

## Dialectical Discourse on Development and Poverty: It's Implication in Nigeria

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### Abstract

This paper crystallizes to a certain extent discusses the interrelationship between Development and Poverty as a social discourse. Principally, the paper x-rays the discourses, citing opinions of scholarly works from available academic literatures with a view of bringing to bear knowledge enhancement and contributing to the epistemology of academic exercise. Fundamentally the thrust of this paper is that "Development" is disentanglement or disengagement from poverty, while poverty is entanglement, an entanglement from development. Above all, its implication in Nigeria context, the paper posits holistically that before development (any meaningful ways of life) can take place, Nigeria people must count economically, politically, socially and nip in the bud poverty in all its ramifications.

**Keyword:** Development, Environmental-degradation, Poverty, Politics and Sustainable-development

### INTRODUCTION

Noticeably, development and Poverty are thresholds that could respectively make or mar the humanity. Thinking and writing about these social discourses pose a great challenge to intellectualism. Development has assumedly multidimensional approach in its explanation. Widely conceived, development to be a complex concept. It is usually viewed as socio-economic, political, science and technology inclusive. Intrinsically difficult not only to be conceptualized but also in its manner of measurement.

A question raised by Oyeshola (2007) that, is development to be measured by Gross National Product per capital (GNP), by Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or the Physical Quality of Life Index (PQLI)? And "do the usual three indicators of life expectancy, thus: infant mortality at age one and adult literacy disclosed everything"? (about development). "Even if the yardstick such as democracy, level of corruption and technological advancement is used, does it explain the real meaning of development? Oyeshola (2007) queried. What about the new discourse that emanates in literature 'sustainable development'.

On the other hand, to explain the concept Poverty which is as old as contending with the origin, creation of man and his/her pattern of livelihood from time immemorial till date. Townsend (1970) conceptualizing poverty, he brings to bear dimensional concepts that are intrinsically inherent in poverty as a socio-discourse. To justify the foregoing, Townsend (1970) in his work conceptualizing poverty asserts that "poverty deserves to be treated as a scientific phenomenon with universal application", "a striking fact is the divorce between analyses of poverty in rich and poor societies". For instance, to take a clue from the meaning of poverty according to Townsend in his findings based on "Studies of random samples of a national population have shown that different images are held. Thus among a national sample of the

population in the United Kingdom in 1968 – 69 the condition of poverty was interpreted variously as: (i) starvation, (ii) inability to achieve subsistence; (iii) inability to meet minimum or basic needs, (iv) living conditions of minority groups; (v) a condition experienced by past generations, (vi) inability to share standard of living common today (Townsend, 1979: Chp. 6). Due to variations of understanding poverty as a discourse, this paper is strongly attuned to Townsend's three dimensional discussion, namely the subsistence, basic needs and relative deprivation standards in order to succinctly conceptualized the discourse – poverty.

Therefore, the paper is subsumed into four sections. The first section tries to a certain degree to review what constitutes Development. The second section brings out Townsend's expositioning of Poverty. The third section tries to juxtapose, a symbiotic relationship between Development and Poverty if any? And finally, the fourth section endeavours to weigh the two discourses dialectically and see its implication in Nigeria. A conclusion is drawn thereof.

### **Development: What about it?**

Arising from the questions raised by Oyeshola (2007) whether GNP, GDP and PQLI truly measures development. This does not reflect anything about the distribution of total income of the country understudied. To Oyeshola (2007) "...some countries with very unequal income distribution may have the higher GNPs per head in the world... Neither does it capture the totality of development situation of the country" (understudied). So also, the deficiency in GDP is the non-inclusion of the outflow (profit and benefits) "... of multinational enterprises (MNEs) as well as the remittances of immigrants in the society are not included in the calculation". Still writing in similar vein, Oyeshola (2007) about development, noted that an effective evaluation of PQLI also remain questionable.

In other words, development cannot be subjected only to spectrum of diagnosis and surgical instrument of GNP, GDP and PQLI as important as they may be. Rather, development should be all encompassing. Imperatively, it include economic, social, political, psychological and all human befitting way of life even religious wise and international inclusion of their environment. Hence, Oyeshola (1989) asserts that development include the conditions of reality that allows people to take their destiny into their own hands individually and collectively. Implicitly, development can be defined in terms of the ability and capability of a people Oyeshola (1989) concluded.

