

ON THE HEAVY BURDEN OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICA

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Abstract

Developing Africa has continued to be an issue that requires attention of development scholars, both indigenous and western. Western scholars and development experts have accused indigenous African development scholars of being very ethnocentric as they uncritically localize issues of development, thus making development of Africa a heavy burden. These indigenous Africans are referred to as culture particularists while the western scholars in their acclaimed refined approach to development are called the culture Universalists. It is the finding of this paper that both divides are laced with some forms of ethnocentrism and such orientations constitute the heavy burden of developing Africa; the former is not dynamic enough to accommodate values from other cultures while the latter assumes so much culture superiority to the extent that the values of the so-called developing cultures are insignificant in the development agenda. Adopting the methods of hermeneutics and analysis, this work argues that development agenda would be ineffective if African peculiarities are jettisoned in the name of one imagined and imposed global village. It concluded that lifting the burden of developing Africa lies in advancing development policies, programmes and strategies that are rooted in the pristine and positive values of African cultures while accommodating the progressive ones from the West, not the reverse situation currently operational in development programmes and policies in Africa.

Key Words: African development, Africa's development, heavy burden, ethnocentrism, syncretism, globalism

Introduction

The need to develop Africa has continued to generate ideas from scholars and policy makers alike. Different approaches, policies and programmes have been suggested; many of which are being implemented yet Africa is still at the lower rung of the world development ladder. This paper is a both an examination and a contribution towards addressing the development question of Africa. The development approaches adopted are grouped into particularists and Universalists. While the particularists who believe in African development see nothing wrong with an approach of development that is traditional to a people with certain peculiarities, the Universalists who are advocates of Africa's development support generality in addressing development problems confronting the entire human race, regardless of our different origins, cultures and orientations.

This work is interested in both African development and Africa's development. It is therefore a major goal of this work to critically appraise both kinds of development as they affect Africa. Selected policies of development meant to address development problems in Africa are highlighted in our mission to show that they (both kinds of development) are not antithetical to each other in their goals on achieving development.

In view of the highlights above, this work aims to establish that ideas of a people cannot be wished away simply on the altar of the acclaimed superiority of some other extraneous cultural orientations and values. Development does not even accommodate such cultural ontological destruction from any culture irrespective of the advancement made by such modernized culture. This therefore leads to showing that cultural syncretism is a way out but such approach needs a critical harmony of cultures rooted in the positive values of a people while discountenancing anachronistic ones.

African Development and Africa's Development: Conceptual Distinctions

Conceptually, African development is that type of development owned by Africans themselves and which is dependent on traditional African values, assumptions and concepts that constitute the interpretations and understanding of their experiences. It shows that “Africans have a world-view that is uniquely their own which is then contrasted with the scientific world-view seen as characteristically Western ...” (Oladipo, 2000, pp. 33-34). Any attempt to introduce the minutest western logic of development into this brand of development, perhaps on the grounds of cultural dynamism, is completely rejected because such activity raises questions on the status and ownership of such kind of development. In terms of policy and theoretical frameworks that explain African development, we can see the idea of Pan- Africanism, Senghor's negritude, Nyerere's Ujamaa, Kaunda's African humanism, Nkrumah's Consciencism and Ubuntu. Detailed discussions on these African projects clearly show that all these are attempts at founding Africa on African traditional principles and values with a view to advancing development that can best be christened African (Makumba, 2007; Mawere & Mubaya, 2016). Ogundowole emphasizing how indigenous they are to Africa, describes them as the “fundamental theoretical principle of selfreliancism” (2011, p. 43). Other attempts by African leaders and government, especially at post-independence showed how much Africans wanted to own their development. This was demonstrated with the enactment of economic bodies to enhance development in Africa on the basis of traditional African values. Such bodies include the Economic Community for West African States, Lagos Plan of Action, Organization of African Unity (now African Union) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development among others. Whether these African values guided African leaders in the implementations of the goals of these bodies is a subject debate outside the purview of this work. The reason for mentioning them here is because of the priority accorded traditional African values and the subsequent promotion of African identity.

