

Development and Underdevelopment of African Continent: The Blame Game and the Way Forward

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Abstract

This paper considers the development dichotomy between the global north and global south. The focus of this paper is not about the global north but the underdevelopment and development options available to the African continent. It highlights the various theories of development and the flaws associated with such theories. This paper uses the theory of modernization, dependency and alternative development theories to operationalize how development is understood along the development trajectory. The paper also highlights the causes of underdevelopment of African continent and finally proposes ways forward for the continent of Africa encompassing strong institutions, culture and development, transfer of technology and African countries strategically positioning themselves in the world capitalist system.

Keywords: Development, underdevelopment, Africa, structural adjustment, modernization, dependency.

Introduction

‘Today, the lighthouse of development shows cracks and is starting to crumble. The idea of development stands like a ruin in the intellectual landscape. Delusion and disappointment, failures and crimes have been the steady companions of development and they tell a common story: it did not work. Moreover, the historical conditions which catapulted the idea into prominence have vanished as development has become outdated. But above all, the hopes and desires which made the idea fly, are now exhausted as development has grown obsolete’ (Sachs, 1992, 3).

The growing gap between developed and developing countries has dominated international relations and diplomacy for a long time. This gap has led to constant capital influx from the developed countries to those in the Third World including Africa; with the goal of helping them overcome their problems and reduce the gap. The debate concerning the underdevelopment and development of African continent and other equally poor parts of the world is not a new phenomenon in the development discourse but can be traced back to antiquity. There exist a number of reasons deduced to the present condition of Africa which might be termed as development crisis. This is because the continent has remained largely underdeveloped regardless of the presence of huge natural resources (gold, cocoa, bauxite, oil, diamond, timber) and human resources based. Several decades after the end of colonialism, most parts of Africa is still fighting with problems such as high poverty rate, corruption, lack of basic infrastructural facilities in all sectors of the economy, unemployment, high mortality rate, political instability and insecurity of lives and property. The development discourse is made up of a web of key concepts. ‘It is impossible to talk about development without referring to concepts such as poverty, production, the notion of the state, or equality. These concepts first rose to prominence during modern Western history and only then have they been projected on the rest of the world’ (Sachs, 1992, 5). For example, Ghana touted as one of the best democratic and politically stable countries in Africa and Nigeria the most heavily populated African country, according to the United Nations human development report (2011), ranked 135 and 156 respectively out of 187 countries (UN, 2011). Against the background of Africa’s development crisis, emanated the debate on how to solve the crisis of development in Africa. This debate has been a blistering one and is dominated by two main related themes, namely: the argument over the actual meaning of the concept of development and the appropriate pathway to development (Ikenna, 2009). However, despite the discrepancy among scholars, global policy makers and institutions over these issues, numerous attempts have been made to understand and solve the crisis of development in Africa.



Fig. 1. Source: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/maps/africa/>

Figure 1 above shows the map of African continent.

The aim of this paper is to examining the history of development and underdevelopment in general and narrows it down to African continent, look at the diverse definitions of the concept of development and underdevelopment, reflect on some of the theories of development with much emphasis on modernization theory(1950s), dependency theory(1960s), alternative development paradigm(1970s) and the neo liberalist perspective(1980s) and reflect on the diverse causes of African underdevelopment as a crisis, looking at possible pathways for the realization of development in Africa and conclusion.

History of Development and Underdevelopment

With regard to the history of development and underdevelopment, there exists limited literature. However, the origin of development and underdevelopment is associated with the speech of President Truman of United States. That very day, the day Truman took office as the 33rd president of United States, a new epoch was opened for the world – the eon of development. President Truman in his speech on that day asserted that ‘we must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas.

