

## Analysing Human Development Theories in Profering Solutions to Poverty and Income Inequality

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### Abstract

This research identified and analyzed human development theories. While some of the theories analyzed are focused on human development from biological point of view, other theories argue that environment and culture play a vital role in human development. Disagreements among theorists in the field of human development reveal conflicts in the field that needs to be resolved. While the conflicts and disagreements inherent in the field allow us to understand the basis for human development, I argue that what is more central is its relationship to economic development. Based on my analysis, I made the following conclusion: first, there is not much difference in the theories as all of them focuses on development. Second, human development as a subject is generally accepted as multidisciplinary subject. Third, that human development as a subject has direct linkage to economic development vis-à-vis poverty and inequality.

**Key Word:** Human Development, Theories, poverty and income inequality

### Introduction:

Human development as a subject in the field of science is *new* in academics when compared to other subjects such as mathematics, physics, et al. It emerged as a science subject in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, Rayner et al. (2005:1) thinks that the study of “person’s individuality” may have taken root in the western world during the renaissance and centered in Italy. According to Alkire (2002) human development is a multidimensional subject that encompasses such areas as “poverty, cross cultural psychology, moral philosophy, quality of life indicators, participatory development and basic needs”.

The broad nature of human development has posed difficulty in crafting a consensus definition of human development. However, there are other several attempts to define the subject of human development. For instance, Alkire (2002) views it from the multidimensional nature, comparing and contrasting the identified dimensions with recent theories of human development such as Amartya Sen’s capability Approach that has become accepted by several development practitioners as a tool for poverty reduction. However, defining human development from the perspective as suggested by Alkire (2002) may not be encompassing, as it may be restricted to few dimensions.

Despite several attempt, meaning of development as a concept and subject has been contentious since its emergence as a field of academic study. Human development as a subject has no one agreed definition as observed earlier. This is arguably due to the nature of the concept of development. Thus, there are debates among scientists including sociologists and psychologists over the meaning of the concept of development. This is as a result of the different methods and approaches used in measuring and comparing “state of affairs” in different sciences (Valsiner, 1997:1). However there is an agreement among them that development entails ‘change’ (Lerner, 2002:16). While change is agreed as the major feature of development, change that is not systematic and organized cannot be regarded as development from the scientific perspective. Louw (1998:5) argues that development psychologist only focus on those changes that are “relevant to developmental psychology”. However, it may be very difficult to define and distinguish ‘relevant’ and ‘irrelevant’ in the study of developmental psychology.

Thus, Bronfenbrenner (1979: 3) views human development from a new perspective and defined the concept of development “as a lasting change in the way in which a person perceives and deals with his environment”. This perspective Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes as ecological environment concept of development and the concept has three levels that include: (a), the inner most level that contains the person that is developing. This level include school, classroom, home, office, etc.; (b), Interaction of settings (not a single setting) affects development of a person, (c), Person’s development is profoundly affected by events occurring in the settings in which the person is not even present (Bronfenbrenner, 1979: 3-4). Further, Bronfenbrenner (1979: 3) describes this concept as a “set of nested structures...” which “can be decisive for development”. For instance, ability to learn depends on what is taught largely at school. However, there is also a connection between what is happening at home, the entire society and a person’s ability to learn. The interaction of the three levels of ecological environment shapes development.

The debates over the meaning of the concept of development threw up salient issues in human development such as nature, nurture, continuity, discontinuity, abnormal behavior, individual differences, early and, later experiences (Lerner, 2002). Human development theories rightly focus more on human behavior, which Perun & Belby (1981: 239) describe as being influenced by “current and historical aspects of social structure and the

individual". Therefore, human development is described as a science that studies how we learn and develop psychologically from birth to the end of life. Its main focus is on child development, but recently has expanded to include adulthood. It has also involved the study of the relationship between human development and economic development.

