

RELIGION, SOCIO-ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE IN AFRICA: MODEL FOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE POST COVID-19 ERA

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Abstract

In every society, traditional or modern, Religious, social and economic factors remain common denominator for development. While Religion safeguards the spiritual and moral aspects of man, he is a product of the society. Therefore, his well-being, depends on the cordial atmosphere which may exist in order for him to meet his needs for development. As it were, the world is now a global village. With advances in science and technology, no part of the world is so isolated from the developmental trend worldwide. This notwithstanding, the developed countries continually kept the developing countries in a state of perpetual under -development. This paper focuses on the imperatives of religious, and socio-economic independence of Africa as a permease for sustainable development in the post covid-19 era. The paper identifies religious, social and economic factors as denominators that drive development in any society. It holds that religious and socio-economic independence of Africa from the entanglements of the western world, will accelerate development in Africa. The study adopts the dependency theory of development as the lens for the study. The aim and objectives of the study is to identify and explain the role of religion, and socio-economic factors as indices for development of Africa. The research combines both the historical and phenomenological approaches in the discussion. It observes that Africa's underdevelopment is largely because of its overdependence on foreign sources. It concludes that Africa should look inward and explore the natural resources and human potentials to drive its development.

Introduction

Without doubt, the COVID19 pandemic left a big scare on the human race. Since its outbreak, the world order is no longer the same. This is to the

extent that the social, economic, political, cultural and religious life have twisted and stumbled, each searching for away forward. Similarly, Nnorum, Obodoegbulam and Wosa (2020) argue that “international relation and global economy, now seek for a new definition”. The truth of the matter now is that, it is no longer business as usual.

Worse still, this is coming at a time when some world powers like the United States, Britain and Russia, are passing through political and economic uncertainties. The strength which the less developed world would have drawn from the larger economies, seem not forth coming. Instead, the United States, Britain, Italy, France, Russia, Spain and Brazil appear to be worse affected. According to OECD (2020) Beyond health risk, the covid-19 shock to African economic systems manifested in three ways:

- i. Lower trade and investment from china in the immediate term.
- ii. A demand slump associated with the lockdowns in the European union and OECD countries.
- iii. A continental supply shock affecting domestic and intra-African trade.

Unfortunately, Africa’s economic and political development are tied to the dictates of the west. According to Bojang (2017), the problem of African development includes: bribery and corruption, bad governance, weak political institutions and undemocratic values. As it were, the COVID19 pandemic, has forced the world to redefine them such as independence, inter-dependence and self-sufficiency and sustainability. During the first phase of the pandemic, international borders were closed, air lines parked up and international travels halted. Each country and continent were forced to look inward for a possible way forward. This paper explores the prospects of religion, socio-economic independence in Africa, as model for development in the post COVID 19 era.

The study adopts the dependency theory of development as the lens for the study. The aim and objectives of the study is to identify and explain the role of religion, and socio-economic factors as indices for development of Africa. The research combines both the historical and phenomenological approaches in the discussion. It observes that Africa’s underdevelopment is largely because of its overdependence on foreign sources. It concludes that Africa should look inward and explore the natural resources and human potentials to drive its development.

Theoretical framework

The dependency theory, forms the lens of this study. According to Hara Lambus and Horborn (2013), this theory originated from two Papers published by Hans singer and Paul Prebisch in 1949. In their separate papers, the two scholars

argued that the terms of trade for some developing countries had deteriorated in the cause of time. They contended that given the present economic situation, the underdeveloped countries now access fewer goods and services when compared to what is used to be some ten years ago. In response to the above insinuation Raul Prebisch submitted that in order to wriggle out of the import substitution, industrialization, no trade and export orientation are the only panacea for the underdeveloped countries to get out of the situation.

Premised on the above supposition, dependency theory is the notion that resources flow from the periphery of poor and underdeveloped states to a core of wealthy countries enriching the latter at the expense of the former. Based on the above scenario, dependency theory submits that the poor states continue to sponsor the growth and development of the richer states at their own detriment.

Viewed from another perspective, it is observed that the dependency theory was developed as a Marxist perspective by Paul Baran in 1957 in deed, this theory is noticed to have many things in common with the imperialism pronounced by Rosa Luxemburg and Vladimir Lenin.

Without overstating the obvious, scholars of development studies have identified two main perspectives in this theory. The Latin American structuralist exemplified by the works of Prebisch, Celso Furtade, and Anibal Pinto as well as Paul A. Baran and Sweezy.

On the final note, it is necessary to submit that the dependency theory was postulated in response to the modernisation theory which the developed countries were using to regulate and control the economic development of the underdeveloped economies of the world.

