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AFRICA AND THE DILEMMA OF FOSTERING DEVELOPMENT THROUGH WESTERN-ORIENTED IDEAS IN A MULTI POLAR WORLD

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Abstract

The central argument of this paper was that Africa's development dilemma set in with the introduction of colonial rule and the subsequent application of foreign ideas and technology for development. The paper has highlighted Africa development trajectory prior to the advent of colonialism. When the African exploit in the fields of agriculture and manufacturing were examined, it was seen that the continent made a steady progress. But after the colonial rule was introduced and the subsequent application of foreign technology for development, Africa started to experience difficulties in the economic sphere. Given the fact that transfer of technology is fraught with difficulties we emphasized that, as long as Africa continues to apply only exogenous ideas and strategies for development, real socio-economic transformation would elude them. On the basis of this we recommended, among other things, a switch of emphasis to indigenous technology which should be based on research and development.

Keywords: Ideas, development, multipolar, liberalism, technology, dependency

1.1 Introduction

It is a truism that development has eluded Africa regardless of bold attempts by her leaders, for many decades, to reverse the trend. The continued prevalence of high level of unemployment, stunted growth of the GNP, balance of trade disequilibrium, high poverty rate and the collapse of social services in most African countries, are some of the evidence of economic decay.

However, scholars are not agreed as to the root cause of Africa's dismal economic performance. Whereas some liberal theorists point to the domestic factors, most radical scholars attribute it to the external milieu. In specific terms, the origins of Africa's underdevelopment is traceable to such factors as slavery, colonialism, imperialism and most recently, globalization (Dos Santos, 1970; Frank, 1966-1967; Nkrumah, 1974; Rodney, 1972; & Stiglitz, 2002). For instance, even foreign direct investment (FDI) which is widely regarded by the neo-liberal theorists, as one of the potential syrups to cure Africa's economic difficulties, is regarded by some Marxist scholars as a conduit pipe to eviscerate resources from Africa.

To most liberal scholars development in Africa is undermined by the internal or domestic forces. The most spectacular among them being, corruption, poor attitude to work, administrative ineptitude, poor planning as well as poor policy implementation. It is thus contended by these theorists that regardless of availability of human or financial capital, if for instance, project supervision is weak, no tangible development can take place. (Dumont 1980, McMichael, 1996, Meier, 1989 & Thirwall, 1983). Neoliberal proponents further argue that society's failure to harness its resources in a way which is consistent with the demands of modern economic growth may result to underdevelopment.

However, despite some elements of truth in some of the contending explanations, it is the position of this paper that the origins of Africa's underdevelopment is rooted in the application of western – oriented ideas for development purposes. Given our premise, the cardinal thesis that underlie this work is that, as long as Africa continues to apply only exogenously- inspired ideas and strategies in an attempt to transform the continent, real development which is consistent with the values and aspirations of the people would be elusive.

2.0 Conceptual And Analytical Framework

2.1 Conceptual Clarification

Certain terms that are inherent in this work are contentious and are thus used in a variety of ways. To get rid of any misunderstandings of the context they are to be used, it is imperative to operationalize them. The first in this regard is the concept of “development”.

The term “development” is not only vague and nebulous, but is also polemical. The reason for this is that such terms as growth, change, industrialization, transformation and modernization are often used interchangeably with development (Okereke & Ekpe, 2010, p. 2). Beside its different usage, the interpretation of the concept to imply either a process or a condition by some scholars complicates the problem of coining a universally acceptable definition. However, without involving ourselves in the academic polemics, development is to be used in this discourse to imply, conscious attempt to mobilize the people with a view to concerted dealing with their environment so that transformation from “a less to a more socially desirable state” is attained.

The basic components or characteristics of development as defined above include:

- Less dependence on foreign technology and the development of indigenous ones;

- Poverty alleviation;
- Conservation of foreign exchange earnings;
- Horizontal linkage between all sectors of the economy, especially between agricultural and industrial sectors;
- Generation of employment opportunities;
- Development of service sector;
- Reduction of the rate of inflation;
- Reduction of debt – stock;
- and Self – reliance.

