

The Normative Impediments to African Development: Internalist and Externalist Interpretations

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Abstract: The nature of African development is such that has remained poor and lags behind other regions in the world. A number of mutually reinforcing factors (according to some scholars) account for the wide gap between Africa's development and the rest of the world; and its stagnation/ underdevelopment at large. This condition is reflecting lack of domestic economy capacity and weak social infrastructure, following the colonial experience. Africa countries have been weaker and fragile by low exports prices and significant terms of trade decline as well as the heavy burden of external debt. Apart from this is the issue of dictatorial regimes and poor governance characterised by abuse of power and economic mismanagement, all of which undermined the development process. Africa is indeed in economic, political, and social mess. In providing explanation and perhaps solutions to the many problems of African States- two schools of thought emerged: the internalists and the externalists. The internalists believe that Africa's problems are principally due to some internal factors among which are, - corruption, lack of good governance, declining investment, infrastructural problem, leadership problem, mismanagement, while the externalists centres their arguments on some external factors, -western colonialism, slave trade, deteriorating terms of trade, imperialism, etc.

Key words:

INTRODUCTION

African development has been the major concern of African leaders since the attainment of political independence from the shackle of colonialism and imperialism. Their concern for development is predicated on the pathetic and palpable nature of Africa, which without exaggeration, has become, one of the many fundamental features or characteristics of African states. These features have become the indicators of African under-development.

Various developmental plans, paradigms and programmes were designed to rescue Africa from her unenviable undervaluing position but which have proved abortive. All attempts and strategies formulated to develop Africa have ended in futility.

Subsequently, various reasons have been adduced as the bane of development in Africa. In other words, what are the obstacles to African development? Considering the magnitude of natural endowment in Africa, why has Africa refused to develop? This paper now attempts to answer these questions on African development within the internalist and externalist explanation of the contentious issues to better enrich our knowledge on the subject.

The concept of development: To avoid misunderstanding, it is important to note that the term

'development' has been adapted to mean many things. More often than not, the term has been confusingly used in literature, that its true meaning has become problematic. It has been used interchangeably with synonyms or adjectives like 'transformation', 'growth', 'modernization', 'advancement', etc.

Moreso, as articulated by Walter Rodney^[13] '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.
- At the level of social groups, therefore, development implies an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships. Development in the past has always meant the increase in the ability to guard the independence of the social group and indeed to infringe upon the freedom of others -something that often came about irrespective of the will of the person within the societies involved.
- More often than not, the term 'development' is used in an exclusive economic sense -the justification being that the type of economy is itself an index of other social features.
- He then concludes that 'development was universal because the conditions leading to economic expansion were universal'.

Therefore, 'development is a term which is used so loosely and freely that it has little precise meaning' McCarthy^[8]. But for the purpose of this paper, we shall give some scholarly and working definitions of development.

According to Cowen and Shenton^[4] in the nineteenth Century England, development they argue, referred to 'remedies for the shortcomings and maladies of progress. This involves questions such as population explosion, job loss, the social question and urban squalor. In this argument, progress and development (which are often viewed as a seamless web) are contrasted and development differs from and complements progress. Thus, for Hegel, progress is linear and development curvilinear'.

Pieterse Jan Nederveen^[12] defines development as 'the organized intervention in collective affairs according to a standard of improvement'. He stated further that 'what constitutes improvement and what is appropriate intervention obviously vary according to class, culture, historical context and relations of power'.

In the Human Development Reports of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), development is defined as 'the enlargement of people's choices' cited in Pieterse^[6]. While Everest Roger^[12] views development 'as a type of social change in which new ideas are introduced into a social system in order to produce higher per capital income and levels of living through modern production methods and improved social organisation'.

According to Claude Ake^[2] 'development is the process by which people create and recreate themselves and their life circumstances to realize higher levels of civilization in accordance with their own choice and values'.

From the above analysis, we can safely agree that 'real development involves a structural transformation of the economy, society, polity and culture of a country that permits the self-generating and self-perpetuating use and development of the people's potentials'. The rate of development of any particular society is influenced by so many variables such as the political culture, leadership, natural resources and the level of education of the entire people of a particular country. Although 'development has been taken to mean growth, economic development, industrialization, economic growth, modernization and nation-building... it serves a mirror of changing economic and social capacities, priorities and choices'. Pieterse (2001:7).

The issue of african development: Africa, with an area of 30 million square kilometers, is the second largest continent in the world, being ninety-five times the size of the British Isles. Its area is also about two-thirds that of Asia, the largest continent in the world... Allan^[3].