Challenges to Africa's Development

One of the Greatest challenges which confronts Africa's development is the concept of modernisation which the developed world conversed. Modernisation theory postulated that the present state of the less developed countries is an original state the developed countries once passed. This theory insists that for the developing countries to grow, they have to move away from their traditional culture and embrace modernity.

Prior to the introduction of this theory the colonial perception of Africa was one of primitive, barbaric, backwardness. Therefore, they set a task for themselves to see to it that the African continent is transplanted to their pattern by choice or by force. According to this theory, the planks of development include: social pattern of demography, urbanisation, literacy, investment, trade and government finance, economic pattern of consumption and production,

psychological attributives of nationality and calculability, as well as ascriptive and identified motivation. In another respect the above supposition, forced Africans to adopt life-styles that are completely alien to them. For instance, Africans were deceived to consume what they do not produce and produce what they do not consume. Egbezor (2018) criticised the western parameters outlined above and highlighted others such as the creation of nation states, European styled formal education system, the introduction of European manufactured goods, and the development of European infrastructure such as tarred roads, and railways as indices for Africa's continuous under development. In a critical analysis of Africa's political economy, Ake (1974) as quoted by Egbezor (2018) observed that "the colonial policies in Africa was riddled with confusion. To this end, it sought to improve the socio-economic lifestyle of the people, with exploitative tendencies characterised by forced labour. He notes that in course of time, rather than the economy making progress, it dwindled to the extent that by 1939, a given unit of export could only purchase about 60% of the import which it would have purchased between 1860 and 1880.

Identifying with the arguments above, Bojang, (2017) holds that the post-independent African states has undergone several political and economic reforms yet there is little development to show for it". Africa by far, one of the richest continents endowed with natural and mineral resources in the world, but among the poorest in the world.

According to International Resource Panel, (2020) Almost all human activities depend on natural resources to a greater or lesser extent, directly or indirectly. However, in human's pursuit of social and economic development, natural resources are not put sufficiently in focus. Further, they stressed that in reality, a long-term vision for the responsible management of natural resources is critical in ensuring socioeconomic resilience, and strategic to conceiving and achieving sustainability objectives in the twentieth century.

Bringing the socio-economic uncertainty of African countries to discuss the South-African situation, Thomsom and Wissink, (2018) contend that South African society has undergone deep-seated socio-political, economic, and legislative changes since 1994. Notwithstanding, the numerous challenges which confront Africa, the western world still persist in exploiting its human and material resources to Africa's disadvantage.

The fate of Africa in the socio-economic sphere also transcended to religion. Nwangweso, (2018) argues that, to remain relevant in the 21st century, African religions must seek to compete and remain relevant by embracing

creatively and innovatively frameworks and tools that engage a modernizing world.

According to Sibani, (2018) The socio-cultural evolution in Africa in one way or the other has provoked development and crisis as well. Most of the time, the crisis generated are intolerable at the extreme, antagonistic and provokes war. The various conflicts which greeted the coming of white-man in many parts of Africa were eloquent enough to this.

In the wake of the pre-colonial and colonial era, Mbiti (1969)quoted in Waweru (2020) notes that “one of the early dominant attitudes in this early period was the assumption that Africans beliefs, cultural characteristics, and even food were borrowed from the outside world”.

In a similar manner, , Frobenious as quoted by Idowu (1973) remarks concerning the Africans “if the soil of Africa is turned up today, beyond the colonialists plough share, no ancient weapon will lie in the furrows, if the virgin soil is cut beyond canal, its excavation will reveal no ancient tomb, and if the axe effects a clearance in the primeval forest, it will nowhere ring up the foundation of any old world palace”

Idowu (1973) also quoted Emille Ludwig as asserting that “how can the untutored Africans conceive of God; how can this be. deity is a philosophical construct which the savages are incapable of framing”. In the light of the above perceptions about Africa and its socio-economic sphere, these early western explorers, ethnographers and scholars never felt that Africa holds any future for itself.

Adogbo (2010) quoting Parinder (1962) berated early European writers who used negative words and parochial notions to describe and discuss African indigenous religious traditions with derogatory terminologies. Unfortunately, those cultural artifacts and relics which the early missionaries and explorers condemned as fetishes and idols, were carted away to enrich their museumsand decorate their cities. For instance, the Ethiopia’s Oblis, which stands very tall in Rome. Again, is the bronze terracotta of the Queen of ancient Benin kingdom, which was gallantly displayed in a London museum.

According to Tasie (2013), the missionaries who came to Africa did not act in any way different. In their effort to plant the Christian gospel in the soil of Africa, they denigrated African culture and tradition and branded them as; fetish, idol worship, animism, paganism, nature worship, ancestor worship and the like. Unfortunately, this misconception mirrors the perceptions of early missionaries, traders, and travellers to Africa.