Africa's development is that type of development, mainly economic, which is also significant to Africa and Africans. It is initiated and implemented by individuals (Heads of State and Government) and institutions on the basis of norms, principles and strategies which are assumed to be universal. This type of development is therefore not necessarily owned by Africans in terms of the peculiarities of their situations and orientations but it encapsulates approaches designed based on global principles and applied on African situations with the conviction that humanity has the same ontological reality and the peculiarities of problems are only apparent and not real. In terms of philosophy, Uduigwomen clearly states that “the Universalist or professional school... is of the view that philosophy [of development] is the same everywhere, using the same methodology” (1995, p. 3). There is therefore no congenial cultural way to development; it is simply a universal phenomenon that all cultures should conform to by subscribing to “a philosophy that seeks to consider things in the significance of their singularity and not in the exclusiveness of their otherness” (Asouzu, 2004, p. 39). The assumption that underlies this

Universalist perspective of development was captured elsewhere by Alumona (2022) thus:

Development takes place in any part of the world irrespective of the differences in social situations or circumstances. In other words, there are universal standards of development that any society or people should subscribe to whether there are variations in the understanding of certain values or not. This is what is termed homogenization of values in the arguments of development between the global North and the global South (p. 173).

This sense of universalism of certain policies, programmes and strategies of development in Africa gives birth to our idea of Africa's development as distinct from African development. Some of those policies and strategies would suffice in our explanations. At post-independence, when African leaders were poised to reclaim Africa, they had the conviction that economic growth through industrialization according to colonial templates was the solution to the development woes in Africa. On the strength of that conviction and in conjunction with their colonial benefactors, they began the first post-independence development plans in the African continent. We have quite a number of them but for want of space, we chose to highlight Nigeria Development Plan of 1962-1968, Kenya's First Development Plan of 1966-1970 and Tanzania's First Plan of 1964-1969 (see Ake, 1996).

The Nigerian Development Plan of 1962-68 had priority in Agricultural production of cash crops for local consumption and exportation to advance countries of the world. The plan also entailed provision of infrastructure and investment in education. However, to achieve all these, the country was to substantially depend on foreign assistance on needed resources, technology transfer and external expertise on planning and execution; and about 50% of the financing of all the proposed activities coming in as foreign aids and loans. The Kenyan First Development Plan of 1966-70 was also drafted with concentration on the production sector, the provision of infrastructure and social services (Heyer, 1966). To be able to finance all these sectors, 56% of Kenya's capital should be from foreign aids and private investment. However, to increase domestic saving and finance, domestic assets held by public institutions must give way to foreign assets that are owned by private individuals who are non-Africans. In the case of Tanzania, attention was to be paid to Agriculture (which is the mainstay of Tanzanian's economy), industrialization and education. Later, rural development had special attention after the 'Arusha Declaration' of 1967. The shift in attention from industrialization to Agriculture and rural development was welcome by the Europeans who felt that there was going to be huge returns on the investment made in training manpower from primary to post-secondary school education on agricultural productions. More loans were obtained than grants and so, servicing and repayment of such loans were for the interests of the foreign 'masters'. Again, the primary agricultural products were to be exported abroad since Africans lacked the industries for their processing and production into final consumable goods. To succeed in capital expenditure in the implementation of the plan, 78% of the expenditure for development comes from external sources by way of loan, aids and grants.

In terms of policy thrust, the *Structural Adjustment Programmes* (SAPs) emerged in the early 1980s from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank to address the economic woes which sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries inflicted upon themselves. A breakdown of the economic crises confronting the SSA countries include: overvaluation of local currencies of countries, restrictions on imports and exports/overprotection of infant/domestic industries, excess government spending, investment or budgeting on social services such as

subsidies leading to external debt burden, government involvement in price regulations and excess consumption and less production of goods and services. The multilateral institutions—convinced that they had the exclusive magic wand for solving the institutions' imposed problems on Africa—reeled out the path to economic recovery and development that Africa must necessarily follow which include: industrial incentive reforms, deregulation/divestiture/privatization, foreign exchange price flexibility (*devaluation of local currency against the dollar*) and international cooperation (*abolition of tariffs and taxes/duties*) (Rono, 2002).

