and all other sciences focusing on man, the fourth revolution derived its impetus from the first two revolutions. In the West, science and technology are fairly recent phenomena whose occurrence was planned but both were "the product of a whole culture that was headed in that direction". According to Gheddo, the transplantation of technology and science in the underdeveloped countries cannot succeed because of the

differences in culture. Gheddo cited in Offiong (1980:471) states that "*one of the fundamental differences between the western world and the third world is precisely this; on one side are societies that have had a long cultural preparation, culminating in modern progress, on the other side are those who are unprepared for the break with the whole cultural past that would result from the introduction of new revolutionary ideas and new technology*".

According to Moore cited in Ezeibe (2016:243), "modernization is a process whereby societies move from traditional or less developed to developed or modern, hence modernization. In order to modernize the third world countries must overcome their traditionalism. Modernization and development are intertwined".

Having examined the concept of modernization theory, next to be examined and clarified is development. What is development? Development is one of the concepts in the social sciences that have attracted the attention of many scholars across the globe as well as world governance institutions such as United Nations and World Bank. This explains why there exists a plethora of definitions by different scholars. According to Rodney (1972:1), "development in human society is a many-sided process. At the level of the individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being". He went further to assert that development means that an economy must register advances which in turn will promote further progress. Rodney viewed development principally from the perspective of economic growth and development which to him will bring about the development of other spheres of human endeavour. Naanen (2015:48) sees development as the "incremental improvement in the quality of life". According to Abraham (2010:128), in the context of the contemporary millennium development goals issued by the United Nations, "development may be conceptualized as an increasing reduction or elimination of poverty and hunger; educating all children; ensuring gender equality, control or eradication of infant and maternal mortality and

disease, using environment wisely and implementation of the ideals of global links or working together for development globally”.

Modernization theorists according to Ezeibe (2016:244) define development as “a condition of improved social, political and economic amenities of the society”. Thus, modernization divides development in these three perspectives. At the social level, development is concerned with institutionalization of western values, culture and religion. It asserts that modern societies are better educated and highly urbanized and better welfare packages for citizens. (Smelser cited in Ezeibe, 2016:244).

Developed political systems have a higher capacity to deal with the function of national identity, legitimacy, penetration, participation, and distribution than traditional political systems. At the economic level, development refers to economic growth, high level of industrialization and capital formation. This shows that development is a concept that is multi-dimensional. The dimensions of development include but not limited to economic, social, political, environmental and cultural. On this note, Sen cited in Afeikhena (2004:207) opines that “while economic and social progress and the elimination of poverty are key objectives of development, the development well-being also encompasses freedom from fear and arbitrary arrest, free speech, free association, and the right to run for and hold political office”. To Stightz cited in Afeikhena (2004:207), “development is now seen as a transformation of the society, a move from the old ways of thinking, and old forms of social and economic organization to new ones”.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

This paper adopts political economy as a theoretical framework. Political economy exposes the relationship between politics and economics. Scholars associated with political economy are Karl Marx, Fredrick Engels, V.I. Lenin, Samir Amin, Claude Ake, Eme Ekekwe, Bade Onimode, Frantz Fanon, David Ricardo etc.

Political economy as a theoretical framework enables us to understand the society because it exposes how government of every country conducts their affairs in order to bring about development of the state and economy and how the level of development of the state and economy also influence governance. According to Aja (1998:16), “an outstanding feature of political economy is its methodology of analysis, which is based on dialectical materialism otherwise known as economic determinism”. The theory of dialectical materialism was propounded by Karl Max. Dialectical materialism gives primacy to material or economic conditions of a society.

We believe that political economy is very relevant in the explanation of the topic under study “modernization theory and African development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” where issues of leadership, politics and economy etc. are major issues of discussion. We believe that development in Africa is a consequence of the nature of leadership. It is the continent leadership that determines the development of Africa.

### **4. Relevance of Modernization Theory to African Development**

From the foregoing, development is a condition that every state desires to achieve. The continent of Africa to a very large extent is underdeveloped in comparison with European countries and America. Having recognised this fact, it is obvious that Africa is indeed in search of development. No doubt, over the years series of efforts have been made in Africa to bring about the development of the continent but yet, the continent is still far behind in terms of development. The reasons for this would be addressed in the subsequent section of this paper.

Our task in this section of the paper is to examine how the modernization theory can be of help in bringing about African development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is very obvious that criticisms have trailed the modernization theory and these criticisms emanate from Africa and other third

world countries, despite these criticisms, the usefulness and relevance of the modernization theory to African development cannot be overemphasized. This is because, the modernization theory offers useful explanation as regards reasons for Africa's underdevelopment as well as other third world countries and not only that, it also provides suggestions as regards what should be done to enhance Africa and other third world countries development. It therefore means that critical attention should be paid to the modernization theory in order to extract what is useful for Africa development.

