

## **Human Autonomy and Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria: A Critical Appraisal of Kantian Philosophy of Pure Reason**

**By**

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### **Abstract**

Based upon the belief that freedom forms the basis for happiness and progress under the control of moral law, Kantian philosophy has human autonomy as the guide to understanding society and action of man. Independent reasoning and choices conduce to social justice and development. This paper attempted an in-depth examination of the relevance and application of Immanuel Kant's philosophy of morality of freedom to understanding development in Africa nay Nigerian context. It further identified key impediments to development in Nigeria and x-rayed the level of freedom, happiness and progress enjoyed by Nigerians against the backdrop of choices born out of reasoning. The study is situated within the ambits of the dependency theoretical framework of analysis to explicate the rentier/subservient statue of Nigeria in its relationships with other countries and unmask the rationale for incidences of poverty and sorry state of development. Secondary sources of data were basically employed through a thorough review of related literature and the content analysis approach in data analysis. The paper observed that development should be borne out of personal/individual realization that gives rise to self actualization and contends that Kantian thesis on freedom mind and autonomy is not wholly tenable in our context owing to complex strands. It thus recommends an inward assessment that would conduce to allowance of greater freedom to citizens as enshrined in extant laws of the country and implementation of the freedom of information acts as recently ratified.

**Key words:** freedom, choice, reasoning, happiness, progress and development

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### **Background of the study**

Immanuel Kant's thesis is based on human autonomy and freedom that will bring about happiness and progress (development). He believes that human happiness can be valued through the product of human freedom. One of the fundamental characteristics of human beings as agents of action is their freedom of their will (Kant, 1787). In this sense, freedom and development are as completely linked together as are chickens and eggs! Without chickens, you get no eggs; and without eggs, you soon have no chickens. Similarly, without freedom you get no development, and without development, you will soon lose your freedom. In Nigeria, a growing crisis of legitimacy characterizes the relationship between citizens and the institutions that affect their lives. Citizens speak of mounting disillusionment with government, based on concerns about corruption, lack of responsiveness to the needs of the poor and the absence of a sense of connection with elected representatives and bureaucrats (Commonwealth Foundation 1999; Narayan et al. 2000). Traditional forms of expertise and representation are being questioned. The rights and responsibilities of the citizens are being challenged, as global inequalities persist and deepen. This scenario hinders any meaningful development that will usher in happiness for the people.

It is essential for government to foster participation of the citizens in the decision making process for the community in which they live in, and the efforts to combat extreme poverty' (Declaration on the Right to Development 2001). Nigerian development depends on foreign assistance and strategies postulated by the west like the Structural Adjustment Program and the ongoing privatization process to move forward yet these foreign plans have not fulfilled the purposes for which they were adopted rather it has worsened the problem. When Nigeria look up to the west for policies that will engender development without considering the people that will have direct effect of any strategy being adopted, then development is yet to take its full cause and yield desired profit.

If development is to increase peoples' freedom, it must be development for the people. It must serve them and their interest. This means that development brings freedom so far as it is the development that takes into cognizance the peoples' will, desires and choice as a rational being.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Copying and adaptation of other peoples' values and orientations are common features of most countries in Africa. Most African governments tend to borrow and adopt western theories and approaches very quickly regardless of peculiarities of our environment and orientation without recourse to self evaluation and harmonization of conceptual differences. Nigeria has moved from Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) through several other poverty reduction strategies without significant results owing to the fact that we are yet to really engage ourselves in the process. Development cannot be transferred, it is internally and self driven. Realization of oneself and self determination are invariably borne out of human autonomy and choices which engenders happiness and progress that in turn conduce to genuine cum meaningful development.

High incidences of poverty, poor provision of social/basic amenities of life, low autonomization of the state (Ake, 2001), weak public institutions of governance (Onu, 2012) and overarched lacuna between the government and the people are glaring indications of low involvement of the citizens in decision making as well as level of underdevelopment in Nigeria. Virtually our rules and enactments ranging from the constitution to human rights provisions including even our driving codes and educational systems of the nation are adaptations of the West amidst our claims of non-alignment. Nigerian economy is over 70% dependent on oil but the science and technology as well as the companies exploring and exploiting the mineral deposits are expatriates. The real proceeds of our natural endowments go to Shell, Exxon Mobil/Chevron who provides the required services thereby rendering Nigeria a rentier state. We thus become price takers in the industry that serves as the mainstay of our national economy.