The next related concept that is inextricably intertwined with this paper is that of underdevelopment. As Rodney (1972, p. 15), has rightly observed, “obviously underdevelopment is not absence of development because every people have developed in one way or another and to a greater or lesser extent”. Both the liberal and radical thinkers have tried to explain the meaning of underdevelopment. But their definitions and explanations have not much relevance to our concern. In this work underdevelopment would be defined as absence of development due to the application of strategies that are counter to society’s transformation and non-involvement of the people in the development process and projects.

Multi polarity is the next concept which is relevant to this work and needs to be defined. In global politics, the world is often classified into unipolar, bipolar, tripolar and multipolar depending on the security structure. Multipolarity implies that there is in existence many centres of power in the contemporary international landscape. In point of fact, some powers are declining while others ascending. In the contemporary world there are obviously many centres of power regardless of the American military superiority.

The concept of ideas is also central to this work. It is therefore imperative it is defined in the context we are to apply it in our discourse. Generally, speaking ideas illuminate creative mental thoughts and how human – beings can use their intellectual capacity to transform physical environment to a more desirable level. And as beautifully explained by O'Brien and Williams (2007), ideas are thoughts about how the human, human – made and natural worlds do or should operate (pp. 363-364)

In this work ideas are used to imply concrete objects that are produced through the application of knowledge. When ideas are interpreted in this way, it is to be used synonymously with the term “technology”. In specific terms, this implies devise that helps the people to grapple with myriads of societal problems. Implicit in this conceptualization is the fact that arts and science are integral part of technology.

As observed by Akpakpan (1996) the essential components of technology are two-fold. These are:

- The process knowledge or process technology, that is knowledge of input combinations, and the processing procedures necessary for completing activity;
- The design and fabricating ability. This is the ability to devise tools to perform task which were formally made by hand (p. 2).

2.2 Analytical Framework

The analytical framework that gives us the theoretical lenses to explore our research thrust is the dependency theory. In practical terms, there are multiple views that are lumped together under this paradigm. For this reason this theoretical vision is rather eclectic and not

coherent. But this notwithstanding, what they have in common would provide the signpost as we navigate through landscape of this inquiry.

In essence this theoretical construct holds that underdevelopment of some countries is generated in the process of the development of others. Put differently, it is contended that there is a dialectical relationship between development and underdevelopment. Implicit in this assumption is the notion that the same processes that foster the development of the centre directly foil that of the periphery. This position has been aptly articulated by Frank (1966 and 1967). In his famous dictum, “The development of underdevelopment”. As forcefully contended by most radical scholars, most advanced industrial countries only achieved this status through the exploitation and/or expropriation of economic surplus from the currently underdeveloped countries (O Brien & Williams, 2007, p. 178).

As forcefully argued by Dos Santos (1970) one of the mechanisms used by the centre to perpetuate the position of dominance over the peripheral states is dependency. This, according to him, could be defined as:

A situation in which the economy of certain countries is conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy to which the former is subjected. The relation of interdependence between two or more economies, and between this and world trade assumes the form of dependence when some countries (dominant ones) can expand and be self-sustaining, while other countries (the dependent ones) can do this only as a reflection of that expansion, which many have either a positive or a negative effect on their immediate development (Santos 1970, p. 6).

Dos Santos (1970) identify three types of dependency in its evolutionary growth historically. The first, colonial dependence. This existed during the 17th and early 18th centuries. According to him at this epoch commercial and financial capital in alliance with the colonial state dominated economic relations between the European colonialist and the colonies by means of monopoly of

trade. This was followed by the financial industrial dependence. The hallmark of the second phase was domination of big capital in the hegemonic centres and the attendance export of capital instead of goods, for foreign investment. The third type of dependence was technological industrial dependence. According to him, this type of dependence was spearheaded by Transnational Corporations. Their major economic activity was to invest in industries which targeted internal markets of underdeveloped countries.

In brief, Santos (1970) was of the view that all types of dependence are detrimental to the economic development of the South. As he put it, this is because:

Each of these forms of dependence corresponds to a situation which conditioned not only the international relations of these countries but also their internal structures: the orientation of production, the forms of capital accumulation, the reproduction of the economy, and simultaneously their social and political structure (Dos Santos, 1970, pp. 235 – 236).

