

Historical Consciousness and Sustainable Development in Nigeria: The Experience of Niger Delta Communities

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Abstract

Development studies have become very strategic in charting the way forward for most Third World countries including Nigeria. A historical approach, which is the main thrust of this paper, intends to provide the building blocks, not only for economic advancement but for sustainable development in Nigeria that is development at the grass-root in such a way that the fate of the future generation will not be hampered. There is the hope that with this approach, the Nigerian economy can take a leap from poverty reduction to something close to poverty eradication. The peculiar experience of the Niger Delta communities presents a significant case study. (Abstracted on www.ajol.org)

Background

The idea of historical consciousness has to do with the awareness created by the study of human activities in the past for the sole purpose of living well in the present and facing future challenges. From a broad perspective, Collingwood (1946:10-11) conceives of history as scientific inquiry into past human actions which proceeds through the interpretation of evidence for the sake of self knowledge and development. The perception of the study of the past covers a wide scope which comprises the nature, object, method and purpose of history vis-à-vis the various human cultures and civilization.

A sound knowledge of the historical past affects, and should affect, every aspect of our total existence including socio-

political and economic development. In the words of Burns et al (1997:4) ‘history includes an inquiry into the causes of events and patterns of human organization and ideas – a search for the forces that impelled humanity towards great undertakings, and the reasons for its success and failures.’

Having examined the scope of history as a discipline, there is the need to delineate the nexus between history so defined and the *raison d’être* for cultivating a consciousness of this field of study with implications for sustainable development. It has become a maxim that from history we learn that man never learns from history. Mankind has an inherent limitation and this is associated with the problem of forgetfulness. Schinkel (2004:39) is of the opinion that the crux of our forgetfulness is predicated on the ‘machinery’ of our consciousness. In fact, Afigbo’s (1998:108-138) polemical treatise has amply demonstrated the link between what he identifies as African historical consciousness and development in Nigeria. Our focus in this paper is a new concept in development theories that tends to task classical models.

Crisis of Development Theories

The classical theories of development were concerned with issues of economic policy and their theorizing tended to be oriented toward the creation of a theory of value. They were, however, interested in understanding the function of a market economy as the key element of growth. Adam Smith saw economic advancement as a fall-out of increased specialization and trade. He queried limitations to free trade, and advocated for the *laissez faire* principle in his work *The Inquiry into the Wealth of Nations* (1776). Smith waged a war against mercantilist restrictions because of its ability to hinder competitiveness and the consequent division of labour or specialization. Another, classical economist, Ricardo stressed that agricultural protection, which raised agricultural rent and reduced the accumulation of capital, was a major barrier to growth. John Stuart Mill also advocated for free trade and production for the market as a source of economic advancement. Other scholars that adumbrated on theories of growth included

Karl Marx and W.W. Rostow who both postulated on stages of human economic development. The classical theories have been subjected to the crucibles of criticism. For one, the classical economists assumed rigid division of society between capitalists and labourers a worker which tended to ignore the middle class. Income recipients and or salary earners have been identified as the main source of savings and the accumulation of capital, not the property owners. Moreso, most classical economists tended to overlook the role of science and technology in economic development and in considering diminishing returns to land. In addition, the classical economists posited that there were perfect competitions in relation to the institution of private property. They were not aware of the importance played by the public sector in the accumulation of capital. (Gbosi, 2005).

The idea of development as a universal concept has engaged the attention of scholars. In fact, no nation can be said to be undeveloped. For Rodney (1972:21) the concept of development or underdevelopment makes sense when comparing two societies. But what do we mean by the term development? Arising from the misfortunes and mass poverty that characterized the post-Second the primary attention was beamed of savings, investments and national income. But in the 1960s, and early 1970s, the dismal performance of the East African economies in spite of perceived national income growth led to a re-examination of the entire concept of economic development. A new approach which tended to embrace income distribution coupled with the provision of basic needs like 1996:14-15). It is on record that India was the first country to experiment with the Basic Need Approach (BNA) to development before the International Labour Organization adopted it and gave it a universal application in 1976 (Kalagbor 2004:11). We now turn to a re-appraisal of the major socio-political elements that led to the creation of Nigeria and the challenge of development.

The Concept of Sustainable Development

The 1987 Brundtland report defines sustainable development as that brand of development that meets the needs of the present without jeopardizing the survival of the future posterity in their

quest for material progress. Adeyemo (2003:12) observes that sustainable development basically deals with present and future needs in the process of resource exploitation in addition to environmental protection. In their work, Koroma D.S.M. and Bwala, H.M. (2005: xviii) emphasize that the concept of sustainable development is geared towards ‘the proper management of national and human resources, the environment, energy, waste, transportation, and development based on pattern of production and consumption that can be pursued into the future without degrading the human or natural environment’.