In the 2000s, development programmes as usually determined by the United Nations began with the introduction of the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs). 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 Millennium Development Targets were therefore subsumed under the *Millennium Development Goals*. This is a global development plan which the entire African continent and all Third world countries must necessarily be part of if they have to attain development. The *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) as a development programme is the successor of the MDGs. 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.

So far, it would not be a Herculean task distinguishing between African development and Africa's development. While the former houses policies that promote home grown strategies and approaches to solving development problems in Africa and can therefore be characterized as particularistic, the latter advances external and foreign approaches and strategies as panacea to development problems in Africa and as such termed Universalists' solutions.

Identifying the Heavy Burden of African Development Approaches

One major accusation of the burden of African development is that the proponents are often illogical and irrational in their arguments, especially as those arguments are related to vital forces in certain African ontological beliefs. This is very visible in the Pan-African orientations like Negritude, *Ujamaa*, *Ubuntu* and others which are the bases for those Pan-African approaches to development. For instance, in environment related development challenges, the African belief of ecological monism where man is one with nature acknowledges the non-existence of subject-object dichotomy and takes nature as part of a comprehensive existence with man, other beings in the ecosystem; all of which are inevitably linked with the operations of vital forces. Tempels' seminal work on vital forces of the Bantu people has become the precursor for most discourses on such invisible phenomenon being an active personal principle in the affairs of man. T.U. Nwala, building on the foundation of Tempels' African ontology, wrote of the potency of spirits' occupation of every object in existence among the Igbo people of Nigeria. Kwame Gyekye wrote of his Akan people of Ghana, explaining the four different categories of beings; three of which are defined by spirits while only one is seen as the world of natural and physical objects (Ogbenika, 2011). Such esotericism in African development is what has been adjudged as illogical and irrational and which constitutes a heavy burden of African development. Africans have been accused of talking about immanent personalities without which certain pristine African and ethical values would lack potency and efficacy. Ogbenika exposed this heavy burden of African development thus: “since the idea of spirits in African philosophy is tied to a particular environment milieu or a particular situation, it cannot...be seen as rational” (Ogbenika, 2011, p.10).

Another heavy burden of African development is the exclusivist thinking that the development of Africa can effectively be conducted only by Africans who have holistic knowledge of African cultures, their attendant values and how they can be linked to development. Scholars who attempt to redefine African cultures and development because of their Western training are viewed as influenced by foreign and alien mindsets and models of development, and cannot in anyway advance the authentic African development. This is because they do not know the cultural particulars in Africa and as such become strangers to the way of life of the African. The thinking on development here is that every development programme is cultural and so African development must situate itself in African cultures. This is in tandem with Anyanwu's explanation of culture to mean "the totality of knowledge, behaviour, ideas and objects that constitute the common heritage of a people" (Anyanwu, 1983, p. 24). African development is therefore based on the totality of African mode of knowing, behavioural response to the following: environment, fellow humans, other beings, and issues that stimulate the mind; the idea of reality (which is unitary) and the person-nature of objects around every human being. This orientation is further seen as a burden of African development because "it frowns at any attempt to examine any aspect or element of [African] culture with the model of Western philosophy and its logic of development" (Azenabor, 2010, p. 92). Cultural protectionism exhibited by African scholars in the quest to promulgate African development is hence viewed as an anathema to the realization of their goals.