The new dependency theory as formulated by Santos (1970) is adopted as the analytical tool. The reasons for this are not far-fetched. In the first place, since Africa was inserted into the mainstream of world capitalism her economy has been externally oriented. Production of goods and services in Africa are done through foreign capital and technology. Again, development strategies in the continent are western – oriented. The economic blue – print that is currently applied in Africa is capitalist in nature. On the whole, neo-liberal economic doctrine is forced on Africa as the only viable option for economic development.

Given the fact that African ideas and cultural values are not reckoned with in the development trajectory, the need to use new dependency theory as an analytical tool becomes very compelling.

3.0 African development before colonial rule

Prior to colonial rule Africa's development process was driven by indigenous ideas. For this reason, the decision on what to produce? and how to produce? were entirely the responsibility of the people. To this end, production was geared towards the satisfaction of the society's needs. And the vast majority of the population was involved in all economic activities.

In order to have hindsight view of Africa's level of development before the colonial period, let us focus attention on some sectors of Africa's economy. These are, agriculture and manufacturing. This would give us insight about the robust nature of African economy which was driven entirely by African ideas.

3.1 Agricultural practices in Africa before the colonial rule

African ideas shaped the nature and complexity of agricultural practices prior to colonial rule. At that time, as it is still today in some African societies, the land was communally owned. The labour that cultivated that land was culturally determined. And in all African zones the people were involved. And has been pointed out by Ekpe (2005); "A single household or family would determine where to till, what to cultivated and would also share farming activities with the members of that family in conformity with the cultural dictates of the land" (Ekpe 2005, p. 22).

However, it should not be imagined that agricultural sector in Africa was uniform at the epoch. In practice different zones had peculiar cultural practice which was defined by different climatic and vegetation variations. But in spite of this African agricultural practices shared a lot in common.

To be sure, African farmers from all the zones were very knowledgeable of their environment. Their in-depth mastery of the environment enabled them to determine the most

suitable period for cultivation of land. In this process, the most appropriate period for optimum crop yield was determined. Again, African farmers were able to devise various tools which enabled them to deal with their respective environments. Furthermore, African farmers organized their labour efficiently in order to boost production. At this juncture, in order to penetratingly analyse agricultural practice in Africa in the past let us adopt zonal analysis. First we start with the North African zone.

Agriculture in North African Region before Colonialism

Egypt and Ethiopia represent the two foremost countries in North Africa where the level of agriculture was very sophisticated in the ancient past. In Egypt, for instance, due to the Nile River, agriculture was the main- stay of the economy. Egyptian agriculturists had a firm understanding of their landscape. This enabled them to know what to cultivate at different climatic and ecological periods. Their scientific knowledge of the tide and ebb enhanced their capacity to determine the suitable planting and harvesting seasons.

On the main, Egyptian farmers of the past were serious and dedicated. Without the application of foreign technology they were able to extract a living from their environment. For instance, through the use of irrigation and donkey–driven ploughs, large hectares of land were cultivated.

The major agricultural products in Egypt included maize, wheat barley, millet and rice. These were produced in a commercial quantity such that some were exported to other countries. This position is supported by the Bible when it observes “when famine became acute in Israel Jacob said to his sons, behold I have heard that there is corn in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for the family so that we many not die of hunger” (Genesis 42). According to Ekpe (2005,

p. 24), This Biblical account goes a long way to underscore the fact that agricultural practices were of a very high standard in Africa even before the coming of the Europeans.

In Ethiopia the situation was similar to that of Egypt. According to Rodney (1972), the fertile upland supported the cultivation of cereals and livestock rearing. According to Shaw (1999, p. 48) the area of the present Sahara Desert was much less arid 5,000 to 10,000 years ago than at present. Given the vegetation of that period most Ethiopians were both farmers and pastoralists. Its proximity to “fertile crescent” in parts of modern Iran, Syria and Jordan was instrumental to her acquisition of many types of domestic animals. As contended by Ekpe (2005) Ethiopia had many nomads and pastoralists who reared numerous cattles, goats and flock of sheep.

