

## **HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AS THE BEDROCK FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICA: THE RELIGIO-ETHICAL DIMENSION**

**By Uche Azubuike Clement Ph.D  
Imo State University, Owerri, Nigeria.**

### **ABSTRACT**

Since the attainment of their independence, African countries have been grappling with the problem of underdevelopment. The reason is not that Africa as a continent doesn't have all that it takes to become great when we consider the vast expanse of its land, the teeming population, huge natural resources and the friendly climatic condition with which the continent is blessed. The few countries which have been making great strides at achieving development themselves appear not to understand, or deliberately ignore, what constitutes genuine development. The result is that their efforts have not yielded the expected dividend, because they have only concentrated on the Western model of development. This model emphasizes only technological and scientific development neglecting the spiritual and moral development of the human person who is the subject and goal of development. The argument of this paper, therefore, is that for Africa to achieve any sustainable development, the spiritual and ethical dimensions of the human person, embedded in African worldview, must be given a priority attention. Here the paper makes a case for a return to the religious and ethical values which the African world-view and religions emphasize.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

According to the Christian Bible, after God created man and woman, he charged them with the task of conquering the earth and subduing it (Gen. 1:28), thus to become the master of their fellow creatures. In this mandate, humans were entrusted with the duty of transforming their environment, to improve their lots, but under the supervision of the Creator.

The earliest error humans committed in their bid to "take charge" was when they attempted to put God aside in order to "make name for ourselves" (Gen11:4) with the construction of the tower of Babel. And because their intention was wrong, the project never reached completion. In this episode of the Tower of Babel, we witnessed the earliest drift of mankind to secularism, an ideology which denies all supernatural (religious) causality, affirming a non-religious approach to existence; and which seeks the development of the physical and intellectual nature of man to the highest possible point as the immediate duty of life.

Since the attainment of political independence, most African countries have been making frantic efforts at achieving development and being counted among the developed nations of the world. In pursuance of this goal, some have seen nation-building as consisting namely in technological developments and the setting up of all kinds of modern structures; accumulating almost

inexhaustible supply of the most sophisticated and deadly weapons, ability to defend the frontiers of a nation, high

percentage of literacy, control of buoyant economy and, in short, being in possession of all kinds of material goods which are falsely calculated to make man's life happy here and guarantee security by force of arms. While all these are considered necessary in any talk about development, however they cannot ensure any sustainable development without a proper and integral formation of man who is the object of the development. As Ezeanya (1979) observed "any project for the building of a nation which loses sight or ignores the spiritual and material well-being of man taken as a whole, cannot succeed in building a nation where no man can be oppressed.

Aristotle assents to this when he said that

...the end of the state is not mere life; it is rather a good quality of life... Similarly, it is not the end of a state to provide an alliance of mutual defence against all inquiry or to ease exchange and promote economic intercourse... But it is the cardinal issue of goodness and badness in the life of the polis which always engages the attention of any State that concerns itself to secure a system of good laws well obeyed...any polis which is truly so called and is not merely one in name must devote itself to the end of encouraging goodness.

(The Politics of Aristotle, translated by Ernest Baker, Oxford, 1961, pp 118-119).

Thus the work of nation-building is solidly hinged in the formation of man in such a way that the polis enjoys the Goodness, Justice, Love and Peace which are essential ingredients for nation-building and are products of the human heart. These qualities cannot be imposed by force of arms. They cannot exist in the State if they do not first and foremost exist in human hearts and minds. This is where the African religious and ethical sense must play a vital role in our quest for sustainable development.

This paper will begin with the cursory explanation of the operative terms. Then we shall in some detail examine factors hindering Africa's development and the roles our religious traditions can play in changing the tide. Our discussion will end with the call for a return to our religious and traditional values.

### **Definition of Operative Terms**

The main operative words of this discussion are Human Development. But to really understand the concept we will first try to have a cursory look at the word 'Development'.

### **Development :**

The concept development does not lend itself to a univocal definition. It has various levels and dimensions of meaning. Almost every field of human endeavour employ the term, giving rise to the various theories of development. In the words of Nnabue

(2012) it is a multi-dimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes and national institutions, as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and the eradication of poverty. Thus development is seen at some quarters as "the

elevation of man's quality of life", by which it is understood the assurance and promotion of the rights and liberties with their corresponding obligations and responsibilities which belong to men as men. (See Uche 2011:40). They form the context through which we understand and define the dignity of man and which he should not be deprived of without dehumanizing him.