The focus on child development is due to the belief that most of the changes in human development occur during infancy period. Human development as a subject enables us to understand how children develop and gives adults insight into who they are. In view of this, life span of human beings is divided into various stages. While this method is used for easy understanding of the development processes, Louw (1998: 13) argues that life span of human beings development stages vary based on culture and period. However, recently, human development as a science and subject has gone beyond focusing on child development only to also focus on relationships in social dynamics and economic growth. Thus, recent theorists in human development have developed theories on social learning and poverty. Also the subject of human development though previously held to be a science subject through which, study of human is carried out has been accepted as a multidisciplinary subject (Damon & Lerner, 2006: 4). In view of this, scholars and researchers in the field of human development have broadened the subject to look at its relationship with other subjects such as economics.

The study of human development is being dominated by systems approaches that studies intersecting systems. Consequently Bird & Drewery (2003) argue that human development as a science and subject have become interdisciplinary in nature. Recently, attention globally has shifted from the "mechanical indicators of economic indicators of economic progress", such as GDP and GNP, to indicators that measure the well being of a population (Sudhir & Sen, 1995).

### **Salient issues in Human Development**

There are salient issues in the subject of human development that are identified, which include; nature, nurture, continuity, discontinuity, abnormal behavior, individual differences, early and later experiences (Lerner, 2002). Each of the issue identified is pitched against each other. For instance, a school of thought in human development argues that the environment influences human development. In the school's argument, humans are born with blank minds and that experiences gained from the environment as humans grow to determine its development pattern. However another school of thought argues that nature rather than nurture influence human development pattern. According to this school of thought, human development is influenced by inheritance (gene).

Nevertheless, the two sides have come to agree that neither nurture nor nature can on its own influence human development, but that there is an interaction between the two. Then, Wachs (1993: 375) argues that the debate over the dichotomy of nurture and nature has persisted despite the seemingly general agreement that in an ideal development, there is a "joint function of nurture and nature" because this general agreement exists in an ideal situation and has not manifested in reality.

This interaction produces a force that propels development in human. A second issue in human development is the importance of experience and the point when experience shapes development on human. Thus, a school of thought argues that early child experience is more important and contributes to the human development more than later experience. Hence, most of the studies in human development tend to focus on the childhood. These probably informed Freud work that focus on childhood development. However, this argument may not be going without challenges as experiences acquired in adulthood have shaped human development. For instance, children that underwent abusive childhood might develop a normal life later in his adulthood.

Another salient issue that is dominating human development debate is the debate over continuity and discontinuity. To this, one school of thought argues that changes or development is a matter of quantity. According to this school of thought, children exhibit less of certain behavior as they grow older and drop certain behavior. This thought may have played vital role in the conceptualization of human development theories such as Freud, Eriksson, learning theory, cognitive theory et al. that emphasis on stages and levels of development. Finally, abnormal behavior has been the focal point of human development studies and used in most of human development studies.

Historically, human development studies have always focused on identifying and correcting human development deficits among children. Little attention is paid to individual difference. However, recently, there is increase in the study of individual difference in human development. For instance, some of the recent human development theories such as learning theory bring together the components of abnormal behavior and individual differences. Thus, psychologists today look at individual differences and abnormal behavior when describing child development. In sum, every theory in human development has tried to address one or all of these issues.

However, Inglehart & Welzel (2005) views human development from the socio-economic perspective, suggesting a strong link between economic development and human development. It is the socioeconomic issue that has propelled major works in the field of human development. From the socioeconomic perspective, there are three dimensions of human development that include socioeconomic, cultural and institutional. Each of these

dimensions has a role to play in human development. For instance, modernization is identified as the process advancing human development under the socio economic dimension while value change and democratization are processes advancing cultural and institutional dimensions respectively.

Under the socioeconomic dimension modernization is the human development process that comprise socio economic resources which contributes to people's enhancement of capabilities to act according to the choices. In cultural dimension, value change is the process that comprises of self-expression values. The contribution of cultural dimension to human development is to increase people's priority to act according to their choices. Finally, institutionally, democratization is the process that uses civil and political liberties to broaden people's entitlement to act according to the choices. Collectively, the underlying theme of these dimensions in human development is to broaden humanistic choices. Invariably, these dimensions need to be present and active within a society for its human capacity to be fully developed.