Anachronism is also a very heavy burden of African development. Most of the values promoted in African development discourses are adjudged as no longer relevant to addressing modern day problems. The functionality of those traditional ideas and institutions in the present day challenges in all facets of human existence is now called to question. The ideas of culture evolution and cultural dynamism account for the explanation of such concept as traditional to be old while the modern is new and both concepts are mutually exclusive. The classical Rostowian example of the five stages of growth, beginning from the first stage he calls traditional societies where productivity was limited, social structure was hierarchical and family and clan were major determinants of social organizations (Rostow, 1990) fundamentally explains how outdated Africans can be described in terms of embracing new trends in development. For instance, it is extremely ridiculous seeing Africans stick to their so-called value of covenant when nations are talking about and acting on bilateral and multilateral trade agreements that attract foreign investors and foreign direct investments to their countries. So the heavy burden of African development in this respect is the weird adhesiveness of Africans to obsolete values that are overtly and surreptitiously antithetical to both human and material transformation.

The last heavy burden of African development ensues from the lack of engaging all the actors and factors that define complementarity (Asouzu, 2007) in development. Actors here are human agents with their own contributions on the issue of African development while factors are ideas, programmes, policies and strategies. Somewhere above, we talked about African scholars who hold that they are the only competent persons capable of insightfully contributing to issues advancing the development of Africa. This means that some actors have been excluded from making their own contributions to development issues affecting the continent simply on the basis of their place of origin. The factors include ideas, strategies, policies and programmes which define African development. The Pan-African ideas advanced by African political philosophers and thinkers were largely based on what they defined as African traditional values and could at best address limited development issues.

The Heavy Burden of Africa's Development Approaches Explained

One major characteristic of Africa's development agenda examined in this essay is that Africa's development strategies, programmes and policies are universal. It is the opinion of the Universalists that there is a basic ontological unity in all humans across cultures and as a result, all human beings irrespective of cultures have the same development problems and challenges. Problems may be distinct in appearance but the reality is that they are not; all development problems are one with different perspectives. In order to address world development problems effectively, all continents of the world must adopt same development solutions led by the First World economies. The priority is for the First World to ensure that the Third world understands that underdevelopment is a stage in the development process which has been overcome by the First World themselves. So, they are in a position to guide the Third world on the journey of development (Rapley, 1996). Development therefore flows from the First World, albeit slowly, to the rest of the world. It is conceived as “racing from the West and will 'trickle down' to the masses of the underdeveloped people. It was in this thought-frame that the Charter of the United Nations Organization was signed” (Njoku, 2006, p. 229). The heavy burden of development from this perspective is the assumption of ontological monism of values across cultures of the world.

Another problem associated with Africa's development, in the light of our discussion, is making development solely scientific. In this sense, development is economic, technologically and industrialization driven and must be value-free. Attempts to spiritualize development of Africa and introduce esotericism into it are deliberately walking the wrong path towards Africa's development. Such spiritualization is unscientific and irrational, and unacceptable. The rational is the scientific and the scientific is the rational. As rational indices of development, they are verifiable, demonstrable, observable, specific, exoteric and objective. In the programmes and policies promulgated to aid African countries in raising their GDPs, the First world countries through their institutional agents saw the inevitability of technology in order to catch up with the developed countries of the world. Alumona (2017) exposes the opinion of the advanced countries that “the developing countries of the world, Africa inclusive, lack scientific and technological knowledge, skills and techniques needed for their own development” (p. 51). The heavy burden here is the exclusive restriction of development to *scientificity*.

Market forces and competition are also another set of defining characteristics of the programmes of Africa's development which we also view as burdens of Africa's development. The classical views of Adam Smith and David Ricardo are very germane to this approach of development from the West to Africa. The emphasis is on the forces of demand and supply which obliterate any form government interference. The free market economy which started as the foundation for the modernization theory of development became the ideal for capitalist neo-liberalism and has been canvassed as the only route to developing the Third World countries. Ekanola captured this when he avows that “proponents argue that capitalism is the most effective option in the quest for genuine socio-economic development...” (2006, p. 138). Of market forces economy, he says: “prominent among these principles are the following: liberalization of national economies to reduce or abolish regulatory trade barriers, capital controls and foreign exchange restrictions” (p. 139). In the Universalists' view, as individuals are allowed freely into the market, they would be in competition with one another in order to provide goods and services that are meant to ensure the total well-being of the consumers. Two heavy burdens of development from this perspective of development suffice; first is the oversimplification of development to the point that it can be determined by the forces of demand and supply while the second, is the assumption that economic development can lead to the total well-being of both the individual and the State.

