

# **AFRICAN ECOPHILOSOPHY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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## **Abstract**

It is an axiom that Nigeria is richly endowed by providence with enormous arrays of human and material resources critical for all-round advancement. Despite these, she has witnessed stagnation in socio-politico cum economic-educational growth and all facets of National development which is majorly as a result of years of bad leadership and celebrated levels of corruption. Nigeria is bewitched by bad and wicked leaders resulting to general societal underdevelopment amidst infrastructural decay. Using the method of critical analysis, the researcher discovers that it is paramount to know that functional philosophy especially African Philosophy which underlies proper environment for effective development.

**Keywords:** African Philosophy, ecophilosophy, development, environment

## **Introduction**

It is indeed absurd to talk about development or impose on a human race a civilization without reference to Philosophy. Philosophy is a living subject which embraces all dialectical interpretations of life changes in society. It has helped in the concept of human development, to a great deal of being in the epics of the humanitarian paradigm. Philosophy is a genuine supporting tool for a harmonious existentialism and development in Nigeria, through proper restructuring of the polity, educational system, and judicial interpretations on the areas of retributive and distributive justice.

In Nigeria, a quite a number of philosophical principles are generally utilized in the promotion of national development. The philosophical issues of consideration are vital process in the developmental process, and they offer a universal blueprint for all sets of functional relations and national activities in Nigeria.

## **Philosophy, African Philosophy**

Philosophy can also be defined as the critical study of the basic principles and concepts of a particular branch of knowledge, especially with a view to improving or reconstituting them. Philosophy can be defined as the study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality, and existence, especially when

considered as an academic discipline. It is also a theory or attitude that acts as a guiding principle for behaviour. It's the rational investigation of the truths and principles of being, knowledge, or conduct.

According to Onwuama, he views philosophy as a critical, reflective and unbiased investigation on development aimed at providing principles theories for development. Philosophical issues for development refer to those areas and problems of development that are reserved exclusively for philosophical clarifications and hermeneutics (Onwuama, 2012) Remarkably, philosophy is a purposive goal oriented discipline aimed at liberating man from the shackles of ignorance, for sustainability of human existentialism. By understanding the construction of the development era in 21st century, the attention of philosophy has changed from the conquest of truth to the principles of development. These trends involve new discourses and new institutional developments strategy, with a deep-rooted contention over the shape of the emerging order. Thus, “the aim of philosophy is to provide an account of nature and methodology of development and to understand the place of development in people’s lives” (Onwuama, 2012). Lately however, at the onset of this 21st century, philosophy became a very latent force in so many areas of National development. It is relevant in the area of education and in formulation of public policy agenda, through its normative value questions, and predictive analytics.

The historical development of the discourse on the nature of African philosophy reveals four perspectives or schools. Landsman, C., outlines these four schools of thought as follows.

- i. For one group, African Philosophy is the philosophical thought of Africans as could be sifted from their various world views, myths, proverbs, etc. In this sense, it is the philosophy indigenous to Africans, and untainted by foreign ideas. It is based on this understanding that Tempels (1959) wrote that “I confidently hope to be able to convince my readers that real philosophy can be found among indigenous peoples and that it should be sought among them”.
- ii. The second group understands African philosophy as, the philosophical reflection on, and analysis of, African conceptual systems and social realities as undertaken by contemporary professional philosophers. This reduces African Philosophy to reflections by professionally trained philosophers who operate with the collaboration of traditional thinkers.
- iii. The third group understands African Philosophy as the combination of these two approaches, without suppressing or looking down on any. This would involve sifting philosophical thought of Africans as could be gotten from their various world views, myths, proverbs, etc, and reflecting on them by professionally trained African philosophers.
- iv. The fourth group argues that African Philosophy is not any of the above; however, its proponents represented by Odoemene, A. N (2005) regards African Philosophy as any collection of texts produced by Africans and specifically described by their authors as Philosophy.