It is worth noting that, President Truman was not the first person to use the word- development. A former member of the Secretariat of the International Labour Organization by name Wilfred Benson was probably the first person to have invented the word- development when he referred to underdeveloped areas in his writing piece on economic basis for peace in 1942. The expression by Wilfred Benson found no echo from the experts in the field of development studies and the public, hence its extinction at the time (ibid). However, the word development only acquired relevance and the echo from the experts and the public when President Truman presented it as an emblem of his policy direction as the 33rd President of United States (ibid). Since then, development has signified at least one thing: to flee from the undignified state called underdevelopment.

Definitions of Development and Underdevelopment

The exact meaning of development in the terrain of development studies has been plagued with intense controversy as to what is development, for whom and by whom. These controversies notwithstanding, there are a plethora of definitions propounded by various scholars to capture the meaning of development from their perspective and their ideological orientation. The term, development, has been used in several ways. Traditionally, it was equated with growth of per capita income. Since the 1970s, other indicators of development have become widely used by development scholars and development agencies such as the World Bank, IMF, etc. The meeting of basic needs (or, equivalently, reduction in absolute poverty), the creation of modern employment opportunities, and the achievement of a less unequal distribution of income have all become important criteria in determining the level of development(Todaro & Smith, Case Studies in Economic Development, 2003).

According to Todaro and Smith(2012:16), ‘development must therefore be conceived of as a multidimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes, and national institutions, as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and the eradication of poverty’. This presupposes that development is not purely an economic phenomenon but rather a multi-dimensional process involving

reorganization and reorientation of entire economic and social system and it is a process of improving the quality of all human lives with three equally important aspects- which are basic components or core values serve as a conceptual basis and practical guideline for comprehending the inner meaning of development. These core values are sustenance, self-esteem and freedom and these represent a universal goal sought after by individual and society (ibid).

The above definition of freedom is in tandem with Amartya Sen notion on development. He also defines development strictly converse to that of economic point of view. According to him, all individuals are gifted with certain set of capabilities while it is simply a matter of realizing these capabilities that will allow a person to escape from poverty and their state of unfreedom. The un-freedom comprises lack of education, illiteracy, poor health, malnutrition, etc. (Sen, 1999). Sen subjects the fundamental assumption of development viewed from purely economic point of view with emphasis on economic growth and GDP, by arguing that income poverty should not be the single most important factor in determining development because there are equally important dimension to development, hence the concept of development being a multidimensional concept(ibid). Sen expands the critical interpretations of freedom by examining five elemental forms of instrumental freedoms: political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees, and protective security and lays emphasis on the fact that, the five forms of freedom are complementary, interrelated and inextricable (ibid). This presupposes that individual freedom must comprise of the five for an individual to realize his or her potentials.

Development in my personal view has to do with qualitative and quantitative improvement in all aspect of human endeavour comprising the economic, political, cultural, environmental, social, etc.

Theories of Development and Underdevelopment

In an attempt to explain the development gap existing between the developed and underdeveloped countries, a galore of theories and models have been advocated by various scholars and practitioners in the field in support of the reasons behind the divergence and disparity in the level of development across space and time. It is of essence to note that, these theories and models developed by these scholars to explain the developmental disparity are not without criticisms.

Development theory thus refers to the leading theories and many rival and subsidiary theories that critique, revise, sum and offer broad explanatory frameworks on development (Pieterse 2009). Thus, a development theory has both a development concept and a development strategy associated with it. Development theories are also often inter-disciplinary and problem oriented.

Modernization theory is one of the theories that explains pathway to development and gains fame in the 1950s. Modernization theory emerged in the 1950s as an explanation of how the industrial societies of North America and Western Europe developed. The theory argues that societies develop in fairly predictable stages though which they become increasingly complex. Development depends primarily on the importation of technology as well as a number of other political and social changes believed to come about as a result. For example, modernization involves increased levels of schooling and the development of mass media, both of which foster democratic political institutions. Transportation and communication become increasingly sophisticated and accessible, populations become more urban and mobile, and the extended family declines in importance as a result. According to modernization theories, endogenous factors in the countries, such as traditional, illiteracy, the traditional attitude of the population, agrarian structure, the low division of labour, the lack of communication and infrastructure, etc., are answerable for underdevelopment. Differences in structure and historical origin are considered of little importance; international dependencies are not taken into account. Rostow's five stages of economic growth feature predominantly in the 1950s. In his classic work titled- *The Stages of Economic Growth*, Rostow outlines an optimistic scenario by positing five stages of economic development which all societies in one point in time will transcend to realizing development. These stages are the traditional stage, the pre-condition for take-off, the take-off stage, and drive to maturity and lastly the stage of mass consumption (Rostow, 1990). Despite the contribution of the modernization school of thought to development discourse, it is criticized of being eurocentric, development not a linear process, ignored the history and culture of different group of people and society, etc.

