

Sustainable Development in Nigeria Through Philosophy: A Critical Examination

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Abstract

Over the centuries, philosophical reflections have helped to engender developments in almost all facets of human existence. To this end human capital and sustainable developmental achievements recorded in human history have been to an appreciable extent accorded to philosophy. Philosophy itself, which is a product of wonder and reflections on the origin, meaning and goal of life has helped man to raise fundamental questions concerning his existence and the exigencies of his time. In an attempt to find answers to the fundamental questions generated in his "philosophical wonderment", man is able to develop ideas that later translated into developmental strides that have moved the world forward. This study sets out to determine the extent to which philosophy can engender sustainable development in Nigeria by critically examining the nexus between philosophy and sustainable development. This is based on the assumption that many of the developmental strides in Nigeria have not been able to yield the desired result, because such moves "neglected" or undervalued philosophical thoughts in governance, public policy making and implementation. The study analyzes the role of philosophical reflections in sustainable development and recommends that it could do same to solve Nigeria's underdevelopment problem.

Keywords: Sustainable-development, Philosophy, Public policy making, Nigeria.

Introduction

Sustainable development is the goal of every human society. It is the idea that human societies are to live and meet their needs through frantic efforts in economic and social development and other areas of development, without compromising the ability and propensity of future generations to do the same. According to Onyemah (2020: 111), sustainable development is a reference to the principles geared toward meeting the goals of development and at the same time striving to sustain the ability to carry this to future generations.

In the history of the first world countries, sustainable development moves were triggered by the rational and philosophical reflections of seasoned philosophers. The concept of "sustainable development dates back to Plato in the 6th Century B.C (Izunwa and Ehujuo 2011:7), where he raised alarm at the unsustainable development farming practices of his country men. Accordingly, Tertullian was said to have lamented in AD 200, the unsustainability of farming development of his day (Morris 2002:78). The philosophical reflections of philosophers on issues of fundamental problems and questions which posed as challenges to the socio-economic and political growth of their societies gave rise to sustainable development strides. The reflections birthed dialectical inquiries which in turn gave answers to questions on governance, policy making and implementations. These philosophical inquiries propelled the pre-independent African Nationalists like Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta, Nnamdi Azikiwe Obafemi Awolowo, etc. into generating some philosophical discourse on African situation at the time; the problem of independence, emancipation, African personality, African consciousness and identity. Ndianefo (2011:125), noted that African nationalists were inspired by the western Philosophic dialectical inquires to rediscover Africa in the area of sustainable development. This explains why they projected the view that philosophy is the most potent engine of human and socio-economic development with which Africa could rediscover and harness her natural potentials in achieving her sustainable development goals.

The "near independent Nigeria" was full of hope for a good beginning that would snowball into a nationally-developed nation after independence. The enthusiasm with which Nigerian independence was embraced seemed prophetic of a better tomorrow (Owoeye: 2017: 86). Unfortunately however, the post-independent Nigeria was greeted with oil boom that gave rise to the popular Udorji award (Ezechine 2014:24). This marked the beginning of Nigeria's economic national doom. Orisa (2014:110), noted that the oil boom of the post independent Nigeria opened the eyes of the Nigerian elite to the pleasure of money and affluence without investment, resulting in a prolonged national economic inflation.

The political unrest occasioned by military incursions, emotiveness, tribalism, party politics, corruption, waste of society's talents and resources, persecution of the educated and the undemocratic democracy undermined the power of philosophic reasoning and knowledge (Izunwa and Ehujuo, 2011:41). Thus, Omoye (2019:20), argued that the negligence of intellectual and philosophic revolution which should have followed the independence of Nigeria and preceded modernization are the reasons for backwardness in sustainable development journey in Nigeria. This also accounts for why Nigeria seems to be lagging behind in sustainable cultural, socio-economic, educational, political and technological development among the comity of nations.