## **Ecophilosophy for Sustainable Development**

The line of reasoning so far has underscored the fact that the synergy between ecological well-being and sustainable development, between order of nature and human desire to determine his future on earth, is in danger of coming apart on account of man's abuse of the environment. The quest for sustainable development then is "an expression of human quest for solidarity, bridging important natural, cultural, generational and other differences on behalf of the common good with the preservation and culturation of the earth's resources as essential aspects" (Pope John Paul II, 152). For Onah (172), any philosophical reflection on development and environment is inescapably bound up with a certain concept of man. This is part of the centrality of the anthropological question in philosophy. Braid and Ames (48-49) too believe that "people's attitude to the environment is greatly dependent on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them."

Achieving sustainable development in Africa then requires an anthropocentric ecological philosophy that would lead to a balance and harmonious existence within the environmental economy . It can further be called Affective humanism. Affective humanism then places man in his rightful position as a being that is "thoughtful" and "concerned." It does not ontologize feeling; rather, it sees man as holistic with reason and feeling as complementary realities. Applying this philosophy to the issue of sustainable development connotes the fact that it is reasonable and justifiable to undertake development strides but this should be done thoughtfully, with "the-feeling-for-the-other," that is, environment, which includes persons and things that are affected by this desirable pursuit of development. It is this thoughtful engagement in the affairs of men that I refer to as "Affective Humanism." It is a call for attitudinal re-orientation towards the corporate existence of the eco-system, since the entire environment is conceived as a country of kindred's who must co-habit and co-operate in the struggle for living, rather than resources to be exploited.

## **The Impact of Ecophilosophy on National Development in Nigeria**

As a philosopher, we need to have a long view of the society, to know where we are, what we have achieved and what to achieve; and from there make inferences about the future. However, in relating this argument carefully to the socio-political and economic situation in Nigeria, the question now will lead to the characterization of national transformational agenda in Nigeria. How can we talk about development when we are still in the Hobbesian state of nature? A nation state must be well structured, organized and shall be guarded by some procedural rule of law controlling and regulating the excesses of the civil society. A state cannot exist in a vacuum, it is built by the members of the society who make up the state; and a state cannot equally be developed without the people who make-up the state.

In relating this to the Nigerian situation, Claude Ake emphasizes that a state is an embodiment of structure; a state is not only in the realm of economic growth and industrialization, but also within the ambiance of social, economic, and technological transformation. It is a process in which the people are full incharge of their lives, in transforming themselves into becoming fuller, stronger, better and bigger in their environment. This scenario of sustainability and reliance as opined by Ake, is of course very antithetical to the classical economics, which sees development in the sense of per capita income or economic growth. Development is the socio-political and economic wellbeing of the people. This can be discussed on the basis of a state structure. A state with a proper democratic principles and leadership is in process of an authentic development, which critically accompany all its social institutions, economic structures, and educational training into different philosophical goals or agenda. Philosophy therefore, is a set of idealistic goal, the pivotal force, or framework for the national policy formulation and evaluation of public policy. Nigeria for example, is organized in accordance with the principles of federalism, separation of powers, check and balances, popular sovereignty, limited government, majority rule and minority right. Thus, under these factors, Nigeria should be guided by a positive philosophy that will transcend its present state of development. It must be critically endogenous, by making the people to be in-charge of their lives through better distribution of economic resources, protection of life and property, provision of security, justice, education, and welfare to the people. This elucidates the criteria of good governance and national development. Taking this argument further, in a concrete term on the position of a state structure, one will definitely know that in Nigeria, there is no real sense of a humanitarian paradigm. The government has not yet been committed to the real sense of assisting the people in areas of health, education, environment, security, roads etc.

Philosophical thinking includes assessment of terms, evaluation of logical principles of reasoning, willingness to make a refined distinction between right and wrong, deduction and induction, faith and reason, fact and fallacy, knowledge and belief and so forth. Philosophy addresses the normative issues in more profound manner of human understanding. It is a critical inquiry into the understanding of reality by reflecting and conducting an investigation into the problems of human existence, in areas of justice, happiness, truth, God, beauty, death, good and evil, morality etc.