Following the flaws in modernization theory emerges the dependency theory to explaining development and underdevelopment. This school of thought regarding development and underdevelopment discourse emerged in the 1960s. Dependency was defined as a 'situation in which a certain number of countries have their economy conditioned by the development and expansion of another' (Greig, Hulme and Turner, 2007; Dos Santos quoted in Valenzuela and Valenzuela 1978:544). One scholar whose name keeps ringing a bell with the mentioning of dependency theory is Andre Gunder Frank. In his classical piece titled- *the development of underdevelopment*, he postulates that the underdevelopment of undeveloped countries or part of the world is a ramification of the unequal and unfavourable conditions they found themselves in, in the world capitalist system. To understand why a nation is poor and underdeveloped, it is futile to examining the values and attitudes endogenous to an individual but more pertinent to exploring the role a nation performed in the world capitalist system (Greig,

Hulme and Turner, 2007). The dependency theory turned the modernization theory on its head by rejecting the argument that any relationship between the traditional and the modern societies would culminate into mutual benefits or gains. For them, the possibility of peripheral development is hindered by this relationship (ibid). (Greig, Hulme and Turner, 2007; Frank 1970, 8) illustrated how poorest countries and most remote part of Latin America had been historically linked to the world capitalist system and how this relationship and contact between tradition and modernity led to underdevelopment. So in a nutshell, the main thrust of the dependency school of thought in expatiating development and underdevelopment discourse has to do with core-periphery relationship in the world capitalist system and how the system has a negative repercussion on the periphery states. Gunder Frank used the core periphery nexus to refer to the industrialized/developed and underdeveloped /poor nations respectively.

In the 1970s emerged the alternative development perspective in explaining how development can be engineered across space and especially in the underdeveloped part of the world of which Africa continent is an integral part. It is essence to take note of the fact that, dissatisfaction with mainstream development led to movement of alternative development and by mainstream development, I am referring to the meta narratives or grand theories to development which include the modernization and dependency school of thought or theory. According to the 1975 report of the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 'What Now? Another Development', development should be: geared to the satisfaction of needs, endogenous and self-reliant and in harmony with the environment. Whether this was meant to be an alternative practice of development apart from the main- stream or whether it is to change mainstream development is not quite settled (Pieterse, 1998). Alternative development to development can also imply local development with local knowledge and expert knowledge, bottom up approach with the objective directed at the provision of basic needs. A critical question is whether alternative development is an alternative way of achieving development, broadly sharing the same goals as mainstream development but using different means, participatory and people-centered which is conversely to the mainstream development theories which focus on the state as their agent. It would seem this way if we consider the huge increase of development funds being directed through NGOs during the past two decades which now surpass the total annual disbursements through the IMF and World Bank. Despite the new dimension brought on board by the alternative development in the development and underdevelopment discourse with focus on NGOs and local actors as its agents, it is not devoid of censures. Alternative development has been turned on its head that, how alternative is alternative development? And also it lacks sufficient theoretical cohesion and there exist varying understandings of what is alternative development and what is not.