### **Research Questions**

At the wake of the issues raised above, the following questions are considered imperative to understanding the dynamics of applying Kantian Philosophy of Pure Reasoning in our context.

1. Is there any significant relationship between free reasoning and challenges of socio-economic development in Nigeria?
2. What are the impediments to socio-economic and political development in Nigeria and?
3. Is Kantian philosophy of human autonomy applicable and a panacea to challenges of meaningful socio-economic and political development in Nigeria?

### **Objectives of the Study**

The paper is tied to the following set objectives:

1. To ascertain and analyze the level of relationships that exists between free reasoning and meaningful development in Nigeria;
2. To examine the level of individual freedom and human rights exercised by citizens of Nigeria and their possible impact on governance and development;
3. To identify and explain key impediments to meaningful socio-economic and political development in Nigeria along the perspective of freedom, choice and involvement in public governance in Nigeria;
4. To determine if the application of Kantian Philosophy of human autonomy can result in genuine socio-economic and political development in Nigeria.

### **Significance of the Study**

The paper has as its thesis the realization of human worth and maintains that development at various spheres begins with freedom which grants citizens choices and generates happiness and progress. It maintains that development starts with the individual's ability to understand himself along his environment and harness all potentials to solving his problems along free thought in the confines of moral law embedded in justice. This further implies that decision making should be open to citizens' participation which guarantees the ventilation of variegated opinions. The study thus identifies the need for individual freedom that generates choices, happiness and progress as a prime condition for genuine development and not copying and adaptation of theories and

postulations of Western scholars who end up impoverishing southern countries the most with their imperialist principles. It thus provides a bridge to the widespread perception that development is deeply rooted in imbibing western artifacts and socio-economic indicators.

The study is further considered significant in that it will serve as an eye opener to scholars to understand the place of Nigeria in the international system and embrace theories that will liberate Nigeria's dependent status so as to welcome a meaningful development. It will also inculcate in minds of the new generations to take a revolutionary step in jettisoning any disguised programs and policies which only fulfill the selfish interest of the western world to the detriment of the Nigerian people. And finally, provide additional panacea and knowledge to the already existing ones in tackling the impediments of Nigeria's development along the line of allowing citizens basic rights.

### **Scope of the Study**

This work will give an in-depth explication of the application of Kant's philosophy of moral autonomy in tackling the problems of Nigeria's development. In the same vein, it will provide detailed challenges of development in Nigeria and establish the relationship between Nigeria's freedom and meaningful development

### **Methodology**

Data for this study were derived from the research and analysis of scholars, analysts and practitioners, government documents and journal articles. This is to say that the primary method of study was an extensive review of available literature for descriptive analysis of the problems facing the Nigerian economy. The sources of information were carefully evaluated and analyzed content wise to determine their veracity.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is carried out within the analytical framework of the dependency theory. Dependency theory is also known as Underdevelopment theory/the Radical School of Thought/the Neo-Marxist theory. It came as a direct response to the short-comings of the Modernization theory in explaining why the core is developed, while the periphery is underdeveloped. Its proponents include; Andre Gunder Frank, Walter Rodney, Frantz Fanon, Samir Amin, Claude Ake, et cetera. This theory posits that the development of the Centre is as a result of the exploitation and the consequent underdevelopment of the periphery. Therefore, the relationship between the Periphery and the Centre could be likened to that between a seed and a plant. Just as a seed has to die in order to germinate and give life to plant, the periphery had to be underdeveloped in order to give development to the Centre. But while the relationship between a seed and a plant is natural and symbiotic, that between the Periphery and the Centre is man-made and parasitic. Applying this theory to the work, most of African countries have this commonality in copying

the versions of western policies, theories, approaches, values and orientations of the western countries without taking into cognizance our peculiar environment to self evaluation and harmonization of conceptual differences. Nigeria has moved from SAP through several other poverty reduction strategies without significant results owing to the fact that we are yet to really engage ourselves in the process. Development is not transferable rather it is something that is self determined, borne out of human autonomy and choices which engenders happiness and progress that in turn conduce to genuine cum meaningful development. Nigeria as said earlier on depends on the west for development to take its full course in the country. Nigeria depends wholly on the West for the formulation of socio-political and economic policies designed to benefit the West. These policies are rather instruments of exploitation and subjugation that renders the Nigerian state inconsequential, subservient, impoverished and underdeveloped. The capabilities of the political system are not exploited owing to the readiness of the countries in the metropole to provide services that deprive the citizens of Nigeria opportunities of making better use of their natural endowments ranging from human capital to mineral resources. These make citizens' participation in public governance very low and force the governments to be alienated from the people it is ordinarily meant to serve.