Africa is the least developed of all the continents in the world. Development has been greatly retarded and it is only in comparatively recent times that much has been done to develop its resources. 'Africa is a continent of paradoxes. Ravaged by hunger, war, illness and poverty, it seems to be lurching towards a catastrophe. Yet underneath something stirs. Over the last decade, the picture has been one of almost unremitting gloom' McCarthy^[8].

Africa, because of its underdeveloped nature has been described as sub-saharan, a dark continent, third world etc. In painting the gloomy picture of Africa's underdevelopment, The New Partnership for Africa's Development^[15] in its introductory part affirmed, inter alia, that 'in Africa, 340 million people, or half the population, live on less than US\$1 per day. The mortality rate of children under 5 years of age is 140 per 1000, and life expectancy at birth is only 54 years. Only 58 per cent of the population has access to safe water. The rate of illiteracy for people over 15 is 41 percent. There are only 18 mainline telephones per 1000 people in Africa, compared with 146 for the world as a whole and 567 for high-income countries'.

Furthermore, various development programmes that were designed for Africa to rescue her from continuous retrogression had failed. The Lagos Plan of Action (OAU:1980); The World Bank's Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Agenda for Action(1981); Africa's Priority Programme for Economic Recovery (APPER- Addis Ababa:1985); International Monetary Fund – World Bank Structural Adjustment in Africa; African Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programmes for Socio-Economic Recovery and Transformation (AAF-SAP) (ECA:1989); African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation (ECA:1990); and the United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development (UN-PAAERD-1986). Unfortunately all these programmes have failed to accelerate development in Africa or put Africa in a developmental pedestal. Then what is the bane of development in Africa'?

Problems of african development: Various reasons have been advanced as the bane of development in Africa. Different scholars, writers and commentators have identified many problems of Africa's development following from the fact that, despite the indispensable resource base of the continent in the world, development has remained elusive in the continent.

However, there are two schools of thought on the obstacles to African development. They are: the internalist and the externalist school of thoughts.

The internalist school of thought believes that the bane of Africa's development comes from within. They

are of the opinion that Africans are the problem of Africa. The failure of Africa to develop could be located within African itself. They do not believe that colonialism and neo-colonialism have any contribution to Africa's underdevelopment, but that internal factors are far more significant in causing Africa's developmental problems. They pointed out that it is because Africans failed to be the master of their destiny that culminated into underdevelopment.

Flowing from the above, they contends that Africa which is 'rich in of mineral, oil and gas deposits, its flora and fauna, and its wide unspoiled natural habitat, which provide the basis for mining, agriculture tourism and industrial development'^[15] are enough, if efficiently and effectively tapped, to trigger development in Africa. But 'the insertion of the West into every African problem mandates that the West must become part of the solution, transporting the solution out of Africa to Western capitals. Thus effective resolution of the problem becomes dependent upon Western action or policies, taken outside Africa and over which African leaders have absolutely no control. They may shame, harangue or badger the West but they cannot effectuate Western action. A perfect example is the New Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), which seeks \$64 billion in investment from the West. African leaders have made the success of the Plan dependent upon the very variable - foreign investment over which they have no control.

But the internalist argued that there are some other factors, which by all standards have become imprinted in the Africans way of life, are the bane of Africa's development: corruption, mal-administration, habitual breakdown of law and order, ethnic rivalry, low-level of political culture, political instability, personal ambition, bad leadership, etc.

Among the proponents of the internalist school of thought is Stephen McCarthy^[8] who contends that 'the colonial invasion itself ushered in a period of political stability. Colonialism has of course become a pejorative word. However, it is difficult to argue that mainstream colonial rule, once established, was excessively harsh or oppressive. With hindsight, we can also see that the much-maligned colonials were responsible for a great deal of social progress, particularly in the establishment of a rule of law and reasonably impartial government, in the creation of a number of modern institutions and in the introduction of new technologies and crops. This judgment on the colonial period is made notwithstanding human rights abuses by all the colonial powers at one time or another' McCarthy^[8]. Justifying colonialism in Africa, he argued further that 'apart from the political stability it brought, the colonial occupation, particularly in the later year, laid the economic foundation of independent Africa

the building of roads and other infrastructure and the establishment of export crops or mines' (Ibid:89).

McCarthy^[8] maintained that the failure of Africa's development can be located in the under investment in human development. He stated that 'the importance of the human dimension in accounting for Africa's past economic difficulties and in determining its future prospects cannot be overstated. In the end, all of the problems of underdevelopment revolve around this central issue. People who are uneducated, unskilled and unhealthy have limited resources to reach their own potential. Societies and economies grow because the people, of whom they are made up, grow too' (Ibid:163). He then concluded that, 'thus, for both economic and political reasons, the vicious circle of under-investment in human capital which has affected Africa for the last generation need to be turned around into a virtuous circle' (Ibid:164).