In addition, World Council of Churches, (WCC) (2001) put it thus, to procure sufficient natural resources to meet the basic needs of all in a self-reliant manner; adjust to adverse environmental changes with minimal disastrous consequences; have a stable, democratic and independent system of government; and maintain harmony with the human community and between human and the rest of the environment.

Writing on the same issue, Okobiah (1984) opines that development involves a process of economic, political and social change in a progress direction towards a better social well-being for the members of the society. Nwana (1998) added, development involves harnessing of the resources for the realization of their major objectives, solving their major problems.

Yusuf (2003) subsumed all the aforementioned conceptualization of development to mean all "activities required in improving the attitudes and potentials of people". This equally justifies the view of Bonteng (1990) which described development as the process aimed at improving the living conditions and circumstances of human beings both directly and indirectly. To Yusuf

(2003) development has components and they include social development, economic development, political development and cultural development.

Adeniyi (1995) refers social development as positive social change. Implicitly, social change to him, is the process through which the patterned network rules and institutions are modified in the course of time. Suffices to say according to Yusuf (2001) it connotes a transformation of the ways of life and structures of society overtime. And once transformation or modification exist, this should lead to new behavior which reflects improvement on the old attitude, Adeniyi (1995) asserted. For a way of illustration, the old attitude and believe of the people, condemning and ostracizing “mother of twins” into the jungle as “abomination to the land”. As stressed by Acholonu (2003) “.... Infact the status of women in Nigeria and all over Africa is a problem as they have no access to productive resources like land, credit facilities and even their life inclusive, in African society”. Such practice has almost completely give way as a result of enlightenment, transformation above all social development.

The term economic development according to Falodun, Omogiator and Ezeaku (1997) observed that economic development is the attainment of ideals of modernization such as the rise in productivity, social and economic equality, improving institution and values. In clear terms, it simply implies providing basic essentials of life-eradication of extreme hunger and poverty, universal basic (both qualitative and quantitative) education health for all citizenry, gender parity especially empowerment for females as among others entrenched in Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and now entrenched in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Added to this, Yusuf (2003) refers economic development to the improvement in the general standard of living of the people in the society.

Still commenting on components of development, Yusuf (2003) also refers political development to mean the process of evolving an acceptable political behavior that would facilitates the achievement of the national objectives such as a free and (fair) democratic society. Nigeria political system is full of imbroglio, impasses, a still birth situation, one could described it. This is justifies in Ake (1995) expression, “it is sad to be observed that Nigeria’s leadership selection process take imposition pattern” directly or indirectly. While mediocre are often selected or imposed on the masses”. This obviously negates the principle of political development. Hence, the need for improvement in its entity. There is no amount of constitutional innovation that would guarantee sustainable democracy without first laying the groundwork that is receptive to such innovations, Osaghe (1992) affirmed.

On the other hand, Cultural development involves a process of improving the culture of the society. Adeniyi (1995) noted that improvement in culture involves making the culture relevant and in line with the prevailing and the future needs, interest, values and aspirations of the society. Practically it is unrealistic in the context of this paper to describe the core social value (culture) of more than 320 ethnic groups that formed the federation – Nigeria.

Notwithstanding, anthropological reports suggest and as expressed by Erinoshio (2008) that the time honoured social values among the Yoruba, Hausa/Fulani and Igbo (three main dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria), others inclusive consist of candour, integrity and transparency. This assertions is summarily subscribed to by (Onigu, O. 1989; Samuel, S. 1976 and Imoagene, S. O, 1976) that there is, therefore, a conveyance on the social values that are clearly cherished among the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. Erinoshio (2008) quickly

added, "it is also not farfetched to suggest that honesty, probity and candour were embraced by all the other ethnic groups in the country from time immemorial".

Ironically, the virtues inherent in the culture of early days in Nigeria is fast eroding. Corroborating this statement. Oyenuga, one of Nigeria's highly esteemed professors, summed up the difference between yester years and today in an interview that marked his 90th birthday as expressed in Erinosh's work (2008).