### **Freedom and Development Redefined**

Presenting the 2009 UNDP report on development as it concerns Nigeria, UNDP Resident Representative, Mr. Turhan Saleh stressed that development was not just about the rate of economic growth or the quantum of wealth in a country, but rather, ultimately, about the expanding peoples' choices to live a full life-based on good health, education, income, respect for basic rights and sustainable use of its natural resources (UNDP Report presentation retrieved from <http://www.oyibosonline.com/cgi-bin/newsscript.pl?record=6161>).

We often think of development as movement towards a better and more just society (Tungodden, 2001). It relates with individual freedom and choices especially as it concerns involvement in governance and sustenance of general will/common interest. Development shares significant links with freedom as succinctly presented by Sen (1999). He contends that expansion of human freedom should be viewed as the primary end and the principle means to development whether at the individual or aggregate levels.

Freedom is a key concept that could be seen as the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants though within the ambits of existing rules in a political system, speaks volume of human autonomy and privileges therein which grants the individual greater chances of making choices and getting heard in issues that concern him as well as getting carried along.

Economists usually address well-being in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) per head (Oulton, 2012). However, well-being can equally be viewed as a multi-dimensional phenomenon that is affected not just by material goods, but also by many other elements, including health,

education, political voice, environment and personal insecurity (Fleurbaey, 2009; Stiglitz et al., 2009).

There are three different approaches to well-being: welfare economics weights the various non-monetary dimensions of quality of life; subjective well-being places life satisfaction at its centre; and the capabilities approach makes well-being dependent on a combination of ‘functioning’ (‘doings and beings’) and ‘capabilities’ (the freedom to choose among alternative bundles of functionings) (Prados de la Escosura, 2014).

Recent research shows a strong global relationship between life satisfaction and per capita GDP. However, because the standard of happiness has shifted upwards over time with the level of income, average national life satisfaction provides a useful measure only in cross-section, not over time. Furthermore, neither life satisfaction nor health satisfaction is strongly correlated with objective measures of health, such as life expectancy (Deaton, 2008).

This paper favours the capabilities approach to well-being in the long run, in which development is seen as a process of expanding freedom and in which objective measures are used. Human development, a concept deep-rooted in the capabilities approach, was originally defined as ‘a process of enlarging people’s choices’ (UNDP, 1990): enjoying a healthy life, acquiring knowledge and achieving a decent standard of living. These achievements provide individuals with freedom to choose and the opportunity ‘to lead lives they have reasons to value’ (Sen, 1997). Human development can thus be depicted as positive freedom (Desai, 1991).

Furthermore, development as a concept is a victim of definitional pluralism (Lawal and Oluwatoyin, 2011). Gboyega (2003) captures development as an idea that embodies all attempts to improve the conditions of human existence in all ramifications. It implies improvement in material well being of all citizens, not the most powerful and rich alone, in a sustainable way such that today’s consumption does not imperil the future, it also demands that poverty and inequality of access to the good things of life be removed or drastically reduced. It seeks to improve personal physical security and livelihoods and expansion of life chances. Naomi (1995) believes that development is usually taken to involve not only economic growth, but also some notion of equitable distribution, provision of health care, education, housing and other essential services all with a view to improving the individual and collective quality of life (Naomi, 1995). Chrisman (1984) views development as a process of societal advancement, where improvement in the well being of people are generated through strong partnerships between all sectors, corporate bodies and other groups in the society. It is reasonable to know that development is not only an economic exercise, but also involves both socio-economic and political issues and pervades all aspects of societal life.

It thus matters how progress in the dimensions of human development is measured. Often social variables (life expectancy, height or literacy) are used, either raw (Acemoglu and Johnson, 2007; Hatton and Bray, 2010; Lindert, 2004) or linearly transformed (UNDP, 2010).