The Evolution of the Nigerian Nation and the Challenge of Development

1914 witnessed the amalgamation of hitherto autonomous ethnic groups under the umbrella of what came to be known as Nigeria. This ‘unification’ was accomplished after series of bombardments and humiliation of ‘subject’ people through the instrumentality of gunboat politics. The entire landmass of the Nigerian nation was endowed with natural resources which the British sought to harness. The northern part of Nigeria boasted of the abundance of cash – crops like groundnut, tin and cotton, while cocoa and rubber were cultivated in the Western and Mid-West Regions respectively. The Eastern Region excelled in the production of palm – oil with coal mined at commercial quantity in Enugu. To adequately exploit the natural resources mentioned earlier, the British Government embarked on a strategic transportation network which led to the construction of roads and railways. The crude implementation of a monetized economy witnessed the gradual integration of Nigeria into the world capitalist economy. It became obvious that the colonization of Niger conferred on Nigeria the status of dependency.

The colonial administration at the end of the Second World War in 1945 conceived of the possibility of developing the subject peoples. This change of attitude on the part of the British could be attributed to the coming into power of the Labour Party which had earmarked the sum of Two Hundred Million Pounds for the social and economic welfare of the colonized. To implement this welfare package, the colonial

government formulated a 'Ten Year Development and Welfare Plan' for Nigeria. In 1951 the Ten Year Plan was adjusted to span the period 1951-1956. Both programmes were hardly successful because of the obvious lack of adequate statistical data. The Plan with its revised edition gained some credit as it led to the improvement of public infrastructure such as road, ports, railways and water supply. The visit of some officials of the World Bank in 1954 and their recommendation increased the consciousness and commitment towards development plans for the federating regions (Yesufu 1996:54-55). Still in pursuance of its development objectives, the colonial administration created marketing boards under the auspices of the Department of Exports which was set up in 1954. In 1954 the Resumed Constitutional Conference created a Central Marketing Board to facilitate the export sector of the colonial economy. In addition to the marketing boards, we had public corporations in charges of finance, housing, broadcasting, printing, pharmaceutical industries, sports and others. Most of these corporations performed dismally as a result of ineptitude, incompetence coupled with poor management. Between 1950-1959 the Central Authority (Late Federal Authority), the Federal Loans Board, the Niger Delta Development Board, the Central Bank of Nigeria, Nigeria Airways Corporation and the Nigeria National Shipping Line came into existence. These boards were to oversee key areas of the economy (Tamuno 1980:402-403).

The development blueprint of the colonial administration was inherited by independent Nigeria in 1960. The first National Economic Development Plan and Post Independence Development Plan ran from 1960-1970. This plan was adjusted to span 1962-1968 precisely and was intended to set the country on a solid economic footing. Midway, the civil war plunged the country into state of socio-political and economic disarticulation. At the end of the war, the Second Development Plan was adopted with the following objectives: to ensure (i) a united, strong and self reliant nation (ii) a great and dynamic economy, a just and egalitarian and democratic society (iii) a land full of opportunities for all citizens, and (iv) a free egalitarian and democratic society. Many other development and rolling plans

have become a tradition characteristic of the Nigeria economy with little to show for it.

The Niger Delta Economy and the Concept of Sustainable Development

The Niger Delta region forms an integral part of the Nigerian nation. It comprises distinct ethnic groups, such as the Ijaw, Ogoni, Itsekiri, Urhobo, Isoko, Ikwerre, Ogbah, Ekpeye, Egbema, Ndoni and Kwa Igbo. The definition of states, in the current dispensation, that qualify as the Niger Delta has become very controversial. To establish the defunct Oil Mineral Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC), nine states namely, Abai, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross Rivers, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers were listed. Irrespective of the tenacious submission of some advocates that the core Niger Delta States namely, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers should be recognized, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) that replaced OMPADEC retained its nine-state structures.

A critical examination reveals that the Niger Delta territory is grossly impoverished because of its difficult geographical terrain. The people of the Niger Delta are classified as belonging to the minority ethnic groups in Nigeria. Right from the colonial era, there has been some effort directed at the development of the Niger Delta area. The creation of the Niger Delta Development Board in 1961 subsequent to series of representation to the Willink's Commission in 1975 prompted the late Prime minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa to set up a study group to discern the possibilities of physical development of the Niger Delta Special Area in 1959-1960. a mischievous plot to abolish the board at the 1963 Constitutional Conference in Lagos for republican status was vehemently resisted by delegates of the Niger Delta Congress (Dappa-Biriye 1995). Much later, with the granting of independence, the federal government in response to demands from the area, created OMPADEC which replaced the NDDB and NDBD of earlier period. The initial 1.5% derivation fund for OMPADEC was increased to 3% to mitigate the environmental hazards occasioned by oil exploration and exploitation. OMPADEC did

not really address the titanic problem of the Niger Delta communities as the 'Nigerian factor' crippled its operation through inflated contracts and gross mismanagement of funds (OZEKHOME 2005:134).