*"Oh, my son, they are quite apart! 1951, you could rely on people. If people got stranded and they came and knocked at your door, you would open for them without fear. You would entertain such a person and house him overnight. You can't do that now.*

*You never know who is an armed robber now. You never know who is merely pretending to be in trouble or danger. There is world of difference and Nigeria has changed so much for bad from what we know" (Oyenuga, 2007)*

The level of cankerworms is unimaginable, seemingly all our social institutions, religious institution inclusive, are infected by corruption and fraud. Despite sporadic and geometrical eruption of religious institutions "churches, mosques" and the like, there is no evidence of impact on social values – culture in the land (Nigeria). This is strongly not in consonance with what cultural development implies.

### **Sustainable Development**

According to Oyekanmi (2009) sustainable development is difficult and elusive concept to pin down. The best known conceptualization of "sustainable development" is that proposed in the Brundtland report published by the intergovernmental commission set up by the UN system in the mid-1980s, where it suggested that sustainable development means "development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future, generations to meet their own needs (WCED, 1987).

Writing in a similar vein, (Omotola, 2004) opined that sustainable development connotes development that endures/last, one that will not roll back or recede even in the face of threatening reversal waves. Added to this, it is development that is self-sustaining and meets the needs of present and future generation (World Bank 2000; Serageldin, 1998; Steer and Luts, 1999).

Fadeyi (2004) in a similar dimension stated that sustainable development is that which supports that security and regeneration of economic, natural human and social resources cannot be achieved if women, who make up almost half of Nigeria's population are neglected. Hence, sustainable development is multidimensional and seeks to promote spatial, social, political, economic and psychological linkage not only among the different sectors of the economy but also among the different regions of the national economy (Omotola, 2004) added.

Conclusively, sustainable development encourages equitable distribution of wealth rather than merely emphasizing Gross National Product (GNP) alone (Akinbode, 2003: 8) affirmed as expressed in Omotola (2004).

## UNDERSTANDING POVERTY

Poverty, according to Cairncross (1990) as expressed in Oyeshola (2007)'s work "...is not only a lack of money to take care of basic necessity of life, it creates a picture of aimlessness, uncertainty and hopelessness at the extreme in the mind of the poor. Where there is no infrastructure and services, people who lack pipe borne water supplies, sewage connections or adequate toilet facilities, garbage collection and basic measures to prevent disease and provide healthcare. Such deficiencies promote diarrhea, dysenteries, typhoid, intestinal parasites and food poisoning and not development. When combined with malnutrition, these can also weaken the body's defence system and measles, pneumonia and other common childhood diseases become major killers" (Cairncross, 1990).

Oyeshola (2007) posit further that poverty in Africa is a reality created not only by the internal contradictions like conflict, war, illiteracy, nepotism and corruption within continent but also and more importantly, by the unequal trade relations between the North and South. Africa lacks the basic requirements necessary to participate effectively at the international level.

In a similar dimension, Global Nigeria Understanding Poverty (2004) stated that poverty may be simply defined as the lack of basic necessities that all human beings must have: food and water, shelter, education, medical care, security etc". Implicitly, from the foregoing, one who fails to have decent food, medical care, recreation, decent shelter and clothes, meet family obligations connotatively such one is experiencing poverty.

Presumably, Townsend (1970) dug into history of early men and proposed three alternative and professionally supported conceptions of poverty which deserves explanations: subsistence, basic needs and relative deprivation standards.

### The Idea of Subsistence

The main rationale behind this proposition according to Townsend (1970) is that the government and the ruling group should define the income needs of the poor. That "subsistence" remains the kernel of the United States' government's measure of poverty. Rowntree (1901) took it further and encapsulates "subsistence" to mean "families were in poverty when their incomes were sufficient to obtain the minimum necessities for the maintenance of merely rhetorical efficiency" and "families was treated as being in poverty, if its income minus rent fell short of the poverty line" (Rowntree, 1901:86) The yardstick for poverty line were equally stipulated as at that time in question, Townsend stressed.

Rhetorically, in Nigeria context, the N18,000.00 minimum wage. Does it really meet up the subsistence, definition of poverty? If one should pay all necessary rents (accommodation, transportation just to mentioned a few), what would remain for food, shelter and clothing? Let alone household sundries, such as fuel (petrol) to power energy for household utilities as a result of epileptic electrification in the country.

This proposition or "subsistence" definition of poverty is not left out without criticisms. The main criticism from scholars is that the physical needs – for foods, shelter and clothing should rather be social needs. Because human beings are "social beings" rather than physical beings. Townsends (1981) conclusively opined at this juncture, a rejoinder to this criticism is that different approach in principle has to be adopted. No unilinear measures or approaches to it – poverty.