The Nigerian scenario of underdevelopment justifies the fact that philosophy is the bedrock of human society's advancement and sustainable development. Philosophy on its own, if properly harnessed and utilized has the propensity to drive any nation or country to developmental heights. This would be possible by the philosophic reflective and critical investigations into human existence and societal development to improve the human person and the society. Existentially, it is the case that visible and tangible structures, innovations and development strides in human society have their foundations in the philosophical reflections and theories of philosophers. According to Ezinwa and Ehujuo (2011:42), the being of these structures and the possibility of their existence denote philosophy as their "ground from; ground on and ground

about their existence". Hence the pattern and sustainance of human and societal development are products of philosophical inquires. This implies that the creation, shaping and continuous existence of human achievements depend largely on consistent philosophical reflections and applications. This appraises the view of Plato that for any society to record sustainable development, its kings must be philosophers.

The Nigerian problem lies in the fact that her theories and strides of sustainable development are not rooted or grounded in philosophical principles. Philosophers are not included or consulted in the policy making, implementation and governance of Nigeria. The consequence of this is unsustainable development, economic recession, backwardness and low life expectancy. Hence the work of philosophy, according to Chinwa (2011:42), is to revisit the "how" of sustainable development, the "who" behind it and the "all-important" nexus between philosophy and sustainable development.

The What of Philosophy

From its roots, philosophy is conceived as "love of Wisdom- whereas love here refers to the appetite, inclination and inner push to know and discover, wisdom itself is the capacity to make judgements, discern and differentiate what is "acceptable and unacceptable". According to Asiegbu, as quoted by Chinwe Uba and Ezeugwu (2019:42), philosophy is equivalent to being rational and it is the only academic discipline that prides itself to have reason as its major tool of analysis. Since philosophy is man's ability and propensity to think and reason as a rational being, the philosopher stands out in his critical reflections about life and about reality at large.

The character and nature of Philosophy helps it produce results through the act of critical reflection, which are for all time valid in shaping human experience. In this light, philosophy is said to possess superior values and virtues that distinguish it from other disciplines. Onwuka (2015:150), averred that philosophy depicts a positive power to excite or galvanize actions and works of men into productivity and development if harnessed appropriately and

coordinated accordingly. In the same vein, Omoregbe (1990:22), opined that philosophy is a rational search for answers. When we reflect on our human experience and the reality surrounding us, we ask some fundamental question. Philosophy therefore gives answers to the question that arise in our minds.

Philosophy studies other sciences to be able to reach valid conclusions that can foster growth in human society. This it does by examining their contents, methods and basic assumptions to determine how such could be harnessed for the development of human existence. The task of philosophy is to bring out the "sweetness" inherent in other disciplines and appropriate them for the good of man and his environment. This makes it stand out among other disciplines. On the basis of this, philosophers are trained and equipped to contribute meaningfully and positively to their societies by applying their critico-logical rationality to solve problems in the society and create ideas and ideologies for sustainable development of the society. Oguejiofor (2006:12), noted that human society owes its progress and development to the rationality of philosophy and rational philosophers. This underscores the relevance of philosophy in all areas of human endeavour.

What is Sustainable Development

Sustainable development has different nuances. While some say it is vague (Obi:2011:58), some others say it is obligatory or absurd. However, Obi defined sustainable development as the development that meets the present without compromising the future generations. This suggests that development is very essential to satisfying human need and improving the quality of human life. To this end, development that must be sustainable must be based on the efficient and responsible use of natural, human and economic resources. Sustainable development according to Hasna (2007:87), is a process which brings development in all aspects of human life and affects human sustenance.

The journey of the world towards development reveals that the essential ingredient of sustainable development has been neglected. Orisa (2014:45) suggests that the neglect of philosophy

and its application to the system of governance is negligence of the major ingredient of sustainable development. Thus, philosophy and the act of critical reflection is the forerunner of development that is valid and sustainable.

Nature of Sustainable Development

As the consistent growth of every aspect of human society, sustainable development is an essential part of human experience. It is a process of change and paradigm shift in the exploitation of resources, the orientation of technological development, direction of investment and institutions (Izunwa and Ehujuo 2011:6). Sustainable development in line with the above consists in advancing the society to meet the needs of the time and guarantee the ability for future generations to meet their own needs. This therefore is what it means for development to be sustainable because it does not only meet the need of the present generation but guarantees the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It does this by encouraging a more advanced, stronger and technical society in creating and producing new strategies in technological advancement.