Thus, in considerable extent, within the scope of this discussion, we need to appreciate the fact that they philosophers have responsibility to influence the direction of the society, to influence it positively in our lives. In other words, it is the duty of philosophy to evaluate the nature of a society, to determine the right values in the society. Thus, in this direction, a philosophical framework must be able to manage inequality carefully within the concept of justice. A philosopher must know what kind of society we need. What kind of political institution that will be good for a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic society like Nigeria.

If we fail to ascertain the kind of society, then our discussions on the process of philosophizing for proper developmental process would be meaningless. It will turn to be exercise in futility.

The purpose of a good government is all about engendering happiness to the people through the systematic entrenchment of its policies to alleviate the suffering of its citizens; by creating tangible things that make lives easier and free, in order to build a prosperous future for them for continuity of life in their environment. On the level of this paradigm, let us rewind to recall the manner of the Nigerian state, which is still in a kind of survival of fittest syndrome or a kind of Hobbesian state of nature, where there is no real purpose of development initiatives, that will engender confidence to the people. In Nigeria, there is no real development on the part of the people, this is because, Nigeria is a place where everybody knows that a greater number of people are not educated, that many number of people are not going to school; that many people are living below the subsistence level. Nigeria is also, a place that there is insecurity, the helplessness of the government officials and lack of unity in the continuation of government policies by the successive government in power. Remarkably, it is upon these highlights that there must be a need for a proper philosophical framework for a genuine development in Nigeria. Nigeria as a state under this condition of anarchy and anomaly requires the positive use of philosophy in remodeling the state. Philosophy could be a genuine supporting tool for the restructuring the polity, its education system, judiciary, health care system, environmental cleaning, security etc.

Development is a process of transformational agenda. It is not purely materialistic but happens within the context of a people in relation to the level of growth and progression of individual members of a society. Its real essence is on man in a proper way to provide a humanitarian paradigm “which bring about marked improvement in the standard of living of the people” (Anozie, 2006). In the same way, Offiong (190:21) states that: It involves a structural transformation of the economy, society politics and culture the satellite that permits the self-generating and self-perpetuating use of the people’s potentials. On a related note, Efemini, further provides us with a transformed framework for interpreting our basic experiences on the subject matter. He remarkably asserts that, “Development is here understood as the quantitative and qualitative improvement in the material, emotional, and spiritual conditions of national existence” (According to Wheelwright) However, this analysis grasps an essential truth that development is a systematic entrenchment of values in both qualitative and quantitative aspect of human life. It is materially, emotionally and spiritually driven as a value within a state that goes beyond the evolutionary perspective. It is inevitable march of progress in every culture. Development is not organized around the competing theories of social-change, nor does it adhere to a simple, all-encompassing perspective. Rather, the narrative retraces the concept of development as an increasingly global enterprise that liberates the

people through the promotion of a general welfare in the provision of security, shelter, good health and proper democratic governance.

Thus philosophy for this reason is without a doubt important for national development. It concerns with values, goals and national aspirations for development of human society. It helps in understanding the meaning of development and genuine level of its impact to national development. Under this category of paradigm, the subject matter of philosophical studies have different outlook in human development process: First, it has a great impact to social change. It helps man to classify the sets of social change into different categories of purposes and functions. We do not know what a thing is until we classify it into a meaningful context, and to recognize a class is to recognize the unit of essential attributes in a multiplicity of individual instances. Philosophy therefore helps in the classification, quantitative measurement, and hypothesis, which are solely based on the assumption of the development of science. Secondly, philosophy involves in the political spheres of human existentialism, through genuine democratic process of good politics. The purpose of politics is for good and happy life in a state. Thirdly, philosophy creates social stability and cohesion for proper learning and human education; and finally, it is religious. It establishes man's intentional phenomenology to the understanding of the transcendent. Philosophy justifies the importance of religion to man, but with clarity of purpose by sifting facts from fallacies; and truth from falsehood within the realm of culture(s).