## **Basic Needs**

This is equally important and almost corresponding to the former. Equally it has a long historical antecedent Drewnowski and Scott (1966) expressed that Basic Needs were said to include two elements.

First, they include certain minimum requirement of a family for private consumption: adequate food, shelter and clothing, as well as certain household furniture and equipment. Second they include essential services provided by and for the community at large, such as safe drinking water, sanitation, public transport and health, education and cultural facilities. Townsend (1970) added that the concept of basic needs should be placed within a context of a nation's overall economy and social development writing in similar vein.

Writing in similar vein, ILO posits that "In no circumstances should it be taken to mean merely the minimum necessary of subsistence, it should be placed within a context of national independence, the dignity of individuals and peoples and their freedom to chart their destiny without hindrance" (International Labour Office, 1976: 24 - 25)

This reminds one, of the legendary Musicians, Late Fele Anikulapo Kuti's afro beat song "Suffering and smiling" '99 standing, 56 sitting'. In a funky commuter bus, popularly known as "Molue" in Lagos State, Nigeria.

It is supposedly to be the responsibility of the government to provide essential social amenities that it befitting to the citizenry. Not a racketeering, epileptic social facilities. And this is considered to be done base on economic strength of the nation.

The problem that is very much likely to arise with this proposition, apparently happens to be its major criticism, is the disproportionate poverty and deprivation as experiencing by over 320 ethnic groups in Nigeria. For instance and considering the geographical terrain of various ethnic groups and their social needs.

## **Relative Deprivation**

Amidst the preceding criticisms of two propositions aforementioned, what next? An alternative formular is therefore necessary. Townsends (1970) acceded to this, and proposed 'relative deprivation' 'relative' in a thorough going way.

He stressed that 'poverty must be conceived in the present, in relation to the conditions, obligations, expectation and customs of today and not some absolute standard of the past' (Townsend, 1970). This philosophy of Townsend was strongly corroborated by commission of European Community and this paper quote:

*"Person beset by poverty, individuals or families whose resources are so small as to exclude them from the minimum acceptable way of life of the member state (irrespective of geographical state, forming the federation) in which they live. Resources: goods, cash income, plus services from public and private sources" (CEC, 1975).*

Townsend (1970) analysis of the above proposition, he conceived it to be very significant in three respects. To him, the implied poverty line or threshold is relative to the contemporaneous conditions, or resources in particular national societies, suffices to say people do experience poverty base on geographical location they might find themselves and

this is very 'relative'. The social needs and availability of resources to meet those needs are peculiar. Hence the paper contends that strongly 'irrespective of geographical state, forming the federation'. In as much as the citizens are within the ambit/geographical entity of a given country. Consideration and assessment of poverty should be peculiarly assessed.

Secondly, Townsend (1970) conceived that it is also drawn in principle according to a criterion, that is, 'the minimum acceptable way of life', rather than at an arbitrary point below the mean on a scale of ranked personal or household income; and finally, the concept of 'resources' rather than income is used in recognition of the contribution made to standards of living by income in kind from various sources, Townsend (1970) concluded.

The degree of material and social deprivation relative to income is the basis for the 'relative deprivation' method of ascertaining the threshold amount of income ordinarily required by households of different compositions to surmount poverty "Townsend, 19979, pp, 31; 1993, pp. 33 - 36).

*"Relativity" applies to both resources and to material and social conditions, Townsends (1993) further stated. People living in the present are not subject to the same laws and obligations as well as customs they inherits from previous era. Globalization is remorselessly interrelating peoples and their standards of living at the same time as inequalities are growing in most countries. There are, therefore, major objections to merely updating any historical benchmark of poverty on the basis of some index of prices, Townsend (1993) further clarified.*

Relating the discourse "relative deprivation", to explaining poverty in Nigeria context for further illustrations. Officially there are twenty local council development areas (LCDAs) in Lagos State for instance. The residents across these LCDAs are not enjoying social amenities equally. Simply because not lack of social facilities but majorly the geographical terrain where these LCDAs are located differ and the natural terrain often serves as impediment to government in engendering better and equitable distributions of social amenities to them. For instance, the coastal areas. Ibeju Lekki, Eti Osa, Amuwo Odofin compare to metropolitan and cosmopolitan areas of LCDAs. Hence, the concept of "inequalities" to access development crippled the inhabitants of coastal areas compare to inhabitants of both metropolitan and cosmopolitan areas. Thereby both would be experiencing 'relativity' in terms of poverty. Over many years the 'relativity' of meaning of poverty has come to be recognized, in part if not comprehensive. Adam Smith, for example, recognized the ways in which "necessities" were defined by custom in the early part of the nineteenth century, citing the labourer's need to wear a shirt as an example (Smith, 1912)