Sustainable development over and above the foregoing, should ensure advancement in skill acquisition, capacity building, creativity and all round human capital development. It is a continuous growth of social, political and economic system which will improve incomes and outputs, positive changes in organizations, social and administrative structures as well as customs and beliefs (Todaro 1980:87). Sustainable development is a struggle towards achieving material abundance, political stability and physical security for the majority of people (Krinsky, 2007:2). Ndianefo (2011:107), corroborating the above view averred that sustainable development encompasses and absorbs economic improvement of every nation.

The Place of Philosophy in the Scheme of Things

Philosophy is very relevant and indispensable in the scheme of things. Despite the advancements in different spheres of life

occasioned by scientific exploits, the place of philosophy remains sacrosanct. This is a truism because philosophy develops and broadens human mind and directs his rationality in reflection and in understanding reality. Philosophy sharpens man's intellectual ability to use his rational prowess to reflect on his experiences and environment, ask fundamental questions and give answers to the questions, thereby proffering solutions to the problems of existence and sustenance. Science is guided by the theories and postulations of philosophy.

Philosophy ensures that one has an enlarged mental capacity to subdue one's fears and face life squarely. Chinweze (2011:44), opined that philosophy enlarges one's sphere of action and affection which are vital for sustainable national development. For him, philosophy provides humanity with the insight on how great men in various epochs solved the problems of life.

In education, the role of philosophy cannot be over emphasized. It plays a uniquely important role in the formulation of educational policies and enables the policies to reflect the socio-political and cultural ideologies of the society they are designed for. Philosophy equally helps to review critique and scrutinize educational policies and ideologies in order to ensure that such policies and ideologies foster development in the society. Philosophy coordinates, anchors and regulates the contributions of other social sciences to education and complements them in an attempt to make sound and workable educational policies for sustainable development of the society; philosophy applies its critical and rational principles, methods and evaluative ideals to educational issues. Hence educational practices will fail if they are not anchored on and supported by philosophical theories and tenets. According to Efurhievwe (2012:19), the romance of philosophy with the activities and practices of education helps to develop the society and paves way for the realities to manifest the desired value.

Education has its foundation in philosophy therefore, for it to be worth its name, every nation's educational practice should be directed by sound philosophies and philosophical theories (Attah, 2016:28). The policy of any nation's education must have a very

strong and enduring philosophical background for it to achieve its developmental goals. Thus philosophy is the root of good educational policy and delivery.

In educational delivery, philosophy frees the minds of teachers of education and students from confusion, superstition and dogmatic tendencies and helps them to develop critical and rational minds in the evaluation of reality. Philosophy reforms both the teachers' and students' character and equips them with local tools to investigate, analyse, and scrutinize their experiences.

The Nexus Between Philosophy and Sustainable Development

It is the desire of man to live in a society that is advanced and developed in economic, political, scientific, educational and technological spheres. This desire hangs on the nature of the society to change from one level of development to another. Human beings are the agents of the change and development hence human capital development is pivotal to the development of the society. To achieve the project of human capital development, philosophy is of great importance. Since it is a veritable tool for the intellectual growth of the human person. Philosophy helps to form and reform him to operate and pilot the activities of the society. In the view of Omoregbe (1990:197), the development of the human person is the development of the society. Philosophy trains the mind to be critical, logical and intellectual in order to evaluate reality and human experience. In this way, philosophy fosters the development of the society through the development of the human person.

Sustainable development implies the enhancement of the well-being of all peoples by providing a society fit for human existence. Sustainable development is anchored on the philosophy that harmonizes and integrates the activities of economic, socio and political systems.