In sum, while several salient issues are identified in the field of human development, arguably socioeconomic issue is central. Consequently, the increase in humanistic society is the ultimate goal of all human development theories and where such does not exist; it will be difficult to measure the application of other human development theories such as ecological, biological etc.

### **Personalities & Theories that shaped the study of Human Development**

The study of human development as a subject and science in the past two centuries by several sociologists, psychologists, philosophers and thinkers has influenced and shaped human development as a science and field of study. Personalities such as Kagan, Bowlby, Harlow, Ainsworth, Bronfenbrenner, Bruner, Kohlberg, Feuerstein, Risch Harris, Gibson, Robert Kegan, Freud, Erikson, Piaget, Vygotsky, pavlov and Bandura with his social theory of human development. Each of the philosophers propounds a theory in the field of human development. Human development theories are assumptions derived from observed experiments that intend to explain human development and predict human behavior. Piaget becomes popular in the field due to his assumption that brings together the biological and environmental factors.

Some of the theories propounded in the field include: Attachment theory, cognitive theory, moral development theory, modular theory of social development, ecological psychology theory et al. However some of the theories are dominant and regarded as the major theories in the field of human development. For instance, Sigmund Freud is regarded as the earliest theorist in the field of human development. He propounded the psycho-sexual development theory that is generally known as the Freud's psychodynamic theory. The theory of Sigmund Freud is said to be the 'mother of all theories' in the field of human development. However, Sigmund Freud drew inspiration and knowledge from the works of other early philosophers such as John Locke & Charles Darwin.

Erikson's theory on the other hand can be viewed as an extension of Sigmund Freud's theory. He developed a theory that went beyond where Sigmund Freud stopped. His theory is known as the psychosocial theory which argues that stages of human development spanned our entire life, not just childhood. This theory's focal point is the identity crisis in human development. However, the most of recent theory in the field of human development is the human development index theory that links human development and economic development, developed in 1990 and widely used by United Nations agency such as United Nation Development Program (UNDP) to measure human development. This is a clear departure to the other theories that tends to focus on the biological and environmental changes of human progression.

### **Major Theories of Human Development Psychosexual Development Theory**

Sigmund Freud developed a human development theory where he argues that personality development involves a series of childhood stages and that personality development is established at the age of five. This theory is known as the psychosexual development theory. According to the theory the stages of childhood development passes through the stages where the pleasure seeking energies 'id' is focused on certain erogenous areas that is driven by an energy called 'libido'.

The development stages according to the theory include oral stage, anal stage, phallic stage, latent period and genital period. At the oral stage, the child's focus is on the things of oral pleasures such as sucking. It is Sigmund's view that this type of personality has strong tendency to smoke, drink alcohol, and over eat or biting of nails. As the personality develops; the individual may become over dependent upon others, gullible and afraid to lead. However where the individual have the urge to fight these tendencies, it may turn to pessimism and aggression towards others. The anal stage according to Sigmund's theory starts from the age of 18 months to three years. At this stage, the child's focus on pleasure is no longer in sucking but in elimination and retention of feces. It is the stage when the child acts through society's pressure to learn how to control anal stimulation. However, anal fixation at this stage leads to an individual's obsession with cleanliness, perfection, and control. On the opposite end of the spectrum, they may become messy and disorganized. At the phallic, latency and genital stages, the genitals pleasures, repression of sexual urge and awakening of sexual urge respectively.