The Promises

The formation of the defunct organisation of African Unity (OAU) now African Union (AU) is an indication that Africa knows her problem and the cause of her underdevelopment. According to Ikechukwu et al, (2018) With the ascent of democratization in the 1990s and of 'new' pan-Africanism derived from the formation of the African Union, Africa appeared set to claim its vaunted destiny. Other regional bodies like Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), East African Development Commission (EADC) are indicatives that Africa is ready for self-determination. In another respect, the formation of New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) African free trade organisation (FRTA) and African Development Bank are added steps for development.

At the ECOWAS level, the introduction of such policies like Free movement of goods and persons, embodied in the free trade agreement, the ECOWAS parliament and the ECOWAS court position the region as capable of driving its development. The present move to extend the free trade agreement to all AU member countries, will help to ensure the movement of goods and services within the continent. Some African entrepreneurs investing in different parts of the African continent speaks volume of the African ingenuity. For instance, the building of Dangote cement factory in Kenya, the in-road of DSTV in Nigeria, the flourishing business of MTN in Nigeria, the operation of Slock airline in Gambia, the presence of Globacom in other west African countries are landmark efforts by Africans to take their own destiny in their hands.

The decentralisation of Headquarters of various development agencies and other institutions in Africa support the self-drive spirit of the people. In this regard, is the citing of African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa, African Development Bank in Abidjan and the Confederation of African Football in Cairo, Egypt. This means that Africa has the drive to carry all parts of the continent along.

The hosting of World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) in 1977 in Nigeria and the one which took place in Senegal earlier, are indicatives that Africa is rich in Arts and culture. In 2010, the Republic of South Africa hosted the World Cup for the first time on African soil. Throughout the fiesta, South Africans entertained the world with their "Vuvusila" which was unique in a way. The dominance of this *vuvusila* sound brought the attention of the world that really, Africa has something to offer the rest of the world community.

In the area of mineral resources and industrial raw materials, Africa is richly endowed. Africa is rich in oil and gas, Nigeria, Libya and Angola as well as

South Sudan are major world producers of the crude oil. South Africa is rich in uranium, Zambia in copper, Ghana and Cote d'voire coco among others. Presently, Nigeria is the world's largest producer of yam and cassava, Nigeria exports beans to Europe and other raw materials. In the Aviation Industry, Ethiopian, Egyptian and South African airlines are competing favourably in the international scene.

In the same spirit, the formation of Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) is one bold step towards liberating African continent from the economic strangulation of the west. This body since its inception is mandated to formulate and articulate economic development policies for Africa's development.

According to Ghosh (2020) The technological revolution that began in the late twentieth century is generally accepted to have fundamentally transformed economies, societies and even politics. Africa being the cradle of world civilisation, the advances in the information technology is not a surprise. These include; artificial intelligence (AI) software; artificial, augmented and virtual reality; advanced automation, robotics and machine intelligence; biotechnology and genetic engineering; blockchain; drones and autonomous vehicles; digital manufacturing; and so on.

According to Coulibaly (2020) "with one-third of the 2030 Agenda journey already complete, it is an opportune time to examine Africa's progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) so far as well as assess what adjustments to strategies are needed to overcome the remaining obstacles. The SDGs provide time-bound targets in key sectors including health, education, employment, energy, infrastructure, and the environment for all nations to achieve.

On the religious sphere, despite the negative impression about traditional religion, created by some early explorers, those of them who came to Africa in the mid and twentieth centuries, were objective enough about African people. Placid Temple 1957 as cited by Idowu (1973) remarked about the Baluba "The ontology of the people will give a special character and local colour to their beliefs and religious practices. To their language, to their institutions and customs, to their psychological reactions and more generally to their whole behaviour". (Temple 1959). In another respect, A.G. Leonard as cited by Ikengah-Metuh (1991) holds that "The Africans act religiously, dress religiously, dance religiously and die religiously, to them their existence is their religion and their religion their existence". Evans Pritchard (1956) as quoted by Obodoegbulam (2019) writing about Nuer of Sudan, also shares the view that the

Nuer has a comprehensive idea of the supreme being and worships him accordingly.

Commenting on the Igbo belief about God, Ikengah Metuh (1985) cited by Kanu (2015) contends that “The idea of God looms very large among the people. He adds that in Igbo tradition, God is the ultimate end of all activities and morality. Ejizu (1983) had earlier presented this same opinion when he quoted Arinze’s sacrifice in Igbo religious thought.

According to Ajugo (2020) among the Ogba people of Northern Niger delta, Ikwerre, Kalabari and Ekpeye, religion pervades all aspects of their life. Here, morals, values, ethics and general life are regulated by religious precepts. This applies to the Edo, Ibibio, Efik, Ijaw, Kalabari and Ogoni peoples.

