



Exploring the Gains of History in Sustainable Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria has had a fair share of challenges in her developmental strides. Not until recent the study of history was relegated to the background, leaving the intrinsic web of unifying knowledge uncovered. It is against this backdrop that the paper examined the role of history as an indispensable instrument for any nation Nigeria inclusive, that craves breakthroughs in all human accomplishments. To achieve this, data generated from the primary and secondary sources were analyzed and conclude that there is the need for Nigerians to be imbued with proper sense of history to sustain her development.

Keywords: History, Development, Sustainable development, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the quality of work that has been done on the importance of the study of history as a tool for development of man and society, Nigerians have not come to the full grasps of this importance and this has been a major bane for actualizing sustainable development of the country.

Nigeria as a nation is blessed with vast human and natural resources and conceived efforts are been made to approximately harness and use these available resources to improve the living conditions of the people through policy initiatives, projects and general infrastructural facilities. Nonetheless, prevailing conditions in practically all spheres of life of Nigerians reveal that the nation has not attained the level of development appropriate to its wealth and potentialities to make its population live comfortably notwithstanding their geographical location, social status, or gender (Bola, 2012).

This is not farfetched due to the actions and inactions of the policy makers and political leaders who have tried to underplay the importance of history and historians in the polity thereby undermining the development of the nation. Sunday (2021), observes that while leaders from other climes see the discipline as the bedrock of their nation, their peers in contemporary Nigeria have succeeded in relegating history to the background, paying scant heed to its importance in nation building, individual or societal development. He further states that in view of Dr. Suleiman:

*Historical knowledge is a sine qua non for national development, as nations are products of their own history. History is the cornerstone of patriotic citizenship, and any nation that refuses to come to terms with its history is bound to repeat the follies of its predecessors. This is why Nigeria is moving in circles, or stuck in a tragic trajectory that has hamstrung her developmental efforts. The protracted absence of history at foundational levels, where the values of patriotism and national ideology are primarily inculcated in the young ones, amounted to a major institutional and cultural assault on the spine, which deprives young Nigerians of the opportunity to learn their country's history, resulting in the emergence of a generation of Nigerians, which do not appreciate the importance of history to national integration and development.

Against this background, the study of this nature becomes necessary as it further draws the attention of Nigerians towards historical awakening and brings to bear the nexus between history and sustainable development. The paper therefore discusses the conceptual issues involved therein, history and sustainable development, what Nigeria will gain from history and finally concludes.

Conceptual Discourse

The concept of development is predisposed to wide interpretations with development as economic growth, as modernization, as distributive justice among others, and authors have given different definitions of development. Development is defined as 'an evolutionary process in which the human capacity increases in terms of initiating new structures, coping with problems, adapting to continuous change, and striving purposefully and creatively to attain new goals (Peet, 1999 cited in Mensah, 2019). Also, development is understood as a social condition within a nation, in which the needs of its population are satisfied by the rational and sustainable use of natural resources and systems (Reyes, 2001, cited in Mensah, 2018). Similarly, Todaro and Smith (2006, cited in Mensah, 2018), define development as a multi-dimensional process that involves major changes in social structures, attitudes, and institutions, as well as economic growth, reduction of inequality, and eradication of absolute poverty. Young 1993 as cited in Amodu (2008: 323) stated that:

*Development implies a change for better; the ordering of society and social and economic processes in such a way as to lead to the eradication of gross poverty; ill-health, and illiteracy and to rising standards of living and increased material comfort for all.

For Rodney (1976:3), "development in human society is a many-sided process. At the level of the individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, self-discipline, responsibility, and material well-being ... these have meaning only in terms of relations of man to society".

On his part Todaro (1981:70) in Okowa (2008; 82) posits:

*Development in its essence, must represent the entire gamut of change by which an entire social system, tuned to the diverse needs and desires of individuals and social groups within that system moves away from a condition of life widely perceived as unsatisfactory and toward a situation or condition of life regarded as materially and spiritually better.