In the 1980s appeared the neo liberalism perspective in development landscape. Neo liberalism is seen as representative of reform under globalization. Neo liberalism 'is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. The state has to guarantee, for example, the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up those military, defense, police and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets' (Thorsen & Lie)). The neo liberalism rests on economic liberalizations, free trade, open markets, privatization of nationalized industries, deregulation and enhancing the role of private sector in society with the minimal role of the state in the economy which had seen reflection in the Structural Adjustment Program as package for the developing countries which several African countries including Ghana, Zambia, etc benefitted from. Structural Adjustment Program is the policies implemented by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (the Bretton Woods Institutions) in developing countries in the 1980s. These policy changes are conditions for getting new loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or World Bank, or for obtaining lower interest rates on existing loans following the oil crisis which put burden on most economies especially the developing and the underdeveloped countries. Conditionality is attached to ensure that the money lent will be spent in accordance with the overall goals of the loan. The Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) are created with the goal of reducing the borrowing country's fiscal imbalances. The neo liberal prescription has been seen as a panacea for spreading growth across space since it is market led but it has been challenged and criticized by many scholars that, it has bring more inequality across space than ever before, SAPs have failed to restore economic growth in short and medium term run, introduction of SAPs led to worse health status of people in countries which implemented SAPs and that SAPs do not address the economic constraints of Sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., low levels of technology, human resource skills, small and fragmented markets). (Rapley 2007:4) posited that 'structural adjustment yielded some positive gains in some of the more advanced third-world countries. However, in the poorer countries, those most in need of rapid change, it was less effective, and in some places actually did more harm than good'.

Causes of African Continent Underdevelopment

The current state of African development which has been described by scholars as a development crisis cannot be explained from one perspective but several perspectives of exogenous and endogenous factors which have plagued the continent for decades.

One of the exogenous causes of African underdevelopment widely alluded to by many scholars in the literature has to do with colonialism and the scramble for African continent in 1880. Most African countries have been colonized by the British through the policy of indirect rule and the French through their policy of assimilation. According to Simensen, 'colonial rule can be regarded as the next phase of Africa's integration into the international system. European policies varied considerably between regions and over time, from a brutal period of conquest at the end of the 19th century to active development efforts following the Second World War'. Colonialism is linked to African underdevelopment from the perspective of exploitation of precious natural resources from the continent of Africa which is used to develop the jurisdiction of their colonial masters at the detriment of the African countries. For example, Ghana is been colonized by Britain and numerous resources including gold, diamond, bauxite, timber, etc. are exploited to the benefit of Britain. But the question is what about Ethiopia who has never been colonized before in its history but is still underdeveloped. One conspicuously feature of Ethiopia's level of development is that, it is lagging behind to even countries that have been colonized, for example Ghana. So the question is, is colonialism important in explaining African underdevelopment? Yes to a lesser extent since there are other equally important factors which are endogenous to Africa's underdevelopment. The world capitalist system in which the African countries find themselves in also accounted for Africa's underdevelopment. This school of thought is widely supported by the dependency school of thought pioneered by Gunder Frank. It is argued that, it is not the existence of the world capitalist system per se which is shaped by neo liberal policies of free market, minimal role of the states, but has to do with the role played by individual states in the world capitalist system. The African countries played a very weak role in the world capitalist system with focus on production of raw material with less or no value which affects their relationship in the world market. In the 1980s, the IMF and World Bank presented a unified package, often in the form of an Economic Recovery Programme, as a condition for African countries to find a way out of the debt crisis. Central to this package is the rolling back of the state from the control of the economy, and encouraging rather a facilitator role. According to (Olutayo & Omobowale, 2007) state capitalism that was endorsed in the colonial and the latter part of the 1960s is now perceived as a hindrance to development. In laying greater importance on market forces for the distribution of resources, some of the policies that most African countries have now endorsed since the 1980s include: significant devaluations, removal of government subsidies and price controls, cuts in public expenditure with deep public sector retrenchments, privatization, relaxation of foreign exchange controls, an increase of interest rates to real levels, the withdrawal of protectionist measures and an increase in agricultural producer prices.