Since the industrial revolution of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there has been a revolution in the concept of development. Development has been identified with material development to the neglect of the other aspects. Thus in our days, development tends to refer only to the present high-speed communication system machines and networks, the fantastic space and distant shuttles and wars, the ever increasing efficient medical therapies, the high technology and computer systems. But as Stemmler (1991) remarked, "though economic development is the indispensable basis of any more comprehensive concept of development, it is not identical with it". In other words, a growth in the country's gross product (GNP) does not necessarily mark that country out as developed. For instance, Teaching Hospitals and health Institutions can multiply, yet the masses lack elementary health care; schools and universities can proliferate, yet learning remains deficient, as is the case with most African countries. As the number of billionaires and millionaires were increasing and as the economic statistics was registering growth, the number of the cases of mal-nutrition was increasing too. When growth is encouraged in one aspect and stagnated in the other aspect that is not true and authentic development.

### **Human Development**

Development cannot be limited to mere economic growth. To be authentic, it must be complete, that is, it has to promote the good of every man and of the whole man. It must take into account all the dimensions of the person and not to be limited to satisfying basic material needs, but the most profound aspirations of the person and all people. Thus, true development is integral development. This is the human development where the individual is helped to grow in all aspects of life: social, economic, political, scientific and technological, aesthetic and spiritual. In this light, Bukola (1995:1,3) defined development as:

the transitional process sustaining a multifaceted improvement in human condition, resulting from positive structural and functional changes in social, economic, political, techno-scientific and every available sphere of human endeavour.

This entails normative and organizational changes in the society resulting in

1. The improvement and expansion of mental horizon of the population arising from functional education, and
2. The sustenance of positive and highly functional values, customs and practices relating to all aspects of life and living.

In other words, a purely economic development cannot achieve the liberation of man, on the contrary, it will end up enslaving him they more.

From what has been said so far, it could be said that an authentic development is human development which is integral, embracing all aspects of man's life; political, social, ethical, economic, spiritual and cultural dimensions.

## **Impediments of Africa's Development**

Many years after most African countries have gained political independence, the continent is still wallowing under the burden of underdevelopment. Africa is rich, with plenty of oil, minerals, precious metals, natural gas, besides funds from aids and grants pouring into the continent, for several decades now to spur economic growth, yet one hardly sees any improvement at all, as only the productive use of these resources in themselves can make the difference. On the contrary, most of the problems bedeviling the continent have in recent years become highly exceptional in their magnitude and persistence as mass poverty, economic stagnation and political instability alongside their implications abound all around the continent amidst great resources of which other countries of the world are envious.

The situation has caused a lot of worry in the minds of well-meaning sons, daughters and lovers of Africa. The questions on the lips of many are: what is/are responsible for Africa's lukewarmness even in the contemporary globalized world? does the continent not possess the required mass-power that can change the tide of things for the better?

Many scholars have tried to locate the causes of Africa's underdevelopment on many factors. These include colonialism, over-dependence on Europe and America, Failure of Leadership, Inter-Ethnic feuds, Corruption etc. A brief examination of some of these factors will expose the strengths or weaknesses of the arguments backing them.

### **a. Colonialism**

It has been the argument of the Pan-Africanists that the condition of Africa today can only be blamed on the colonial imperialists' forces. Their argument was articulated in Walter Rodney's "How Europe underdeveloped Africa". Without going into much debate on this, one would ask: How advanced was Africa before Colonization? If Africa was not wealthy before Colonization, then we cannot blame Colonization for its poverty. Again, are the countries least colonized in Africa like Ethiopia (1936-1941) and Liberia that became independent as early as 1847, better than the most colonized countries like Namibia and South Africa?

Some others may argue that the Westerners used up all the resources before they left. Nigeria was set free by the British in 1960, four years after the discovery of oil and the same year was also the year the first oil well was dug. Since 1970 to date Nigeria has made more than \$500 billion from oil. What have we done with it? The same could be cited of Botswana which became independent in 1966 and diamond was discovered there a year after. So the arguments fronting colonialism cannot hold water.

### **b. Over-dependence on Foreign Powers.**

Pope Paul VI once wrote:

Man is truly human if he is the master of his own actions...  
only if he is the architect of his own progress. He must act  
according to his God-given nature, freely accepting its  
potentials and its claims upon him ( *Populorum Progressio*, 34).