Philosophy helps to enhance human's ability to solve problems, communication skills, human persuasive powers and writing skills. It contributes centrally to educational enterprise through its insistence on and demand for intellectually rational

activities. What philosophy offers in education are applicable to all areas of life. This is so because its method are useable in other areas of life. Philosophy enhances problem solving skills and capacities. It helps to analyse concepts, definitions, arguments and solves problems. It equally helps to organize ideas and issues, deals with questions of values and extract what is essential from large quantities of information (Odudu, 2015:125).

In line with the multi-faceted character of philosophy, it is generally applicable to every sphere of human endeavour, hence the need for philosophy in everything so as to enhance positive results. This is why, philosophy is a facilitator of sustainable development. It facilitates and guides achievements in all areas of life and determines the training and certification of persons in all areas of academic endeavour. This explains why Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) is the highest academic degree or certificate awarded by any educational institution. Chinweuba and Ezeugwu (2019:5), noted that no human society can truly make rational arguments or construct bills, proposals and policies or implement them without a deep knowledge of philosophy. Hence the indispensability of philosophy in the project of sustainable development. This explains why philosophy is referred to as the Queen of itself and the queen of all other sciences, the mother of all disciplines and the guide and engineer of human capital and sustainable development. The nexus between philosophy and sustainable development inspires it to tackle the problems and challenges that inhibit the society in its pursuance of sustainable developmental goals. Philosophy as a critical reflection and logical evaluation of events, experiences and issues that bedevil the society in their developmental journey, helps to mend the fence and patch the cracks of the society. Nwoje (2019:65), contests that philosophy in its bid to ensure and enhance development in the society, interrogates the theories, policies and programmes of societies in their journey to sustainable development. It equally interrogates the human existence and reflects on the information gathered from the society and use them to analyse societal national situations. Philosophy is a veritable force and catalyst in the project of sustainable development. Hence any human society that

neglects or underrates philosophy will hardly achieve the project or development that is sustainable.

The Nigerian Predicament in Sustainable Development

The Nigerian nation has over the years continued to fail in her sustainable development project. This failure is evident in the life of Nigeria and in her *modus operandi* and *modus vivendi*. Ayo (2020:18), opines that Nigeria has failed in all areas of life. According to him, the evidence of the failure is manifestly glaring in her undemocratic democracy, one-sided appointments, the imposition of one ethnic group over others as superior, the silent attempt to eliminate a particular ethnic nationality and or religious affiliation, policy formulations and implementations.

Ethnic and sentimental bitter politics in Nigeria has jeopardized the hunger for unity and oneness. This negative and bias state of affairs in Nigeria has made it very difficult for development to be achieved. The crisis in Nigeria and the backward state of affairs are clear manifestations of the absence of sound philosophical network and understanding. It was noted above that the neglect of sound philosophy and its application to the policies of the country is the cause of the failure of our programmes and policies. The absence of philosophy in the Nigerian polity has caused more harm than what could be envisaged. The desperation of the ruling party to remain in power by all means, the insecurity all over the country, corruption in the highest order, leadership apathy towards mass slaughter of innocent citizens, rape, kidnap and destruction are all evidences of the fact that philosophy should be employed in all areas of governance and life of the country. This confirms the fact that non acceptance and non-application of philosophy in our life as a nation has inhibited growth and development.

Solution to Nigerian Sustainable Development Problem

One of the biggest problems in Nigeria is that solutions to our national problems are sought from western countries. This has continuously failed us because the solutions sought are foreign to

the problems. Since the problems are culturally based, their solution are also within the cultural setting. The mad rush to Europe, America and Asia for solutions has crippled and paralyzed the Nigerian intellectual abilities and propensity to solve problems thereby making the educated elites and especially the philosophers intellectually redundant.

The cultural experience of Nigeria are driven by Nigerian languages (Chikwelu, 2019:51). Our educational system has not been able to address the Nigerian problems because it is not indigenous. The methodologies, content and perspectives of our educational system are still foreign to our cultural experiences. Consequently, our education delivery is based on foreign language. Since language is the vehicle with which the people's cultures is conveyed, our cultural experiences are conveyed through foreign language, many Nigerians are no longer familiar with indigenous positive cultural values which should have been the bedrock of their self actualization, emancipation and development.