Nigeria is multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-lingual nation. It has about 250 ethnic groups, with several languages and dialects. There is no nation without a problem, but the problem drastically disturbing Nigeria is the problem of lack of national integration. It has been the cause of conflict in Nigeria. The ethnic relation in Nigeria is fragmented; there is no collaboration in view of economic and political relationship. It is a nation characterized with division, hatred and rancor and philosophy is needed to remove the atavistic tendencies in the culture. It will help to reorient the people into living together as a nation. A nation without philosophy — is doom to fail, because it helps to educate the people into knowing the truth, being rational and constructive.

Thus, philosophy will bring the clarifications of meaning into a better understanding of distribution, by given a legitimate right of distribution of the national resources equitably. According to Nozick, individual must voluntarily transfer their resources, and any infringement on that by the government in a way of taxation, is an unjust act and a violation of individual rights for ownership of property. This indication has been one of the causes of conflict in Niger Delta area of Nigeria. It leads to the issue of resource control for equitable distribution of resources in Nigeria. Equity Principle in the field of distributive justice would be very sacrosanct in distribution of economic resource in Nigeria. It is a

philosophical theory of distribution without hatred and rancor. It supports the distribution of benefits in proportion to what the individual contributed. It increases productivity and growth of economy in relation to individual and state.

Philosophy has a major role to play in the resolution of religious conflict in Nigeria. Philosophy involves the clarification of concepts and understanding of life. It removes the ambiguity and vagueness in our ontology. Thus, with this in question, it will find reason in revealing the ambiguity in religious doctrines which may be harmful to the society. Philosophy therefore is a rational scrutiny of religious claims. It critically examines the exigency of overzealous religious inhibitions in human existence. Philosophy is important in molding of individual character. It is a normative inquiry on “what is”, and about “what ought to be” in our moral attitudes. It transforms our values into rational - altruistic benefits to man. In its entirety, its evaluative purposes and meanings are wholly based in the essence of humanitarian paradigm to better the environment and the people. In practice, a nation, for example like Nigeria should borrow a leaf from this to better the life of their citizens. Stated most simply, philosophy has formulated the survey of controversial and pressing issues in public policy.

I have no doubt that philosophy is now a benchmark for any developmental process in Nigeria, as well as offer a substantial contribution to policy analysis with the analytic approaches in the field, such as ethical evaluation of the public policy issues, criteria of justice and trust in society. Hence Philosophy is a great impact to the hard reality of policy making in the national constitution in Nigeria, which are within the ambit of law in the following factors:(1) The Preservation of Life of Individual in the State(2) The Preservation of Individual Autonomy(3) Fair Treatment of Citizens.

### **Development and Philosophy of Development**

The term ‘development’ is generally understood etymologically to mean ‘expansion by a process of growth’ or ‘growth. Nozick R, observes that there is no agreement as to what development is. It was coined by developed nations to describe the power and powerless nations. According to Offiong D.A, there are various aspects to what constitutes development, however common to all these is a positive change in human wellbeing. The individual and his quality of life must be the centre of the conception of national development. It is in this regard that Schumacher (1975), avers that development should not start with goods, but with the people, their education, organization and discipline. It is not all about money, profit and the number of industries. Levi and Havinden (1982) understand it as a long-term improvement in the standard of living, as felt and judged to be by most of the people in the country. Offiong, Daniel (1980) names education, organization and discipline as the three ingredients of development.

This perspective sees development as an overall social process including economics, social, political, cultural and moral dimensions of life. In the past, discussions and commentaries on development easily tended to be developed by economists who saw it primarily from the perspective of economic growth. In that context, so long as the monetary value of goods and services (Gross Domestic Product) increased yearly, there was development. According to Nwajiuba (1999), this perspective is false as there could be an economic growth, but not development, that is, if the majority of the people did not benefit from it. Onwuliri (2008), thus opines that development thus goes beyond the narrow lines of economic and material advancement. It is all encompassing. Development is a multidimensional process involving the totality of man in his political, economic, psychological, social relations, among others. As Andre (1970) rightly observed, it is erroneous to see underdevelopment as an original state which must be characterized by indices of traditionalism and that therefore development consists in abandoning these characteristics and adopting those of the western world. Development is not a completed affair, it is an ongoing process.