Idowu (1964) in his book “towards an indigenous church” emphasized the evolution of a purely African oriented church. He stressed on how African should worship God using African patterns which are familiar and well known to the people. Garrick Braide in his evangelisation of the Niger Delta in the early 20th century, According to Obodoegbulam and Joel (2019) adopted the use of African instruments of drum and voices in propagating the gospel. In the opinion of Asaju (2010) this is a good example of Africans ingenuity. He goes on to write: After the dominant era of Catholicism and missionary Protestantism different types of Pentecostalism have immersed in Africa. In his opinion, , this is a good example of Africa producing what they want and consuming what they produce. In support of the above, Ogumbile and Akinade (2010) re-echoed that “Since its inception, the history of Christianity in Nigeria, has been marked by prodigious manifestations of change... “To these scholars, this is African ingenuity which should be encouraged.

According to Waweru, (2020) in the 21st century, there has been a flood of ideas on how to deal with African Theology and in particular the sources. Generally, it has been assumed that there are three major theological currents that have emerged in Africa in the last two decades: indigenization of Christianity as well as the place of liberation theology in Africa.

According to Waweru, (2020) Therefore the subject of African Theology should be approached from the context of Africans, if it does make sense. This approach will place emphasis on the culture of the African people whom African Theology reaches, thus making Africans the primary factor in the method of carrying out African Theology and spirituality.

The way forward

In view of the significant of religion and socio-economic independence of Africa, this paper recommends as follow.

- i. There should be economic revolution in Africa where goods produced outside should be deemphasised.
- ii. Inter trade agreement should be promoted among African countries.
- iii. The free movement of goods and services adopted in by ECOWAS countries should be replicated throughout Africa.
- iv. Cultural exchanges should be encouraged in Africa.
- v. African traditional religion should be revived to continue to re-emphasize African values of hard work and personal achievement.
- vi. The lessons of covid19 pandemic should be re-examined and re interpreted to suit local realities.

Conclusion

The lessons of the covid-19 pandemic reveal that no nation in the world can give their best to another, no matter how benevolent. Today, there is this philosophy of the covid19 vaccine nationalism. Within this early period of discovery, European countries decided as a matter of policy to attend to their own citizens first before allowing the vaccine to be exported to other parts of the world, under mining the fact that they helped to spread the virus. Today, there is another conspiracy theory that some of the countries in Europe are rejecting the Oxford axtra zenica vaccine so as to promote another brand of the Covid-19 vaccine.

Concerning the rush for foreign loans, aids, grants and even what is referred to as foreign direct investments, it is the opinion of this paper that all the branded foreign loans aids, and grants from outside Africa are all instruments of underdevelopment. If one may ask, what is the target of any investor? Without mincing word, no foreign investor will come to Nigeria and by extension Africa simply to contribute to her development. Even in the area of employment creation, they will bring their strategic workers from their home country. Off course, this is proper as they will not leave their investment to people, they do not trust their skill and expertise. A good example is the oil industry. Even the so call loans and grants, they also attach the conditionality to supply the equivalent of such loan and grants in materials and services.

Shortly after Nigeria's independence, there has been this deceitful terminology known as "technology transfer" which the west has continuously applied to make Nigeria believe them. However, since 1960, which European initiated investment has worked in Nigeria or any country in Africa? If Africa is sincere to herself, this study should serve as a wake-up call for her to look inward and fashion its model of technological development. After all, the traditional

black smiths, the canoe carvers, the sculptors, the potters, the craftsmen all developed their skills based on the needs of the people and the African society sustained its population very well prior to the colonial era.

Viewed from religious perspectives, the lessons of the relationship between the Church of England Anglican Communion and the Church of Nigeria Anglican Communion is enough to prove that Africa can stand on its own. Since the two severed relationship, the Church of Nigeria Anglican

Communion has braced up to explore alternative sources of financing its programmes and activities. In a similar manner, the Ethiopian church, and the Coptic Church are purely African brand of Christianity. The new religious movement and the founding of the indigenous churches in Nigeria are pointers that Africa has something to offer the wider world.

On the final note, this paper concludes that Africa should look inward and generate resource locally for its development. Indeed, no part of the world has history indicated that technology has ever been transferred. What is popular is that different empires in history, over-run weaker nations and seize or apprehend their technology. To be more precise, according to history, the collapse of the Egyptian civilisation, Babylonian Empire, Greek civilisation, the Roman empire, and recently, Japan before and after the second world war are ever fresh in the mind of scholars. At, best, it is possible to borrow technology or acquire but deceitful to think that any nation will be very willing to transfer their technology to another as doing that will off course sabotaging their own economy. This is exactly what the founders of African indigenous Christianity have done in evolving and developing African brand of Christianity in the form of Pentecostal and Aladura churches.

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