Many Nigerians are hardly able to speak their indigenous languages since they are trained and nurtured in an educational system colted in foreign language and experience. In the light of this, many Nigerians find it extremely difficult to act, think and reason like Africans or contribute to the project of sustainable development. This results in a paradox; the elite and the educated find themselves in a fix, they are neither Nigerians (Africans) nor Europeans.

The solution to the above, for sustainable development is to deconstruct the western mind set among Nigerians. Emejonam (2018:28), calls this academic and intellectual deliverance of the African educated elite from Europeanization. This is so because even the educated elite appreciate their foreign colleagues more than themselves. This mindset that the European is superior to the African is the result of the educational debasement of our cultural heritage. In the view of Adichie (2013:40), this is the reason why Nigerian leaders rush for western support, counsel and direction to the detriment of the Nigeria populace. This equally explains why foreign products, views and ideologies flood the minds of

Nigerians and their markets thereby rendering Nigerians mere consumers.

Freedom from western mental slavery is achievable through quality education whose curriculum and educational policies are based on Nigerian cultural experience and identity. This will encourage and foster positive contributions towards the achievement of sustainable development projects. The deconstruction will cover every aspect of our national life as a people and nation.

Religion equally has a vital role to play in this regard. The Catholic church promotes indigenization of worship and religious practices through her doctrine of inculturation. This means that the message of the gospel and its delivery method should be indigenized for it to be rooted in Nigerian culture. The mentality of demonizing everything Africa should give way, knowing full well that the Christian message is coloured and shaped in the cultural norms of the place it originated from. For it to be meaningful to the Nigerian people and contribute to the project of sustainable development, the Christian message must be delivered through Nigerian cultural experience as a vehicle. This transformation in religious language and gospel delivery would be made possible through the study and application of sound philosophical theories and policies. The Catholic church trains her clergy in basic philosophy before they are admitted to study theology. It is meant to equip them with the tools of philosophical reflections in order to be able to interpret the gospel in the language and tenet of their culture.

It is evidently clear that within the context of philosophical transformation of all areas of life, the Nigeria society can positively respond to the challenges of sustainable development. It is a truism that the one who wears the shoes knows where it pinches him and only those with the direct experience of a particular situation can validly analyze it. It follows therefore that only Nigerian thinkers can validly provide answers and solutions, to the problems of our national life. This is because the Nigerian thinkers have a very good and in-depth knowledge of the situation as it is part of their cultural experience. Odiaseh, and Chigbo (2016:52), affirmed that the solution to the Nigerian problem could be found

in using philosophical analysis to tackle them. Nigerian thinkers and especially philosophers if given the opportunity, would be able to a large extent, solve Nigerian problems in the areas of education, socio-political and economic spheres for sustainable national development. Presently, Nigeria is being managed by intellectual and economic mediocres who have little or nothing to contribute to the growth and development of the country. It is alleged that one of the presidential aspirants in Nigeria gave the reason why he thinks he should rule Nigerian – as “it is my turn (Agha, 2022). A country ruled with this mentality cannot develop. This is why it is paramount that only those with a good intellectual mien and proven resourcefulness should be allowed to pilot the affairs of Nigeria.

Conclusion

The relevance of philosophy to the project of sustainable development is indubitably evident. It is the case that philosophy as a rational inquiry and reflective activity spurs man to scrutinize the state of affairs to know why it is the way it is, discover how it should be and help to place it right. It prepares the human person for task acceptance, equips him with the wherewithal to accept the challenges posed by the exigencies of his environment and encourages him to rise up to the challenges. In this way, the human person is poised to work for sustainable national development. Philosophy has the potential to give the human person the intellectual and moral equipment to be a capacity and nation builder. This is why there may be no meaningful achievement or development without sound philosophical foundation. Nigerian leaders and intellectuals **must** evolve some workable philosophical ideologies to push the developmental project of the nation. Such philosophical ideologies and policies must be indigenous and culture-bound, and their implementers must be sincere in order to achieve the desired result.

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