Lifting the Burdens: A More Holistic Approach to Develop Africa

From our expositions above, it is clear that the criticisms levelled against certain invisible entities in African ontology that are deemed helpful in African development are on the basis of the scientific image of rationality. Newton-Smith captures this when he avows that:

The image that the scientific community likes to project of itself, and indeed the image that most of us accept of that community, is that of rationality par excellence. The scientific community sees itself as the very paradigm of institutionalized rationality. It is taken to be in possession of something, the scientific method, which generates a 'logic of discovery' (1981, p. 1).

It is this acclaimed Universalist image that Alumona had earlier identified as the “‘metaphysic spirit', the 'hub spirit' which drives narrow conception” (2011, p. 141). This essay does not support the fact that any unjustifiable item could be brought in while trying to chart the course for African development through some homegrown policies but it is also averse to narrowing the matrices of being and intentionally foreclosing the potentialities of other cultures' capabilities of making inputs on issues of development. When Africans are discountenanced for applying these non-empirical elements, the Universalists should have asked what brands of rationality were applied by Africans. Ogbenika (2011) would see it as weak form of rationality while Nickerson (2008) would call it practical rationality. In the dual forms of classifications explained by these scholars, neither is superior to the other; both are only geared towards the realization of the same end through different means that ought to complement each other.

The apparent mutually exclusive relationship between the proponents of African development strategies and those of the Africa's development ones, with their respective orientations of particularism and universalism, is another identified heavy burden of development in Africa. In itself, cultural particularism is not an ethnocentric negativity since there are always what a people are known for which fill the gap when the question of identity is raised. What is discouraged is the promotion of peculiarities to the extent of culminating in culture isolationism. The necessity of cultural particulars cannot be over-emphasized in the planning of development. Ikeke and Alumona alluded to this culture indispensability when they posit that “no development can fully succeed if it does not take into consideration the cultural beliefs of the people. No development can succeed if the people do not own or believe in it. One thing that will make people to easily own the process of development is attentiveness to their genuine cultural beliefs and practices” (2016, p. 81).

These cultural beliefs and practices must, however, make provision for cultural interactionism and interculturalism. This is the confluence point of cultures without a 'superior-to-thou' attitude from any one culture in order to genuinely embrace people-oriented development. This justifiably runs contrary to cultural universalism which does not recognize culture peculiarities. Such culture universalism is an intended ethnocentric attitude against some peculiarities of values in the development of Africa and an unnecessary showing of cultural superiority. Many aspects of the touted universal values are also peculiar to the West but are exported to the so-called Third world countries as applicable to all human beings in disguised Eurocentric imperialist manners, especially in the form of globalization.

What we continue to advocate for is a genuine mindset towards the development of Africa where the so-called universal values do not assume perfection at the detriment of the potentials of the particular values. Again, cultural interaction can play a key role in lifting this burden.

Another heavy burden of development already highlighted is the alleged attitude of

Africans bandying obsolete values as appropriate for the development of Africa. Such anachronistic values cannot fit into the contemporary development space where science, technology and other practical market indices determine world economy and development. Kwasi Wiredu had earlier seen these as one of the three major development problems of any society that jettisons rationality. For him, African development problem in this respect is because Africans fail “to perceive anachronistic things for what they are and to discard or modify them as the case may require” (Wiredu, 1980, p. 1). Wiredu's disjunctive submission of obliteration or modification of obsolete traditional values in Africa provided a considerable way of handling such values that are deemed irrelevant in our present development situations. While there is no problem with modification, except for the *how* of such activity, there is every reason to question the advocacy for complete annihilation of so-called outdated African traditional values. Historicists as philosophers of history are prominent critics of the destructive, rather than deconstructive, approach to African traditional values.