The decree setting up OMPADEC in 1992 had the following objectives inter-alia, to administer the monthly sums allocated to it from federal account; to rehabilitate and develop oil mineral producing area; to consult with the relevant federal and state government authorities on the control and effective methods of tackling the problem of oil pollution and spillages; to obtain from the NNPC the proper formula for actual oil mineral production of each State and Local Government Area, and to ensure fair and equitable distribution of projects, services and employment of personnel in accordance with recognized percentage production and to liaise with oil producing companies regarding the proper number, location and other relevant data concerning oil mineral producing area. On 12th October 2000, the Federal Government under Chief Olusegun Obasanjo promulgated the Niger Delta Development Commission. The NDDC had the following terms of reference:

- (i.) Planning and implementing projects and programmes for the area in the field of transportation, road, waterway, health, education, employment, industrialization, agriculture and fisheries, housing and urban development, water supply, electricity and telecommunications.
- (ii.) To ensure that the Niger Delta area is surveyed for the purpose of physical development.
- (iii.) To see to the implementation of all the measures approved for the development of the area by the federal government and member states of the commission.

- (iv.) Identify factors inhibiting the development of the NIGER Delta area and assist member states in the formulation and implementation of policies to ensure sound and efficient management of the resources of the Niger Delta area.
- (v.) Assess and report on any project being funded or carried out in the Niger Delta area by oil and gas producing companies and any other company including non-government organizations and ensure that funds released for such project are properly utilized.
- (vi.) To tackle ecological and environmental problems that arise from the exploitation of oil minerals in the Niger Delta area and advise the federal government and the member states on the prevention and control of oil spillages, gas flaring and environmental pollution.
- (vii.) Liaise with the various oil mineral and gas prospecting and producing Companies on all matters of pollution prevention and control.
- (viii.) Execute such other works and perform such other functions which in the opinion of the commission are required for the sustainable development of the Niger Delta area and its people.

From all indications, the federal government in principle has lofty plans to transform the Niger Delta area. While the increases of the derivation fund from a paltry 3% of the OMPADEC era to 13% under NDDC is commendable. It is disheartening to discover that there is a yawning gap between policy formulation and implementation. Most of the problems

the NDDDB, the NDBD, OMPADEC and NDDC were established to tackle are still looming large.

From the hindsight of history, it is common knowledge that oil exploration and exploitation activities are very hazardous. A trip to Olobiri in present day Bayelsa State, where oil was first mined in commercial quantity in 1956 leaves much to be desired. The flaring of gas and oil spillages have led to sordid disasters in many communities like Jesse, Ogoniland, Ogbahland, Warri, Eriemu in Ughelli North Local Government area of Delta State; Olumma in Bonny L.G.A. of River State; Nnejiji, Umugbed in Isioma Ngwa L.G.A. of Abia State, Ogale in Eleme L.G.A. Ekorinim village in Calabar, Cross River State and a host of others. The consequences of these ugly occurrences are far-reaching. The Niger Delta Area has become a disaster zone that features youth restiveness, environmental degradation and abject poverty which has reached 58% in all the south-south states where the region is positioned (Fabiya, 2005). Violent protests against perceived injustice have been staged by various groups such as the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), the Niger Delta Volunteer Service (NDVS) led by the late Isaac Adaka Boro and Niger Delta Volunteer force led by Asari Dokubo.

Resource Control and Sustainable Development

A sincere sense of history reveals that the crude oil resource of the Niger Delta will not last forever. This realization is the *raison d'être* for the concept of sustainable development. Alagoa (1999:21) advocates for a type of development programme in the Niger Delta that harnesses local resources in such a manner that the welfare needs of our future generation are taken into account.

At this juncture, we need to define the concept of sustainable development. The 1987 Brundtland Report views it as that brand of development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the unborn generation to their own needs. Thus sustainable development goes beyond the process of resource exploitation (Adeyemo 2003:12).