According to Naanen (2015:61), "Western Social Scientists bemoaned and debated the absence in Africa of the "economic man" who was driven by economic forces. Development in these countries was hindered by lack of liberal democracy and the prevalence of dictatorships marked by military and revolutionary governments which precluded political pluralism. To develop therefore, these societies had to forsake traditional values and embrace modernization". This can be said to be the summary or the basic thrust of the modernization theory. This theory is of the view that instead of Africa and other underdeveloped countries of the third world to blame external forces for their underdevelopment, it is better they look inward because by so doing they would find out those things in them that retard their development. This is necessary because solutions to problems presuppose that the problems are well known.

It is not in doubt that the political and economic condition of Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not palatable and this is so because of bad leadership. This explains why Achebe cited in Ogbeyi (2012:3) opined that "the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian land, climate, water, air, or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to their responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which is the hallmarks of true leadership". Most countries of Africa still have the problem of leadership. According to Naanen

(2015:48), "persisting underdevelopment in Africa is not just a matter of economics but it is located at the intersection of the trinity of economics, politics and culture. Certain cultural values which celebrate ill-gotten wealth (not questioning it), leading to the prevalence of corruption cannot be conducive to development".

According to Naanen, "Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson have reminded us in their best seller, "Why Nations Fail", that what makes the critical difference between prosperity and poverty, between great nations and lesser nations, is the development of inclusive political and economic institutions that allow free competition of ideas and actions, encourage popular participation in economic opportunities, and rewards enterprise and innovation". If the political space is opened for people to participate freely in politics and structures put in place to recognise and reward hardwork, it can lead a country to development.

We can regard the modernization theory as a theory that explains the factors that are present in Africa and other third world countries that inhibit their development and what can be done for them to be developed. As a result of this, scholars as well as governments in African countries should have to study and understand the nitty-gritty of the modernization theory to be able to apply the knowledge gained to be able to transform positively their various countries in order to achieve development.

## 5. Challenges to Development in Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

The post-colonial Africa is still grappling with the crisis of development. This condition has made it impossible for Africa to be given reasonable attention and respect in the comity of Nations. There are a plethora of factors that constitute great challenge to development in Africa. These factors include:

**Bad Leadership:-** The place of leadership in a country's development cannot be over emphasized. Many countries in Africa have not been so lucky to have good leadership that

would help them to achieve development. According to Abubakar (2004:154), “leadership, in other words, is an essential element in the process of nation-building and reconstruction. The tragedy of most post-colonial African states, however, is that they lack visionary political leaders who will transcend personalist and primordial interest to transform the state into a viable vehicle that could address the basic needs of the citizenry through the provision of adequate health facilities, qualitative education, shelter, food, and security of lives and property. Post-independence leaders in Africa not only personalized power, but also privatized the state for the purpose of primitive accumulation”. He went further to state that “instead of using the state for initiating development, African leaders utilized it as a vehicle for terrorizing the citizenry, thereby leading to the disengagement of the populace from the public realm”. This situation cannot be conducive for development.

**Corruption:-** This is another factor that poses very serious challenge to African development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Corruption in all its ramifications has pervaded and permeated virtually all sectors in Africa, this condition has made development in Africa very difficult. In the words of Ezeibe (2016:256), “notably, the problem of corruption has become intractable in Africa. In September, 2002 for instance, Africa Union estimated that corruption costs African economies more than \$148 billion annually. Similarly, the President of World Bank in 2006 estimated that corrupt Nigerian politicians have stolen over \$300 billion since 1960”. With these, it is obvious that monies meant for executing developmental programmes and projects end up in private pockets.

**Problems of sit-tight leaders in Africa:-** In different parts of Africa, we have leaders that have spent more than 20 years in office and yet are not willing to quit. This situation has serious implications for development, this is because such leaders would not allow popular participation in the political process and this is done using the instruments of the state to silence opposition elements. According to Oyewo (2011:21), “there has been massive economic decadence and under-development of an

unyielding measure in those countries, while serious mis-rule and discomfort have become the order of the day because the leaders loath to quit their offices as at when due but intended to stay put permanently and forever”. According to Ehindero (2013:54-55), “African rulers who were overtime affected by the sit-tight syndrome are Felix Houphouet Boigny of Cote D’Ivoire who died in office after thirty-four years as President, Sekou Toure of Guinea after twenty-six years; Abdul Nasser of Egypt after sixteen years, both Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya and Sir Seretse Khama of Botswana after fifteen years; Mobutu Sese Soko of Zaire (Congo Leopoldville), Sir Dauda Jawara of the Gambia, Lebuja Jonathan of Lesothos, Hamana Diori of Niger, and Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana were in office for thirty-two, twenty-nine, twenty, fourteen, and ten years respectively, before being overthrown in military coups or armed revolts and Kamuzu Banda of Malawi and Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia for twenty-nine and twenty-seven years respectively before they were voted out in a multi-party democratic election. Habab Bourguiba of Tunisia was dismissed after thirty-two years in office on the ground of senility certified by a group of medical doctors. Julius Nyerere of Tanzania voluntarily retired after twenty-seven years”.