The internalist school of thought also argued that the nature of the political systems of post-colonial Africa also acts as an obstacle to development rather than accelerating development in Africa.

Considering the externalist school of thought, we have scholars like Walter Rodney^[13], Basil Davidson^[5], Pius Okigbo^[11], Solomon Hussein^[14], Kwame Nkrumah^[9], etc. This school of thought believes that Africa's underdevelopment is a consequent of western colonialism, marginalization, imperialism, the pernicious effects of the slave trade, racist conspiracy plots, exploitation by avaricious multinational corporations, an unjust international economic system, inadequate flows of foreign aid, and deteriorating terms of trade and the further integration of African rulers into the international market. They believe that the bane of Africa's development does not result from the works of African's themselves or cannot be located in Africa but from the rot of Western Colonialist and the offensive marginalisation in the international global market^[7].

In corroborating the opinion of the externalist, The Agenda on the New Partnership for Africa's Development^[15] in Article 15 stated that 'the impoverishment of the African continent was accentuated primarily by the legacy and effects of slave trade, colonialism, the Cold War, the workings of the international economic system and the inadequacies of and shortcomings in the policies pursued by many countries in the post independence era'. In Article 19, it stated rather soberly that 'for centuries, Africa has been integrated into the world economy mainly as a supplier of cheap labour and raw materials of necessity; this has meant the draining of Africa's resources rather than their use for the continent's development. The drive in that period to use the minerals and raw-materials to develop

manufacturing industries and a highly skilled labour force to sustain growth and development was lost. Thus, Africa remains the poorest continent despite being one of the most richly endowed regions of the world⁷

On the impact of colonialism, Solomon^[14] wrote that 'the colonial state was not simply a repressive state; it was also a state extracting from the labours of the majority for the benefit of the few. This legacy also permeates the contemporary African states... In summary then, the twin legacies bequeathed by the colonial states to its post-independence successor were state repression coupled with politics of exclusion and the myth of self-sustaining, independent nation-states. These twin legacies have been Africa's bane'.

Pius Okigbo^[11] blamed it on slavery and colonialism which hunted our politics, economy and technological deficits while Davidson^[5] blames Africa's underdevelopment on the 'non-African legacies of dispossession'. This is why Nzongola-Ntalaja^[10] defined colonialism as 'a system of economic exploitation, political repression and cultural oppression'.

In the perspective of Claude Ake^[2] he argued that the two main features of the colonial states in Africa—absolutism and arbitrariness, were carried over into the post-colonial states, in which an African political elite, hand-picked by the former colonisers, was busily engaged in seizing and maintaining political power, and in preserving state power from the challenge of any socially, ethnically or regionally based political opposition. Indeed, 'the struggle for power was so absorbing that everything else, including development was marginalised' (ibid:7).

Conclusions: The need for development in Africa cannot be over-emphasised. The unenviable substantive nature of Africa's underdevelopment needs to be addressed in order to put Africa on the pedestal of development.

As explained above, the arguments of both the internalist and the externalist on the bane of development in Africa is, without prejudices, valid. Both explanations have done creditably well in analysing and identifying the problems of African development and for an utmost understanding of the bane of Africa's development one needs a synthesis of the explanations of both school of thoughts.

Thus, we can safely conclude that the problems of African development can be found within the internal environment of Africa as well as external (or foreign) contribution to the problems. Whereas, while African States, as a matter of urgency, be thinking of building a well defined internal political, economical and social system for accountability and reforms, the developed Western –colonialist States should be thinking of developing sincere programmes of partnership rather than competition for development.

African leaders have overplayed the externalist card (colonialism, American imperialism, etc.) to cover up their own failures and incompetence. They may have personal and political reasons for inserting Western colonial policies in the African problem-solving equation. For one thing, it diverts attention from their own intellectual deficiencies and fundamental lack of understanding of the problem. A problem that cannot be explained by them must have been caused by somebody else^[7].

Whereas the 'Internalists believe that, while external factors have played a role, the internal factors have been far more significant in causing Africa's crisis. This school of thought maintains that while it is true that colonialism and Western imperialism did not leave Africa in good shape, Africa's condition has been made immeasurably worse by internal factors: misguided leadership, misgovernance, systemic corruption, capital flight, economic mismanagement, declining investment, collapsed infrastructure, decayed institutions, senseless civil wars, political tyranny, flagrant violations of human rights, and military vandalism. In fact, one can identify a whole lot of them but these will suffice'. (ibid).

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