Okoro presents Maurice Mandelbaum's view of historicism as an attempt at explaining that historical change is defined by the historicity of values, an expression that signifies that cultural values are always indigenous to a particular age (Okoro, 2011). Most often, the standards applied in the annihilation of a people's traditional values are alien. This in turn undermines the people's entire way of life and negatively affects their mode of knowing, language, ontological relationships and their identity as a whole. While not admitting all kinds of values that are traditional to the African peoples in the quest for a critical endogenous development, values should be respected in such a way that even at the possibility of modification, we can know how they have evolved in order to also know how and what to further modify, or again what has been modified in the past. This way, we promote cultural revivalism in the midst of engaging other cultures of the world.

Finally, a very clear burden of Africa's development is the claim that development could only be enjoyed by countries in Africa if they allow the forces of demand and supply to determine their terms of trade. This means liberalization of the economies of African countries wherein there is no government interference with the progress of the market. It is suggested that the totality of Africa's well-being depends solely on the market forces with their TINA (there is no alternative) acronym. On this holistic well-being, the scholars of economic liberalism promoted the assumption that free market forces, following from Adams Smith's postulations, would guarantee effective and just production and distribution of not just the economic requirements needed for development but also the social, political and epistemological ones.

This classical glorification of market forces in reality seems to be a deceptive one when compared to the economic and development realities in world economy, Africa inclusive. The principle of competition which is the kernel of market forces carries the implication of inequality and unhealthiness in Smith's market forces theory of development. Certainly, the economic, social, political and epistemic advancement of the First world countries place them far above those of the African continent. In actual sense, there is no competition because they are not all taking off from the same departure point. “Those who own the means of production see their incomes and wealth increase more rapidly than those who do not” (Holcombe, 2021, p. 9). The market forces approach to development leaves out principles such as communalism, solidarity, reciprocity and covenant which are familiarly attached to Africans. And this non-consideration of other cultures and possible alternatives is the reason the free market economy approach to development confidently and proudly assumes there is no other alternative to development. But development scholars are not unaware of what De Rambures calls socialist market economy and

which he describes as the China model of development. It is a mixture of reformed government or State on the one hand and private market economy on the other hand. What is visibly unique about the model is that the Confucius' virtues of honesty, generosity and a sense of duty - which are all reflections of their own culture - are significant aspects of development story (De Rambures, 2015). So, there is at least an alternative to the western liberal model of development. Such advocacy for critical hybridization of cultural values for development is not in short supply in Africa. That is in line with the position of this paper on critical complementarity of African cultural values with those of the west which should save Africa from being victims of the burden of monopolized development model from the west.

Conclusion

Development has paradoxically remained a desire and a burden in the African continent. It is a desire because there is need for improvement in both the material and spiritual aspects of lives of Africans. It is, however, also a burden because many of the approaches to satisfying such desires have been viewed as ethnocentric as Africans and scholars of Africa's development are basically involved in cultural protectionism. But we have argued that cultural protectionism is not a negative phenomenon as long as it does not foreclose interculturalism and reception of values from other cultures leading to critical modification of values. On the flip side, we have also argued that universalism no matter how well intentioned is negative if it aims at cultural destruction, rather than encouraging complementarity.

Scholars and approaches have been classed into particularists/African development and Universalists/Africa's development. Each of the divides has been presented in the light of their intended ethnocentric advocacies which constitute the burden of development in Africa. The perceptions of both divides are antithetical to each other and mutually exclusive. This ought not to be the case because the ontology of values does not abhor cross-cultural interactions. To lift this burden of development, we therefore conclude that there must be critical complementarity of values from the different cultures of the west and Africa rooted in African traditional values. In the traditional concept of *Ibuaru* (heavy load), an individual needs a complementary effort from another to assist in lifting such a load. In such scenario, it is not really the helper that determines the nature of assistance because the owner of the load is more acquainted with the way the load is packaged than the helper. The helper would need to inquire from the owner to know the areas in which help is needed and even if he observes something the owner is oblivious of, he can at best make convincing suggestions rather than imposing his own strategies on his potential beneficiary. It is on this basis that we recommend complementary strategies, instead of imposing ones, to the development of Africa.

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