It is Sigmund's view that a child (male) at the phallic stage develops unconscious sexual desires for their mother. Because of this, he becomes rivals with his father and sees him as competition for the mother's affection. During

this time, boys also develop a fear that their father will punish them for these feelings, such as by castrating them. As an individual develops and has strong fixation on this stage, the individual may have sexual deviancies including weak or confused sexual identity. At the Latency stage sexual urges remain repressed and children interact and play mostly with same sex peers while genital stage is the final stage of psychosexual development as propounded by Sigmund Freud and begins at the start of puberty when sexual urges are once again awakened. Words such as id, libido, ego and super ego featured prominently in the theory. However, critics of the theory argue that the theory focus more on the psychosexual development of male while little is mentioned about the development of female. Also, the critics also argue that it is difficult to measure scientifically id, ego, super ego, libido etc. that are prominently featured in the theory, while other critics argue that the theory is heavily dependent on biological assumptions (Holt, 1989: 117). Finally, a section of the critics further argue that it is a theory conducted based on case study rather than empirical. Despite these criticisms, Holt (1989: 8) describes Sigmund Freud and the psychosexual theory as “the indispensable starting point for any serious student of psychoanalysis...and other behavior sciences”. Thus, the stages in psychosexual development stages as propounded by Sigmund Freud remains an essential foundation for conceptualization of any serious developmental initiative in a society.

### **The psychosocial Human Development**

Erik Eriksson propounds the psychosocial human development theory. He argues that human development is a product of the interaction of the biological, psychosocial and societal systems (Newman & Newman, 2008: 6). According to the theory, human development involves eight states of development, which includes oral (sensory), muscular (anal), locomotor, latency, adolescence, young adulthood, middle adulthood and maturity. Each of the stage according to the theory involves a conflict or crisis that must be resolved in order for an individual to develop. In resolving these conflicts, the individual is presented with two choices and where the individual is unable to resolve the crisis at any stage; the individual will continue to struggle with it his later life. The theory is an extension of Sigmund Freud’s psychosexual theory as it acknowledges the biological assumptions of Sigmund Freud. However, critics argue that it is difficult to objectively evaluate identity crisis of an individual. Secondly, Eriksson in arriving at the theory used some selected famous men to test his methods and hypothesis. In view of this, it might be very difficult to apply the same method on every individual that will give the same result. Further, the theory is criticized as being biased towards male development and relied more on biological assumptions.

### **Social Learning Theory**

Social learning theory argues that learning can occur through observation, depending on the mental state and does not always change behavior. Prof. Albert Bandura is the major proponent of this theory. The theory focuses on learning that occurs within a social context and viewed as a bridge between the behaviorist and cognitive learning theories (Ormond, 1999). Bandura argues that observational learning is the “central development process” (Shaffer &Kipp, 2009:49). Apart from the observational learning, the theory also argues that environment shapes personality development. Furthermore, it acknowledges the importance of classical and operant conditioning as a very influential to personality development. However, critics of social learning theory argue that relying so much on the environment as the main influence of personality development may not be reliable. The critics argue further that it is important that genetic influence in personal development is also reflected.

### **Behaviorism**

It is important to mention that learning theory encompass the classical and operant conditioning theory that was made popular by theorist such as Pavlov, Skinner et al. The theory argues that behavior is a consequence of the presentation of something. When a new thing is added with several trials, while the old thing is presented, the new thing may become very much associated with the old thing. Consequently any time the new thing is presented, it produces the hunger for the old thing. For instance, if a child is made to sit down and later food is presented to the child (after several trials), anytime the child sees food, he will gladly sit down. Operant learning theory according to Skinner argues that development depends on “external stimuli (reinforces and punishment) rather than internal forces such as instincts, drivers or biological maturation” (Shaffer &Kipp, 2009:48).

### **Cognitive Development Theory**

Cognitive development theory argues that human development is dependent on the ability to think and reason. It is focused on internal states such as motivation, problem solving, decision-making, thinking and attention. Major proponents of this theory include Piaget and Vygotsky. According to the theory, the way and manner children mentally grow plays a central role to their development. However, Piaget and Vygotsky differ in their approach to the theory. Piaget argues that development involves four stages that include sensorimotor, preoperational, the operational and formal operational.