Apart from the exogenous factors accounting for Africa's underdevelopment, there are equally important endogenous factors causing underdevelopment in Africa. One of such endogenous factors is corruption. Today, most African nation-states have been independent for forty years. Unfortunately, at forty, many of these nation-states have made either minimal progress or stagnated, in terms of socioeconomic growth and development. Despite the fact that the continent's problems are multifaceted, corruption, particularly in countries where it has become an integral part of the social fabric, is a major handicap to their development efforts. Corruption may be defined simply as the misuse of entrusted power for private gain (Ineke 2010; Transparency International 2006). The financial resource involved in these corrupt deals could have been channeled into useful project that will help to stimulating growth and development in African countries. It is also important to take note of the fact that no single regime or government in Africa after independence has been excluded from corruption saga, being rumour or truth. Taking Ghana for instance, there were corruption rumours leveled against ex-President Kufour regime of purchasing a mansion (Hotel Kufuor), kickbacks at the seat of government from contractors, Sekyi Hughes (former Speaker of Parliament) looting government bungalow, sale of lands to NPP ministers and cronies, etc. Under the late Professor Mills regime, there exists corruption allegations and famous one include the Woyome saga which is currently on going in court, Mabey and Johnson saga which led to firing of some ministers under his government – DrSipaYanke, etc. This corruption allegation from Ghana is to buttress the point that, though Ghana has been touted as the most democratic country and beacon for African continent, there are still challenges of corruption which is thwarting its economic as well as its democratic gains. The question is, if Ghana being touted in such colour is riddled with corruption challenges, how much more other African countries?

Geographical location of the Africa is another factor that accounted Africa's underdevelopment. This factor is endogenous to African because it has nothing with external forces having their influence on the continent, hence its underdevelopment. Most of the African landmass lies within the tropical climate with no access to either the Atlantic or the Indian Ocean. This made the vast areas of the interior continent home to malaria and tsetse fly which afflict humans and animals respectively. This made some researchers including Bhattacharya on the

causes of African underdevelopment to test the hypothesis of malaria as the dominant cause of the underdevelopment in the continent. In particular, Bhattacharya 2009 cited in (Kumo , 2009) argues that malaria and other tropical diseases have fatal as well as debilitating effects on human population in Africa. It negatively affects productivity, savings, and investments in physical and human capital and directly affects economic performance of the continent. It is important to note that significant achievement has been chalked in the area of improvement in health on the African continent as portrayed by Bhattacharya but more has to be done.

Furthermore, weak institutions in African countries are used in explaining causes of underdevelopment in Africa. This is also an endogenous factor in explaining the divergence in developed and the less developing and underdeveloped countries. Increasingly research has shown that weak, missing or perverse institutions are the roots of underdevelopment. Other explanations for development, such as technological innovation, investment, or years of schooling are not associated with higher rates of economic growth (Shirley 2005; Easterly 2002). The vast majority of Africans today live in countries that have failed to create or sustain strong institutions to foster exchange and protect persons and property. Most of African countries are suffering from these problems but a point must be made that, there are some countries whose institutions are weaker than others (Sudan, Congo, Somalia, etc.) Individuals in these countries enforce most bargains using informal mechanisms—private armies; threats to reputation; ostracism—and they have little trust. The state is either too weak to prevent theft of property by private actors, or so strong that the state itself threatens property rights and personal independence. Individuals and organizations face a high risk that they will not be able to realize a return if they invest in specific knowledge, skills, or physical assets, so they refrain from investment; production, innovation, and productivity are low and the economy festers (Shirley, 2005).

The way forward for Africa continent's development

It is a desire for all African countries to be at par with the developed countries and I suggest some ways for propelling development on the continent of Africa.