### **The problems of development in Nigeria**

In spite of series of development strategies, put in place by successive governments, and sometimes with good intentions, all attempts to generate meaningful development proved futile.

The incidences of poverty according to the 2010 publication of the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) revealed that a staggering 112.519 million Nigerians live in relative poverty conditions with an average life expectancy minimal rise from 46 in 1990 to 54 years in 2012 (WHO, 2014 retrieved from <http://www.brandpowerng.com/who-report-rates-nigerias-life-expectancy-low/>). The incidence of poverty as revealed by the NBS 2010 report implies that about 69% of Nigerians live in relative poverty even at the wake of uncorrelated growth in GDP that stands at 7.75%. More so, Unemployment Rate in Nigeria increased to 23.90 percent in 2011 from 21.10 percent in 2010. Unemployment Rate in Nigeria averaged 14.60 Percent from 2006 until 2011, reaching an all time high of 23.90 Percent in 2011 and a record **low of 5.30 Percent in 2006** (NBS Report retrieved from <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/nigeria/unemployment-rate>).

Based on this, one is now confronted with these puzzles: “Were those previous development plans or strategies bad in their context, or wrongly projected?” If nothing was wrong with the plans, then why is it still difficult to generate meaningful development in spite of the huge resources at our disposal? The solutions to these puzzles are not farfetched. A lot of factors have combined together to fetter nation’s development. One, there are in most cases, no executive capacity responsible for the formulation and implementation of the plan. What we usually see are officials entrusted to such a position but without any meaningful executive authority. Some of the previous development plans failed because; there was little or no consultation of the general public. Planning is supposed to involve even the peasants in the villages. Even, the Local Government officials who are close to the people were not consulted. Planning is not an edifice where technocrats alone operate (Mimiko, 1998). Lack of good governance also militates against national development. Where there is no good governance, development becomes a mirage. This is as a result of bad leadership in the country. Most of our leaders have no sense of commitment to development. Mimiko (1998) captures the situation this way: “The decolonization allowed the crop of leaders that aligned with colonial power to take over Nigeria. This ensured the sustenance of a neo-colonial economy even after political independence. These leaders on assumption of power quickly turned up the repressive machinery of the colonial state rather than dismantling it. Significantly, they have no vision of development to accompany the efficient instrument of repression they inherited. All they were interested in was access to power and privileges and not development”. High level of corruption and indiscipline is another barrier to development. Nigeria state is corrupt, managed by corrupt leaders who have made the state an instrument of capital accumulation, rather than using it to project the interest of the citizenry. A very good plan supervised by a thoroughly corrupt state can hardly do a thorough good job (Mimiko, 1998). Corruption and development are antithetical to each other, the two cannot cohabit, and so, where one is present, the other suffers. Another important factor is the mono-economic base of the country. The country largely depends on crude oil for her survival to the detriment of other resources. All other sectors of the economy are neglected. For instance, agriculture, which constitutes the mainstay of the Nigerian economy in the 1950s and 1960s, has been thrown into limbo over the years. How would government encourage export promotion when there is virtually nothing to export? The economy is not diversified and this is not suitable for a sustainable development (Mimiko, 1998).

### **Basic Impediments to Socio-Economic and Political Development in Nigeria**

In spite of several economic and socio-political strategies including development plans that were initiated from the pre-colonial periods till date, Nigeria is still on the crossroad when measured/compared with other countries of the world as it concerns the concept of development. Some key impediments have continued to feature in redefining development in our context regardless of the approach being adopted. Some of the impediments include the following:

**Governance Challenges:** defined as a system of values, policies, and institutions by which a society manages its economic, social, and political affairs through interactions within the state, civil society and private sector (UNDP, 1997 & 2000), governance comprises the mechanisms and processes for citizens and groups to articulate their interests, to work together and mediate their differences, and exercise their legal rights and obligations with rules, institutions and practices that set limits and provide incentives for individuals, organizations and firms.

Good governance refers to the question of how a society can organize itself to ensure equality of opportunity and equity (social and economic justice) for all citizens (Dike, 2010). Good governance promotes people-centered development. The people are not allowed equal economic opportunity and freedom to participate in the political process. As Sen (1999) has noted, 'unfreedoms' leave the people with little choice to exercise 'their reasoned agency.' For Sen (1999), 'Freedoms are not only the primary ends of development, they are also among its primary means.' Thus development (social, political and economic) 'requires the removal of major sources of unfreedoms.'