**Lack of Technology:-** The place of technology in the development of any nation cannot be overemphasized. This explains why Ajibade (1986:41) opined that “the future is not bright unless there are fundamental changes in the current approach of developing countries particularly Africa, to the acquisition of technical know-how”. The availability of technology is one of the pre-requisite for development. The low level of development in Africa is partly attributable to lack of technology.

**Do or die attitude to politics by the political class in Africa:-** The post-colonial state of Africa is characterised by a political class that sees politics with a do or die mentality. This is because of the high premium placed on politics in Africa and the tendency to use power for accumulation. This situation generates an atmosphere of political crisis and instability

which is not favourable to development. This explains why Ake (1996:16) opined that “in postcolonial Africa, the premium on power is exceptionally high, and the institutional mechanisms for moderating political competition are lacking. As a result, political competition tends to assume the character of warfare. So absorbing is the struggle for power that everything else, including the quest for development, is marginalized”.

#### **6. Prospects for African Development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

It is very obvious that Africa is underdeveloped in comparison with Europe and America. According to Aja (1981:171), “as a concept and condition, underdevelopment presupposes that in a comparative sense, there exists an advanced economy which is structurally advanced in international division of labour and less developed economy which is structurally disoriented, disarticulated and disadvantaged in international division of labour”. From the foregoing, it is very obvious that Africa is not developed in comparison with Europe and America and as such, efforts should be made to ensure the development of Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond. The following can help in bringing about development in Africa.

**Diversification of the Economy:-** It is obvious that many African countries depend mainly on one product as a source of revenue, for example a country like Nigeria has crude oil as a major source of revenue and as such whenever there is fall in price in the international market, the country would be adversely affected. For instance, the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari attributed the economic recession that engulfed Nigeria partly to the fall in price of crude oil in the international market. Assuming the economy was diversified, there would be several sources of revenue which would be used to run the state and economy. In doing this, different African countries should identify and concentrate on production in areas where they have comparative advantage. On this note, Toyo (2997:39) asserted that “it was thought that all countries would gain best if each country specialized in producing a commodity

using a larger proportion of the resources she was rich in. The resources were natural resources, capital, and workforce. Since the west was capital-rich and other areas were relatively capital poor but land-rich and labour-rich, it would pay all countries best if the west concentrated on exporting manufactures which used proportionally more of capital, while other areas concentrated on agricultural and forest exports which used proportionally more of land and labour power”.

**Good and effective leadership:-** It is very difficult if not impossible for any country to get developed without good and effective leadership. Good and effective leadership is central to any country’s development. It was Lee Kuan Yew who turned Singapore from third world to first. Therefore, if Africa is to be developed there should be the presence of good and effective leadership.

**Adherence to the principles of rule of law:-** According to Egugbo (2014:23), “when the principles of rule of law are adopted and applied in any given society, the tendency of achieving peace, stability and above all overall societal development is high”. This explains why late President Yar’Adua submitted that “respect for the Rule of Law is the basis for civilization”. The United Nations Security Council cited in Bjornlund (2914:5) defines the rule of law as “when all persons, institutions and entities, public and private including the state itself, are accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced and independently adjudicated, and which are consistent with international human rights norms and standards”. Most crisis and wars in different parts of Africa can partly be attributed to non-adherence to the principles of rule of law, the crisis and wars have made development to be a distant dream in countries where they occur. Therefore to ensure development, governments and the citizens must ensure the respect and adherence to the principles of rule of law.

**Improvement in Technology:-** It is very difficult to achieve development without the availability of appropriate technology. It is on this note we suggest that government of African

countries should try as much as possible to ensure the improvement in technology.

**Vigorous and effective anti-corruption crusade:-** It has been observed that corruption is prevalent and pervasive in virtually all countries of the world but the level of destructiveness is very high in Africa. Corruption has led to the weakening of development in Africa. According to the United Nations office on Drugs and Crimes (2005), “despite the prevalence of anti-graft commission in Africa, corruption continues to eat deep into the roots of most African economies. Africa has lost over \$400 billion to corruption and illicit transfers to foreign countries. It is on this note that we suggest that for development to take place in Africa, efforts should be made to strengthen the fight against corruption.

### 7. Conclusion

In an effort to bring about development in Africa, it is very pertinent for Africa to look inwards to identify the factors in Africa that hinder and inhibit development with the hope of changing them for the purpose of development. It is obvious that if Africa does not make effort to get developed no other continent can devote time, resources and efforts to develop Africa. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we feel it is not proper to continue to attribute the underdevelopment of Africa to slave trade, imperialism, colonialism, and neo-colonialism. This explains why we decided to interrogate the modernization theory as it relates to the nature of development in Africa. We came to the conclusion that Africa should do away with those factors inherent in Africa that inhibit development and put more effort in doing those things that can bring about development. Some of these things have been identified in this paper.

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