First and foremost, culture and development nexus should be looked in their development effort. They should adopt policies, programmes and technologies that are appropriate and compatible with their cultures. Culture is defined by Granato et al and quoted in Selington and Smith's book as 'a system of basic common values that help shape the behaviour of the people of given a society'. Some economists have confronted culture and found it helpful in understanding economic development. Perhaps the broadest statement comes from the pen of David Landes: Max Weber was right. If we learn anything from the history of economic development, it is that culture makes almost all the difference. Elaborating on Landes's theme, Japanese economist Yoshihara Kunio writes, "One reason Japan developed is that it had a culture suitable for it (Harrison, 2006). It is therefore important on the part of African leaders to focus on their culture in relation to development from economic perspective, Sen's perspective on development, etc. The culture and development nexus brings to mind the Confucian ethics which is a contemporary theory linking economic development to cultures of some countries as a ramification of observation of some countries economic progress since the World War II. Example of such countries includes Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, etc. Therefore, it is essence on the part of African countries to look inward to their culture in development effort. In fact, there are certain elements of Africa's rich cultural heritage that has led to the evolution and mastery of technical knowledge with respect to the arts, textile industry, craft, music technology and food technology, in which most African societies have made some progress, and have attracted cross-geographic exchange and interaction (Ogungbure, 2011). As part of culture, Africans should patronize made in African goods and reduce their taste for foreign goods which is eroding gains that should have been made by African countries should they patronize what is produced in their countries.

Secondly, emphasis on strong institutions in African countries can be a panacea for African development and not having strong political leaders as it pertains in Africa. This is in tandem with statement by President of USA; Barack Obama when he made a statement that, Africa needs strong institutions and not strong leaders when he met late President Mills of Ghana in 2009. Having a strong institutions can help fight against corruption since the system will be tight to address issues of corruption of whatever form- political corruption which is paramount in Africa as well as corruption in the civil service, etc. In addition, to combat the pernicious problem will require putting in place appropriate anti-corruption and legal machinery; and prosecute without fear and favour. The low incidence of corruption by the governing elites in countries like Denmark, New Zealand, Sweden, Singapore, Finland, Iceland and the Netherland is present, thanks to rational legal bureaucratic practice, is evidence that corruption can be contained (Uneke, 2010). And this cannot be achieved if there exists no strong institutions and therefore, having strong institutions in Africa will be in the right direction toward development.

In addition, transfer of technology is another pathway which can aid in Africa's development. Technology is basically defined as an application of scientific knowledge to practical problems whilst transfer of technology on the other hand has to do with the processes by which technological knowledge moves within or between organizations and countries; it can be international technology transfer. Technology transfer is an important means by which developing countries can gain access to technologies that are new to them. For example, the acquisition of foreign technologies by East Asian newly industrialized countries, coupled with endogenous

technological learning efforts to accumulate the capability to change technologies have been key factors in their rapid technological and economic development. African countries can do the same but definitely there are challenges of acquisition and mastery of technology, both costly and time-consuming, acquired technologies often need to be adapted to local conditions- hence the issue of appropriate technology. All in all, transfer of technology can help African countries in all aspect of their economies toward development.

The last but not the least forward matching for the African countries when it comes to development has to do with strategically positioning themselves in the world capitalist system being perpetuated by globalization and its compelling forces. In order for globalization to have positive impacts on Africa's development, national governments must have the choice to choose among apt monetary, fiscal, trade, macroeconomic and other economic and social policies without heavy-handed intrusion by the developed countries and the multilateral institutions these countries control. In short, a more democratic international economic and political environment is a sine qua non for sustained and broad based economic development to take place in Africa.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, the development gap between the developed (core) and the underdeveloped (periphery) countries has remained an issue among development experts, academicians, politicians and students of development studies. Various development theories of different nature- meta and micro narratives on development have been advanced but the gap between the developed and the underdeveloped countries is widening by days. Various factors have been advanced for African underdevelopment comprising both endogenous and exogenous factors of colonialism and the scramble for African continent, world capitalist, corruption, geographical location and weak institutions. Despite the above causes, there is still hope for Africa's development through the options of culture and development nexus, emphasis on strong institutions in African countries, transfer of technology, strategic positioning of themselves in the world capitalist system.

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