**Human Development Challenges** Human resources play an immense role in the success or failure of any organization or nation in terms of capability and strength of character of the leaders and followers (Dike, 2010). In Nigeria, most of the problems facing the economy today are reflections of the lack of investment human capital development and poor management of natural resources because education, which plays a critical role in human development and economic health of the nation, has been neglected for decades (Krueger & Lindhal, 2001; Dike, 2002).

**Leadership Challenges:** The leadership problem that has confronted Nigeria since independence appears to be worsening by the day because the state of the polity is rapidly deteriorating. Yet the leaders appear oblivious of the magnitude of the problems facing the Nigerian economy. However, the leaders of Nigeria appear good at prescribing solutions to economic problems without providing the institutional framework to make it grow (Acemoglu, June 2003). And more often than not, their policies are hastily put together and poorly executed. The political landscape is littered with wreckage of unreasoned policies and those involved in such activities appear to enjoy the nation's underdeveloped status (Dike, July 22-28, 2006).

**Corruption Challenges:** Although corruption is a global scourge, Nigeria has witnessed overarching rate of corruption. It thus appears that corruption has turned part of our value system popularly christened 'culture of corruption' (Smith, 2008). Over the years, Nigeria has earned huge sum of money from crude oil, which has gone down the sinkhole created by corruption. Over-flogged on our national dailies, the rate of prosecution of perpetrators tends to spell



celebration of the scourge. The cases of the former inspector-general of Police, former PDP Chairman (Ogbulafor), former Governor of Delta State (James Ibori), erstwhile chairman House of Representative Committee Chairman on Education and Power, Farouk Lawan and Ndudi Elumelu respectively are special pointers to the watchfulness of anti-corruption agencies.

**Infrastructural and Institutional Challenges:** Another significant challenge to growth and development in Nigeria is weak, personalized and ineffective institutions of public governance coupled with dilapidated infrastructure (bad roads, erratic power supply, limited access to potable water and basic healthcare, and ineffective regulatory agencies, etc). The plethora of reforms and policies are ineffective due to institutional failure (Hoff, 2003). With a population of about 160 million people, power generation is still at below 5000MW which is quite paltry when compared with even South Africa that boasts of 35000MW for its relatively very small population. Power generation and distribution have thus posed a serious threat to development with the manufacturing and productive sectors including the artisans operating at levels that leave them subjugated to the importation of few petit bourgeois and comprador bourgeois personalities that have strangled the activities of the middle class thereby rendering the economy underdeveloped and subservient to those of the Western metropole.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

Nigeria's socio-economic and political challenges have remained perpetually unresolved because of poverty of leadership and governance crises. Successive governments and administrations have operated within the rudiments of distorted structures and institutions of public governance that were either personalized, rendered ineffective or pocketed with flagrant disregard to rules. Leadership and administration are thus alienated from the people and followership to the extent that the citizens lack trust and belief in the political system. The people are deprived and denied involvement in public life and separated from affairs that are supposedly theirs. Individual choices and freedom are slaughtered on poor implementation of policies and weak institutions that are operated with intents to perfect the wimps and caprices of the ruling class (who are instruments in the hands of the Western powers in the world of neo-imperialistic divide). Citizens and their lives thus wallow in deprivation, frustration, neglect and disillusionment. Poverty, unemployment and highest tendencies of death before celebrating 55<sup>th</sup> birthdays become rampant in a society best defined in social distrust and disharmony. Massive group uprising, armed robbery, gangsterism, corporate robbery and unbridled vandalization of public utilities masked in insurgency are fast becoming conventional.

What is more, there is need for a 'paradigm shift' in the manner the country is governed, a collective mentality reorientation of the citizens to reposition citizens' perception of leadership and governance. The paper recommends that development should be borne out of personal/individual realization that could conduce to self actualization and contends that Kantian thesis on freedom mind and autonomy is not wholly tenable in our context owing to complex strands of inconsistencies. It further recommends an inward assessment that would give rise to allowance of greater freedom to citizens as enshrined in extant laws of the country and implementation of the freedom of information acts as recently ratified.

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