Furthermore, philosophy of development has as its object a broad and fascinating area of psychosocial research. It is a second order inquiry or meta theory concerned with the philosophical foundations of theories about human development and education, and its subject matter overlaps with philosophy, psychology and education. People change in many ways. Most changes come about smoothly and gradually, some are abrupt and vehement. In either case the result may be far reaching, as when the change leads to a fundamentally new way of seeing things.

### **Nigeria in Need of Development**

Nigeria and the Search for National Development as already observed, the language of African nationalists was that everyone should rise in support of independence so that development would quickly come the way of the struggling nation. Nkrumah, among others had argued that once independence was attained every other thing will follow. The quest for national development was at the top of the agenda of the Nigerian political decision makers of the early days of independence. Even though the tentacles of the colonial masters were still looming around, for Nigeria was still being run within the framework of the British political system of government, Obi, Eddy (2005) avers that they were able to mark a departure from the conservative policies of the colonial government. They put forward elaborate development plans geared towards the expansion and improvement of the educational system, development of high level manpower, expansion of industries, increase in the Gross National Product, providing infrastructures and social services.

The First and Second Development Plan (1965 and 1970) focused on agriculture, industry, transportation and manpower development. The Third Development Plan (1975) was launched during the oil boom and focused on the distribution of resources, indicating that Nigeria had moved forward in development. Within the period of two decades after independence, Nigeria recorded impressive figures in terms of material development. The overall picture of Nigeria at the time was that of a developing black giant in Africa. As promising as the future was, corruption slipped in through the backdoor and ravaged the development of Nigeria. It reached an unprecedented level during the Gowon era (1966-1975).

According to Nnamdi B.S., this period was characterized by an unbridled *squandermania*, nepotism, and naked embezzlement and the government was not only helpless in checking these vices but seemed to have deliberately aided and abetted their perpetration. Although there was material development, the rich were its beneficiaries. The problem was leadership. They conceived development as a unilateral process, emphasizing its economic dimension. They operated the Westminster government in Nigeria, with very little adaptation. Amucheazi (1980) avers that the Westminster government proved dysfunctional and collapsed by 1966 as the military disbanded politicians and took over power. There was a general breakdown in law and order by the end of 1965. According to Mackintosh (1966), the legislature was more concerned with championing sectional and ethnic interests. Political institutions lost their credibility, as she could not even give an accurate census of her population without manipulating it for sectional interests. When it came to industrial projects, experts were influenced to produce reports that were unfavourable to particular communities. With this sectionalism, it was difficult to produce an acceptable formula for revenue allocation. The bureaucrats running the civil service were not exempted. They were sick of ethnicity, sectionalism and corruption; they rigged elections, manipulated census, falsified reports and frustrated the implementation of development plans.

The result of all these was that the gap between the ethnic groups widened. The advent of the military in 1966, which came in as a corrective regime, left the nation in a worse state. They were only concerned with maintaining law and order and increasing the production of material goods. Their corrective regime ended up widening the filth, evident in the poor quality of life, failure of economic projects, increase in corruption, uneven development of the country, decay of towns and villages, increase in robbery and banditry. These factors that crippled development during the early years of Nigeria's development, are still with us. They continue to slow down the wheels of Nigeria's development. The past of Nigeria is the hidden history of her present crisis.

## **Conclusion**

The position that this paper maintains is that African philosophy, although an enterprise that entertains abstract ideas, has something to contribute to national development. And beyond stating that African philosophy has a contribution to make in national development, it encourages African philosophers to be more concrete in their analysis of reality in such a way that it would bring about the transformation of society and persons. This paper supported the claim that philosophy is important to national development in Nigeria. Here in the world, we tried to justify the role played by philosophy in the development process through right education, inculcating of good moral up-bringing, clarifications of the ambiguity in the scope of distribution of resources, and to be resolved by the adoption of the principle of equity in the theory of distributive justice.

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