By extension the Pontiff goes on to insist that “nations are the architects of their development, and they must bear the burden of their work” (no. 77). Thus true human development is one done by the people themselves, by their own decision-making and by their productivity.

Although African nations have gained political independence, they are yet to enjoy exclusive political self-determination and economic sovereignty. The colonial masters continue to teleguide and install leaders in the African Countries, while directing them as surrogates and puppets to achieve the ends of continued economic exploitation. The legislations made in these countries tend to favour the domineering influence of multinational corporations with accompanying dependency syndrome, functional imperialism and capitalistic exploitation, leaving the countries exploited, impoverished and confused (Nnabue 2012:20).

As Nnabue (2012) observes, self-determination entails the power of a population to decide its own government and political relations: the ability of the people to govern themselves without outside interference, the ability to make laws in response to their own needs and shun unnecessary translocation of laws. It implies national good over and above global interest. In the same vein, economic sovereignty embraces both the totality of the economic powers of a State and its equal status in international economic relations. It connotes juridical independence from the authority of others and relates to the ability of a state to manage its resources without undue interference.

Our experience shows that most African Countries are still over dependent on their colonial masters in the management of state affairs.

### **C. Failure of Leadership**

Those who have spent their career puzzling over Africa’s underdevelopment have blamed it on the failure of Leadership. Here attention is usually directed on our political leaders and their cohorts, as the custodians of the common good. They are entrusted with the collection and distribution of wealth and resources, as well as oversee the organization, production and distribution of such essential commodities and services like electricity, water, Tele-communication, mass media, good education, good health facilities and financial and social security. When things go wrong these are the people that must be held directly accountable.

Leadership in Africa is generally more concerned with garnering possible privileges and spoils that can be gained, and backing it up with some sustained effort to protect the interest and privileges of the ruling elite. Here governance as Ogunsanwo (1994) observed, is perceived as the chance or opportunity to plunder with reckless abandon and without accountability the resources of the country concerned thus creating millionaires or billionaires for just reason. Hence, as Nass (2012) observed, in the various forms of government practised across the African continent, one common feature of all remains poor quality of governance and mismanagement of national resources resulting in increasing pauperization of the mass of African population and deplorable level of human development. Uzochukwu (2011) corroborates with this view when he opines that the culture of political unruliness has created unimaginable miseries and unparalleled oceans of poverty dotted with island of scandalous wealth which have destroyed basic virtues of trust on the social arena as well as creating a vicious circle and reinventing Thomas Hobbes’ State of Nature characterized by mutual aggression. This statement confirms Okafor’s (1974) observation that:

Whatever the ideals and aspirations of material development, only frustration can result from a leadership devoid of the moral and ethical standards as its foundation. To lack these standards in the building of nations, is to build a fragile structure in a brittle foundation.

### **Religio-Ethical Issues in Africa's Development.**

It has been established that true development is human development, where the individual is helped to grow in all aspects of life: social, economic, political, scientific, and technological, aesthetic and spiritual. Following the Euro-American model of development, which has no place given to the spiritual side of man, African countries have often met with hard rocks in their effort to develop. For when the African loses sight of the fact that he has his own peculiar cultural character, with its own assets and liabilities, stand in danger of losing his way, and perishing in pursuit of unnatural foreign standards. Therefore, while we admire and learn the modern science, we must reject the modern scientism which holds all reality to be experiential and knowledge to be empirical. It must be admitted, as Okafor (1974:56) opines, that 'the well-being of a nation must not depend only in the intellectual, technical, and social progress of its people, but also in their character development.' And character yields its best proceeds when it is ennobled and vivified by religion. For religion caters for the spiritual side of man, that is, the area beyond food and drink, and material needs; the area where we have ultimate values such as love and goodness; the area where we can ask for the meaning of life; the area where we can look death and evil in the face and see beyond them (see Uche 2004).

This calls for a return to the traditional African metaphysical orientation, which had yielded authentic humanistic values and regulated the natural human excesses. This metaphysical orientation has its roots in the African world-view, which emphasizes ethical conduct with some transcendental postulates. Also, on account of the African concept of man, a concept which is a necessary by-product of theocentric attitude on life, an intensely humanistic socialism had been in vogue in the continent. The sense of community and humane living are highly cherished values in traditional African life.