Agriculture in West Africa before the Colonial Rule

Agriculture played a significant role in the economy of West African countries before colonial rule. It must be stressed that no foreign ideas was used in order to boost food production in this area. The agricultural sector was influenced by the ecology of the region. As observed by Ekpe (2005, p. 24), different zones within the regions were engaged in different agricultural activities due to variation in ecological forces.

The main agricultural practice in most coastal and riverine areas was fishing. Dwellers of costal areas were mainly fishermen. Through mastery of their environment they were able to traverse the length and breadth of numerous rivers and oceans through the use of canoes and other big boats. Given the fact that fishing expedition was regarded as a vocation virtually all grown up people were involved. At first, fishes were caught through the use of poisonous herbs and bark of trees. But with time more sophisticated tools were devised and applied. For instance,

water traps, spears and arrows and much later hooks were used for fishing expeditions. (Ekpe 2005).

For hinterland dwellers farming and hunting were the main preoccupation of the people. According to Rodney (1972) the widespread farming system was the shifting cultivation. At a seventh year interval new farm- land were slashed and burned for cultivation. Through people's mastery of their environment variety of crops were planted for consumption and commercial purposes.

3.2 Manufacturing in Africa before colonial period

Cottage industries which produced high quality of products existed in Africa before the advent of colonial rule. Many African societies were adroit in manufacturing activities. In the textile industry, there were many types of textile products which were produced in different parts of Africa.

In Baganda, superb cloths were made from the bark of trees and palm fibre. Its finish was comparable to velvet. Local textile products from Guinea were equally of a high quality. They were yarned or woven and finally dye to produce a fine textile material. The making of dye itself was a very complex process. Rodney (1972) observed that cottons and cloth from Guinea coast were stronger than Manchester cottons.

In the field of iron smelting, available evidence also show that African has a fair knowledge of iron work. There is abundant evidence that the people of Congo Sudan Uganda and Oyo kingdom in Nigeria were knowledgeable in iron smelting. The availability of wide avalanche of iron and metal products in pre- colonial Africa suggest that these products were not imported. But rather they were produced locally. According to Williams (1999, pp. 61–65).

Africa had her own indigenous furnaces for iron production. According to him, iron – smelting furnace in North Africa and Sudan “appears to have been more or less cylindrical in shape with a number of holes around the base in which clay pipes were inserted to create a force draught”.

Apart from iron smelting African also had a fair knowledge of the metallurgy of copper, brass, bronze and gold. This contradicts some racist scholars position that African had no knowledge of iron making. In fact as noted by Davidson (1977) given the scope of iron products in Africa, one English scholar was constrained to refer to Moroe city as “the Birmingham of ancient African.” To underscore this point another English captain, William Towerson who visited Guinea in (1566) had this to say: “There were many fine iron goods which were hand – made. They included spears, fishhooks, farming tools, and swords that are very sharp on both edges”.

Without going further, we are saying that development in Africa was indigenous before colonial rule. Africans were able to use their indigenous ideas to eke a living in the face of harsh environmental conditions. Put differently, Africans were not dependent on Europe nor elsewhere for her developmental needs and strategies. It was the colonial rule that distorted Africa’s economy and made it heavily dependent on Western European ideas and technology.

4.1 The Dilemma of Africa’s development through western – oriented ideas

Development in Africa in the past was endogenously inspired and was driven by the people. The workforce was able to frontally grapple with the forces of nature for survival. Indeed, development process was inextricably intertwined with African cultural values and ethos. As articulated by Nwogwugwu (2009, p. 101), development drive was at that time based

on local strategies, knowledge, institutions and resources. Accordingly, African people were able to master their environment and correspondingly devise tools to facilitate development process.

The introduction of colonialism in the 17th and 18th centuries halted and reversed African's development drive. For instance, with colonial rule Africa was inserted into the mainstream of world capitalism. According to Ake (1981), the mechanisms used in this regard were monetization process, imperialism of trade and foreign direct investment. As would be seen later, all the weapons used to integrate African economy to that of the West and America were systematically put in place for a reason. According to Chinweizu (1983) one of such reasons was to promote a limited development of African economies so as to make them more serviceable to Western interest.