The need for sustainable development is the common denominator in the clarion call for equitable resource control at

the just concluded (Nay, abruptly concluded) Political Reform Conference headed by Justice Niki Toby. In his opinion, Sagay (2005:15) notes that resource control means:

- (i.) That ownership of the resources will revert to the and natural owners who live with the resource and preclude the death sentence of absentee landlordism and artificial ownership.
- (ii.) That the producing states and communities will have a decisive say in the granting of license for exploration.
- (iii.) That they will monitor the extraction process and ensure that damage to the environment is reduced to the barest minimum and that the best oil field practices are used.
- (iv.) That along with present production of the wasting toxic asset, a programme of substitution will be put in place to ensure that life, livelihood, productivity and sustainable development do not come to an end with the exhaustion of oil and gas.
- (v.) That the present will not eliminate the future. Resource control does not mean the appropriation of all the proceeds of the petroleum resources by the producing states and communities, neither does it mean the deprivation of our non-producing sister communities of Nigeria of a share of the proceeds.

It is the position of this paper that the Federal Government should do justice to the call for equitable resource control. It should be note that the principle of resource control is

not an entirely novel idea. In the 1963 constitution, a summary of revenue allocation reveals the following breakdown:

- (i.) Minerals including mineral oil: 50% of proceeds to all regions from which they were extracted.
- (ii.) 20% to the Federal Government.
- (iii.) 30% of import duties went into the distributable pool.
- (iv.) Import duty on petrol and diesel consigned to any region was refundable to that region.
- (v.) This applied to excise duty on tobacco. Sagay (2005:8) further argues that the main thrust of resources control or fiscal federalism is:
 - (i.) The restoration of the environment which encompasses lands, waters, forest, air, etc to a near uncontained and viable state and
 - (ii.) To entrench an economy with renewal resources at its fulcrum that will sustain the people of the Niger Delta after the exhaustion of petroleum resources.

The current devastation of human lives and property at New Orleans and Texas in the United States of America is enough caution. The effects of gas flaring are so debilitating that concerned citizens cannot afford to be nonchalant. Some of the effects include acid rain which facilitates the process of rusting and also reduces soil productivity, excessive heating of the environment, the depletion of ozone layer which is responsible for skin damage like sunburn and suntan (i.e. brown skin which one gets from excessive exposure to bright sunlight); destruction of the natural ability to fight skin cancer; eye damage and

reduction of clarity of vision. The effects of the depletion of ozone layer on ecosystem are as follows: destruction of tree growth, delay in flowering, averse changes in leaf structure (Sagay 2005:15).

Even in defending sustainable development, it is also the position of some scholars that adequate attention should be focused on agriculture. Gbosi (2005:227) notes that the agricultural sector absorbs not less than 75% of the labour force. Our country Nigeria is an economy that consumes virtually every product from outside. (i.e. overseas). We can produce the materials we need for maximum happiness. There is also the need for accountability on the part federal, state and local governments.

The connection between accountability in governance and socio-economic development has been highlighted (Sorkaa, 2003:1). Beyond allocating finance to the various state and local governments, there should be a control mechanism to ensure that development gets to the grassroots with the desired result. This issue of accountability is very critical in view of the fact that the federal government's gesture of the current 13% and the demand for upward review of derivation revenue formula has generated so much debate. Asiegbu (2001:61) recommends the setting up, inter alia, of a Federal University of Petroleum and Gas Technology and massive infrastructural development in the major area of the Niger Delta. We are also aware that there are some who are asking 'what has been achieved with all the derivation funds so far'. The answer to this question may wait for an opportune time.

Nigeria as a leading member of African Union is committed to the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) strategy inaugurated on October 23rd, 2001 at Abuja. One of the basic principles of NEPAD is sustainable development (as a means of combating the ravages of underdevelopment) and reduction of poverty. We hope that the yearnings of African leaders will translate into positive action.

Summary and Conclusion

This paper provides an insight into the connexion between historical consciousness and sustainable development in the light of technological breakthrough. The burden of modern technology has tasked the foundations of both classical and neo-classical development theories. From a historical perspective, it is now obvious that development theories that adumbrated on seeming abstract phenomena are no longer relevant.

It has become abundantly clear that the colonial approach to the development of 'subject' people which was inherited by the independent Nigerian nation leaves much to be desired. Meaningful and lasting development must be hinged on the survival of the present and future generation. The concomitant effects of oil exploitation, the mainstay of the Nigerian economy, pose new challenges. As has been revealed, the culture of neglect and lip service to the cause of the oil-bearing communities of the Niger Delta is responsible for the clarion call for resources control as escape route should the oil wells dry up. Where historical consciousness is lacking, the federal government's effort in setting up NDDC might be far from realizing the stated objectives. With Nigeria's membership and commitment to NEPAD objectives, we await to see a transition from policy formation to that of practical policy implementation.

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