Vygotsky argue that there is no set different stage for development rather he is developed a theory encompassing all the three stages. In addition, Vygotsky's theory is focused on the influence; parents have on their children through transmission to their children "the beliefs, customs and skill of their culture" (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2008: 15). Critics observe that the theory has limitations. For instance, critics argue that Piaget's assumption is not representative enough to allow for generalization of the assumption. Second, according to the critics, there is verifiable data to suggest that environment plays vital role in development.

### **Maslow's Theory**

Abraham Maslow in the Maslow's theory argues that humans are independent and fundamentally motivated in order to achieve growth potential and develop capabilities. Maslow in the field of human development study belongs to the humanist group. The theory focuses on the needs or curiosity of humans. Consequently, it identified human needs and delineated them into five broad needs which include physiological, safety, love, esteem and self-actualization. These identified needs were arranged in a triangular form that is known as the Maslow's hierarchy. Although, Maslow's theory is related to other developmental psychology theories, it did not use human deficiencies such as mentally ill or neurotic history for its experiments. Rather, Maslow used healthy humans to carry out his experiment.

However, the theory is criticized for being individualistic and the result derived from the Maslow's experiment may not be generalized in other societies that are not individualistic in nature. Second, the assumption is based on an experiment carried out on a selected few which, will be difficult to apply generally. Other critics dismiss the hierarchical arrangement of the needs as a pattern that may be meaningless to some societies. Nevertheless, the theory is popularly in the business world and adopted in their various marketing and human resource strategy models.

### **Erik Eriksson's Human Development Theory**

Eriksson is one of the respected psychoanalysts that have contributed immensely to the study of human development. Eriksson's work gave rise to the situation called "identity crisis". According to the theory, human development passes through eight stages of development that includes oral sensory, muscular anal, locomotive, latency, adolescence, young adulthood, middle adulthood and maturity. Each of the stage is characterized by a peculiar conflict that must be resolved before moving to the next stage of development. Although Eriksson used Freud's stages of development as the foundation for his theory, he extended stages in his theory to include three other stages such as young adulthood, middle adulthood and maturity. In the theory, Eriksson focus on social and cultural orientations and not solely on biological factors as is the case with Freud. Despite criticisms against the theory, it is generally applied in clinical psychology to resolve issues and predict behavior.

### **Gender and Human Development**

According to Nussbaum (2001: 1), human development should be feminine in nature and more focus should be on the development of women since they "lack support for fundamental functions of a human life". Although women play vital positive roles in the society such as "reproducers, caregivers, sexual outlets and agents of a family's general prosperity" (Nussbaum 2001: 2), they are "often...not treated as ends in their own right, persons with dignity that deserves respect from laws and institutions" (Nussbaum 2001: 2). Also, most of the researches in the field of human development on women had focused on "family life cycle rather than on the work life cycle" (Perun & Belby, 1981: 239). Women face more obstacles in life than men. They are often subjected to physical and sexual abuse; less educated and less qualified for professional and vocational jobs. These obstacles are more observed in the third world countries including Nigeria. Consequently, Nussbaum (2001) argues strongly that "international political and economic thought should be more feminist, attentive (among other things) to the special problems women face because of sex in more or less every nation in the world, problems without an understanding of which general issues of poverty and development cannot be well confronted"(p.4).

There is no doubt that women all over the world are faced with obstacles in life more than men. However, designing human development initiative from only the feminist perspective might not allow for the confrontation of global poverty because it is not broader enough. Rather than focusing on developing women exclusively in early formulation of developmental agenda, it is important to build on the "social relationships in which they are embedded" (Reeves & Baden, 2000). It will make more sense that in early formulation of development agenda, focus should be on both women and men. In other words, gender issues should be a collective issue.

Thus, Cornwall (1997: 12) asserts that there is "need to find constructive ways of working with men as well as with women to build the confidence to do things differently" if gender is everybody's issue. Truog (1997) argue that a "feminist engagement with the human development debate and its rhetoric on gender equality must move beyond the level of norms and institution and tackle the symbolic structure underlying them". Troug's argument is based on the belief that human development discourses has been "overtly patriarchal" (Troug, 1997). The patriarchal nature of human development discourse is as a result of the male centered early human development

theories such as Sigmund Freud's psycho-sexual theory of human development. However, Truog's argument fail to acknowledge the upsurge in human development discourses that is centered on gender equality.