In practice, the introduction and eventual integration of African economies to that of capitalism has produced both the positive and negative effects. On the negative side, it has decimated indigenous industries, dislocated family ties, force Africans to produce what they cannot consume and the consume what they cannot produced (Ake, 2002; Kay, 1982; Chinweizu, 1983; Rodney, 1972). Capitalist economy is seen by most liberal and neo-liberal scholars as advantageous in that, among other things, it accelerates the tempo of industrialization, boost the growth rate of the GNP, alleviates poverty and fosters transfer of technology (Thirlwall, 1983; Meier, 1989; Todaro & Smith, 2004).

Some African scholars are of the view that transfer of technology, which is seen as a stimulus to Africa's economic development, is rather inimical to her interest. It is in this wise that African development through exogenous ideas is seen as a dilemma. The remaining part of this section is devoted to examine this contention.

4.2 Foreign technology and the dilemma of african development

When African was integrated into the orbit of world capitalism, she was assigned the role of supplier of industrial inputs to the global market. Manufacturing activities were handed over to Western European countries, Japan and the United States. But in practice, this role was and is still performed by the Multilateral Corporations who are the patent owners of modern technology.

The exclusion of African from the process of manufacturing logically means that she has to be dependent on foreign technology and technical know-how. This need became very compelling because of the following reasons:

- To fill technological gap between the now non- existing indigenous stock of technology and the modern technology required for faster growth;
- To overcome technological backwardness in a highly competitive global world;
- To reduce the inequality gap between the advanced industrialized countries and Africa;
- To develop basic and key industries and infrastructure such as power and communication (Essien, 2004; Akpakpan, 1996; Jhingan, 2002).

Regardless of a dire necessity for African states to solve their economic problems through technology diffusion the fact remains that she is in a dilemma. The reasons for this were not far-fetched. Some of them are as follows:

Since technology is a product of exogenous ideas, Africa lacks expertise, experience or adequate information as regards the implication of using “alien devise” for her development needs.

Technological dependence. Technological innovations are products of investment in research and development by firms. Under the intellectual property right regime of the WTO, the innovator has to protect his innovation against theft and piracy. In order to be the sole

monopolist pattern rights are often given to MNCS for their new products. This means that technology is not transferred free of charge. In order to acquire it one has to pay the price. In ideal situation, MNCS usually restrict the developing countries right to use, change or transfer the technology to their discretion (Essien, 2005, p. 68).

Transference of obsolete model. It is a well known fact that knowledge is power in both economic and political forms. This being the case no MNC is willing to expose its sources of knowledge indiscriminately through diffusion of technology. At best what they do, especially to Africa, as indeed, other Third World countries is to transfer outmoded technology. In most instances, such technologies are without spare parts. This constitutes a dilemma for African countries because the cost of services and maintenance of such out-mode technologies eviscerates resources for development. The repeated breakdown of old technologies bring huge losses to African countries.

Limited labour absorption capacity of some technology. This is another issue which is problematic as far as Africa development through Western oriented ideas is concerned. Development in Africa should be a process involving a large work-force. But paradoxically some technologies that are transferred to Africa are capital intensive. This poses a serious problem to Africa that is desirous to alleviate poverty and to generate more employment opportunities.

High Cost of Technology. Transfer of technology is seen to be detrimental to the progress and well being of African countries given its exorbitant cost. It is a known fact that besides the high cost of technology, some MNCS are in the habit of forcing developing countries to purchase technologies that require the spare parts, industrial inputs, machines etc at a cost which is higher than those obtainable in the world market (Essien 2005).

In another dimension, exogenous ideas or technology is unsuitable for Africa's development because of ecological differences. For instance, it is contended that copying of Western technology will not solve Africa's grave problems such as backwardness, poverty and ignorance. This is because, unlike advanced societies of today, Africa is afflicted with myriads of problems.

Therefore, as submitted by Uwatt (1990) "To try to find western technologies for remedying economic problem in the LDCS where capital is meager, skilled workers few and disorganized, and industry and agriculture are unproductive is, at best, an exercise in futility" (p. 59).

The process to acquire foreign technology by African countries is also problematic and hence a veritable source of dilemma. Some of the channels to acquire foreign technology include Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), joint ventures, turnkey projects, specific contractual as well as licensing agreement, technical assistance agreements sub- contracting arrangements and leasing agreements. (Uwatt, 1990; Akpakpan, 1996).