### **Development and Poverty: A dialectical discourse and its implication in Nigeria**

From the foregoing conceptualization of development and poverty as a social discourse. This paper can be assertive to posit that development is disentanglement or disengagement from poverty, while poverty is estrangement, an entanglement from development. Implicitly, in all its ramification, there can never be development when poverty survive and once there is development, presumably poverty is dead.

Corroborating the foregoing statement, Oyekanmi (2009) asserts that, for development to begin to manifest in this country (Nigeria) people must count economically, politically and socially. In the economic sphere, she stated further that care must be taken to ensure

macroeconomic stability, low inflation rate and stable exchange rate for the Naira vis-à-vis major foreign currencies. That our borders should not just be throw open to importation of all kinds of goods and services. The incubation of small and medium scale enterprises by government should include patronage of Nigerian professionals like architects, engineers, sociologists, demographers, computer scientists and others. And that the current practice of Nigerians escaping from this country at all costs while Chinese and Indian technocrats control our manufacturing concerns and the communication sector do not augur well for development to take place in the country – Nigeria.

Oyekanmi (2009) added (very equally important indeed) are the provision of treated portable water for the use of the general populace. Provision of effective and efficient primary health services should be intensified as this health care is very needed at the grassroots.

Furthermore, Oyekanmi (2009) emphasized the need for the government to take welfare of the people paramountly, priority over every other issue in the scheme of things for development of the country. In addition, sustainable development which allows the use of resources by the present generation of people while also leaving some resources for the future should be a target, she stressed further. The leadership must shun corruption, partisan politics of nepotism, primordial sentiments and encourage best practices as even Independent Corrupt Practice Commission (ICPC) and Economic for Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) cannot curb the practice if the elites are not committed to shun it (Oyekanmi; 2009)

Environmental degradation is another cornerstone. An unhealthy or poor population produces less and may be forced into practices damaging to the environment (WHO/UNEP, 1986). The polluted air from industry, transport system and agricultural and domestic chemical often causes damage to many people. Concretely, the consequences of environmental conflict situation are illustrated in the Tiv-jukun crisis, Chad – Nigeria conflict, (Egunjobi, 2005; Oyeshola, 2007). And the dynamic waves of destructive violence of insurgence 'Boko Haram' in Nigeria, development effort will be drastically reduced.

Lastly, but not the least in the political arena and modus-operandi on how democracy is been practice in Nigeria. What about incursion of foreign policy – redefinition of relations between developing and more developed countries of the world. Finally, are the African countries ready to practice democracy the way it ought to be practiced? The wake of political saga between central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), the Presidency – Federal republic of Nigeria and EFCC. This call for a further insight and research in the wave of corruption and development, a sociological discourse.

## CONCLUSION

In recognizing what constitutes Development and poverty respectively. This paper is of the strong opinion that a better definition and measurement of poverty are an important step toward alleviating it.

This is justified by Townsend (1993) whereby he posit that for any nation to escape from the doldrums of poverty, the first step is that, the agreement reached by all nations of the world in 1995 in Copenhagen (United Nations, 1995) to introduce (and monitor) measures of absolute and overall poverty in every country must be fulfilled. It is only upon such a baseline that an effective anti-poverty strategy can be developed.

Finally, he stated further that assessment of poverty related phenomena and their impact on living conditions requires studying their consequences for the primary distribution of income, the labour market, the level and composition of social public expenditure and patterns of consumption, including the value that the population attribute to the satisfaction of needs (Townsend, 1993).

Nigeria as a country should endeavour to take a clue from all aforementioned. This paper assert that our leaders, in fact all and sundry of this nation should assiduously contribute meaningful to the aspirations of a better Nigeria. The government should provide an enabling environment, better policies and practicable one indeed.

Objective criticisms, laudable ideals should be adhere to and all forms of ethnic chauvinism, corruption and practices that are sentimental and detrimental towards nation building should be shun. Therefore development would strife.

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