An important issue that has been tasking researchers on gender and human development has been the development of the girl-child in way that she can develop appropriate sense of self that will equip them withstand obstacles that women face. It is quite interesting the findings of Surrey (1983) on women development. According to the findings, development of women contradicts the theoretical postulation that "disconnection from early relationships to achieve a separate and bounded sense of self" (Surrey, 1983). Rather Surrey (1983) proposed a theoretical framework that centered on the "formative dynamics of ...relational self-structure within the early mother-daughter relationship". In other words, the findings suggest encouragement of strong relationship between the daughter and the mother at the formative years of the women development. Another crucial feature needed during the formative period is empathy, which is developed mutually, and such empathy can be developed faster between mother and daughter at the early formative development years. However, placing emphasis on the framework as propounded by Surrey (1983) arguably may not allow the women at the early formative period to relate freely with other sex of same age. While it may be helpful for the women development especially in development of empathy, it may put the women at a disadvantageous position to compete with their male counterpart.

In sum, while gender issue is very essential in formulation of broader human development, it is imperative that it is not focused exclusively on the women.

### Conclusion

According to Bird & Dewery (2003) developmental theories like that of human beings are subject to constant change. Hence, in the field of human development, theories are constantly emerging while existing theories are modified to reflect happenings in the environment. However as Bird & Dewery (2003) pointed out, the challenges in the subject of human development is reconciliation of the "traditional euro-western approaches" and the developmental theories with sociological and demographic data that acknowledge the social and cultural context in the human development theories.

These challenge become very obvious when some researchers in the field tend to deny the role of externalities such as culture in human development but insist on the *biological mechanical development theories*<sup>1</sup>. However, recent researchers in the field of human development and other subjects have come to acknowledge the importance of the linkage between other externalities, such as culture, and development. Hence, Ghadami et al. (2010) observed that no transformation can take place within a society without quality education. Education is one of the major components of human development index developed in 1990 to measure economic development and general quality of life within a country. It has direct impact on income, health and general standard of living within a country. Also Barrientos & Nino-Zarazua (2011:4), provided a linkage that exist between human development and poverty by arguing that first, poverty "remains a major challenge in the world" and confronting this challenge requires what the authors described as "social assistance" that is designed to reach out to the world poorest. Second, in order to achieve reduction in the poverty rate and break "intergenerational persistence of poverty (Barrientos & Nino-Zarazua, 2011: 4), it is imperative that there is a combined "income transfers with preferential access to health and education services (Barrientos & Nino-Zarazua, 2011: 4). Education and health services are the major components of human development and invariably the key to poverty reduction. This further reinforces the relationship between human development and poverty reduction.

The United Nations (UN) in recognition of the importance of human development is devoting much resource in developing quality human development especially in the developing and under-developed economies. In view of this development, human development indicators have been developed to measure economic development and growth of countries. This proves the direct linkage of human development and economic growth. Such linkages have also been established between poverty, inequality and human development (Chappero-Martinetti, 2006).

In view of this, much attention is focused on human development especially in developing economies such as Nigeria. According to Anand & Sen (1995), human development report of the UNDP has "over the past five years" have achieved a lot in shifting the focus of attention in the world community from the economic growth indicators to reflecting on the well-being of the population. Such focus on under developed and developing economies is as a result of myriad of issues that has continued to impact negatively on the economies developmental strategy. Thus, since 1990, human development index is adopted, especially by the United Nations agencies and other international bodies to measure human development. While the index has become very popular among development economists, Nagel (2007) argues that new way of measuring human development in relation to economic development has "data limitation that really pose constraints on estimating the index".

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<sup>1</sup> *Emphasis mine*

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