Although all the channels have their strengths and weaknesses, it appears that the demerits out-weight the merits.' This inevitably constitutes a dilemma and a cork in the wheel of Africa's development. As enumerated by Uwatt (1990), one of the misgivings about the process of technology acquisition is that it takes place within an imperfect market. This implies that there exists difference in perception and motivation between foreign suppliers and local acquires.

The inimical aspect of this approach to the economic development of Africa are both latent and manifest. On the indirect cost include:

- Overpricing of inputs of intermediate goods;

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- Charges through profits on capitalization of know-how by equity participation in place of other payments for technology. Dividend on such holdings are payments for technology so transferred
- Charges through part of the repatriated profit of wholly – owned subsidiaries or joint ventures.
- Charges for capital or other technical equipment imported.

On the manifest or direct cost includes:

- (i) Charges for the right to use of patents licenses, know-how, and trade marks.
- (ii) Charges for technological information and know-how required at all stages of technology transfer. That is, from pre-investment through investment to training operation (Uwatt, 1990; UNCTAD, 1978).

On the basis of what we have sketched above, Africa's development through the application of foreign ideas has produce dismal performance. The hopeful claim by the liberal theorists, that diffusion of technology is indeed, the most surest and shortest route for the backward countries to catch-up with the advanced countries has become a ruse after all. Development has eluded Africa despite opening up her doors to the West, sought and transferred Western technical know – how over a wide range of activities with the sole aim of advancing industrialization.

Africa's development woes, regardless of the adoption of exogenous ideas, are legion. Using a number of economic indicators some of these include high level of poverty, stunted growth rate of the GNP, high unemployment rate, high rate of inflation and debt-profile, among others. Given this gloomy situation what are the potential options to address the situation. This takes us to the recommendations.

5.1 Recommendations

- Development of science education and technological training.
- Promotion of technical co-operation among African countries.
- Strengthening of the existing multinational institutions, particularly, the African regional centre for technology, the African regional centre for design and manufacture and the industrial development fund for Africa (Essien, 2005).
- Creation of a social climate which is conducive to the application of science and technology.
- Promotion of research and development activities through adequate funding of research institutions.
- Provision of a framework for active cooperation between research and development institutions.
- Encouragement of professional organization and activities;
- Promotion of intermediate industries that utilize local components in their production activities.
- Creation of a trust fund with a view to recognizing and rewarding scientific breakthrough in African; and
- Publication of technical journals, books and manuals and circulating them to all universities and research centres at affordable price.

6.1 Conclusion

In the paper we have attempted to show that African people performed better in the economic sphere when indigenous African ideas were used to guide development process. As we illustrated using agricultural and manufacturing sectors of the economy, there was appreciable level of development in Africa. As a point of fact, prior to colonial rule Africa was self-sufficient

in technology. A wide variety of technologies were in existence even though there were in rudimentary stage. It was through the use of these indigenous technologies that goods and services which were essential for survival were provided. The local artisans and craftsmen were the major providers of technology. In reality African people were self-sufficient as far as technology for production was concerned. But the advent of colonization fatally dealt a blow to Africa's technological progress.

Colonialism led to the insertion of African economies into the mainstream of world capitulation. This resulted to the subordination of Africa's economic needs to that of the colonial masters. Colonialism brought with it factory system which is predicated on specialization and improved quality of products over the artisans system. This eventually led to the demise of indigenous craftsmen and their technologies.

The emergent capitalist economy which was introduced to Africa requires development through exogenous in the form of foreign technology. The acquisition as well as application of foreign technology has complicated Africa's development crisis. Besides the fact that some of the foreign technologies are at variance with Africa's development needs, most of them are obsolete under-such a situation they drain the meager resources of the continent. Again, the very process of technological transfer is problematic given the unwillingness of MNCs from advanced industrialized countries to transfer their latest technology.

Given the developmental dilemma African countries face in the process of economic transformation, we are of the opinion that African Union (AU) should place emphasis on research and development. It is high time African countries started to be more inward looking. Rather than believe in foreign ideas and strategies effort should be made to discover relevant

knowledge with a view to fabricating necessary tools and machine which are a sine qua non for development process.

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