The orientation of traditional Africa made it possible for collaborative effort between the leaders and the led to achieve the common good of all, as it entrenches high level of good ethical conduct. It is this kind of orientation, to say the least, that the countries of Africa need today to achieve any sustainable development. For as Pope Benedict XVI recently observed, 'development is impossible without upright men and women, without financiers and politicians whose consciences are finely attuned to the requirements of the common good' (see Chukwujekwu 2011:28).

It is not advocated here that Africans should jettison everything about the Euro-American models of development. On the contrary, what nascent Africa needs is what Okafor (1974) calls 'a judicious selective integration of culture': whatever is good, admirable and what imitating in the order models could be adopted, without losing the African heritage or what Pius XII called our 'cultural life-stream.

## **Conclusion**

**In this paper we have tried to examine Africa's developmental strides, the problems confronting these strides and the way forward. We have tried to establish that apart from Africa's overdependence on foreign powers and bad leadership, the greatest problem of Africa's development is found in her neglect of her metaphysical orientation, which advances ethical and spiritual (transcendental) principles. For material prosperity without a corresponding growth in the moral capacity to turn to good use constitutes a danger. Moreover, history has shown that devotion to some spiritual ideal is the deepest source of inspiration in the discharge of public duty. Here this observation of Pius XII has to be noted. According to him,**

**the Africans, who are transversing in a few decades the stages of an evolution which the western world achieved in the course of several centuries, are more easily upset and seduced by the scientific and technical teaching, together with the materialistic influences which have invaded their cultural life-style (Fidei Donum)**

**That is to say that for the African to presume to march at the pace and the mode of the West, to the neglect of her cultural orientation and life-style in terms of development, can only yield her confusion and frustration.**

**Therefore, why pursuing scientific and technological advancement, Africans should be guided by our traditional ethico-religious orientation. For as Odey (2000) opined, 'great changes do not begin on the surface society, but in prepared hearts; in men who, by communion with God, rise above the apathy of the age, and speak with living vital energy, and give life to the community, and tone to the public mind.' That is the only thing that will guarantee sustainable development that is both human and integral.**

**REFERENCES**

- Backer, E. (Transl)(1961)** *The Politics of Aristotle*. Oxford University Press.
- Bukola, S. (1985) *The Problem With Nigeria*. Ibadan: Success Printing Services.
- Chukwujekwu, S.C. (2011) *Nigeria At 51: Critical Reflections*.  
Nimo-Nigeria: Rex Charles and Patrick.
- Ezeanya, S.N. (1979) "African Traditional Religion and Nation Building",  
in Chukwulozie, V.C.(ed.) *Nigerian Dialogue* . University of  
Nigeria Nsukka, vol. 3/3.
- Nass, I.A. (2012) *Democracy, African Politics and Conflicts in A New World Order*.  
Enugu: ABIC Books
- Nnabue, U.S.F.(2012) *The Dialectics of International Development Law and The  
Dilemma of Underdevelopment in Developing Countries*.  
Imo State University Owerri, Inaugural Lecture. No.8.
- Odey, J.O. (2000) *The Parable A Wasted Generation*. Enugu: Snaap Press.
- Okafor, F.C. (1974) *Africa At The Crossroads: Philosophical Approach to Education*.  
New ;York: Vantage Press.
- Ogunsanwo, A. (1994) "Problems of Democratisation in Africa", in Omo Omoruyi et  
als.(eds) *Democratisation in Africa: African Perspective Vol. Two*.  
Benin-Nigeria: Hima and Hima. pp 138-145.
- Stemmler, J. (1991) "The Entrepreneur: Dinamic Element of Economic and Social  
Development", in Obiora Ike (ed) *Catholic Social Teachings En Route  
in Africa*. Enugu: CIDJAP pp147-160.
- Uche, C.A. (2004) *Religion in National Development: A Case for Christianity and  
Islam in Nigeria,*" in Okonkwo, J.I. (ed) *Journal of Nigerian Languages  
and Culture*. Vol.6/1 pp152-157.
- Uche, C.A. (2011) *Christian and Islamic Ethics and The Development of Nigeria  
1960-1999*. Owerri-Nigeria: Applause B Multi Concepts.
- Uzochukwu, J.N. (2011) " Africa, 'Clouds of Evil' and The Challenges of  
Contemporary Religions Vocation", in Oche Amamihe: *Wisdom  
Journal of Theology and Philosophy* Vol. 2/3, pp36-56.ss