Consequently, Todaro sees development as not purely an economic phenomenon but rather a multi-dimensional process involving re-organization and re-orientation of entire economic and social system. As such development is a process of improving the quality of all human lives with three equally important objectives such as

*To raise the living standard of people and consumptions and incomes, levels of good, medical services, education through relevant growth processes.

*Increasing people's freedom to choose by enlarging the range of their choice variables such as varieties of goods and services

*Creating conditions conducive to the growth of peoples' self-esteem through the establishment of social, political and economic systems which promote human dignity and respect.

According to Adeferasi (2009: 203-213), a society develops economically as its members increase jointly their capacity for dealing with the environment which is dependent on their tools (technology) and the manner in which it is optimized. He further states that development could be the act, process or result of developing our state of being or growth through progressive changes.

Also, Fayemi (2009:103-118), notes:

*Development as a concept denotes the process of expanding and adopting capacity of the society in satisfying the material and cultural needs designed to achieve among others, increased productivity within a balanced economic system, the eradication of poverty and disease, and the liberation of the individual from their constraints. Such process necessarily involves individual freedom from and social security, cultural buoyancy, educational and economic liberation, self-reliance and sustainable socio-political order."

Again, Rodney (1976) opines the every man was faced with the task of survival by meeting the fundamental material needs; and better tools were consequence of the interplay between human beings and nature as part of struggle for survival. Given the above, development then implies the desire and ability to use what is available to continuously improve the quality of life liberate people from the hazardous power and influence of natural background. It can be seen as a change or transformation into a better state. Therefore, for development to be meaningful it ought to be

appreciated and utilized by the people for whom it is meant. This means that the key concept of development must be improved quality of peoples' life premised on sustainable development.

Sustainable Development

What is sustainable may vary from country to country, depending upon moral values toward environmental preservation and conservation of natural capital. Different cultures have different attitudes of "respect" or "disrespect" toward the environment (<https://www.studocu.com>mont-kenya-university>).

Basiago (1999) cited in Mensah, (2019), views sustainability as capacity to maintain some entity, outcome or process over time. Sustainability involves, at base, a desire to achieve human and ecosystem longevity along with a greater sense of well-being and connectedness. It is something viable, ongoing, and capable of being maintained indefinitely, and the areas of development that the concept is concerned with include economic, social, political, and environmental (Erhun, 2008). Stoddart (2011) cited in Mensah (2019) defines sustainability as the efficient and equitable distribution of resources intra-generationally and inter-generationally with the operation of socio-economic activities within the confines of a finite ecosystem. On the other hand, Ben-Eli (2015), cited in Mensah (2019), sees sustainability as a dynamic equilibrium in the process of interaction between the population and the carrying capacity of its environment such that the population develops to express its full potential without producing irreversible adverse effects on the carrying capacity of the environment upon which it depends. A number of things are implied by these definitions which mean that sustainability involves the well-being of the individual, efficient and equitable distribution of resources, and a population that will not produce adverse effect on the environment upon which it depends.

On sustainable development, Erhun (2008), posits is the consistent growth of all aspects of human society; the cultural, economic, socio-political, technological and environmental. Izunwa and Ehujuo describe it as "a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investment, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are made consistent with the future as well as present needs"(2011;6) cited in (Ehurm, 2008). On their path, sustainable development would simply mean 'development that can be continued either indefinitely or for the given time period (Dernbach, 1998, 2003; Lele, 1991; Stoddart, 2011) cited in Mensah, (2019), As it were, sustainable development entails evolving the state to meet the needs of the present generation and ensure the ability of the future generation to meet their own needs by ensuring the undisrupted development of every aspect of the society. It also involves in advancement of skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self- discipline, responsibility and material well-being. For, Todaro it is continuous growth of social, political and economic systems, improvement in incomes and output, positive and radical changes in institutions, popular attitudes, social and administrative structures as well as customs and beliefs (1980:87 in Ehurm, (2008). Also, sustainable development is measured by the growth of positive and objective attitude of the leadership and the citizenry as well as the quality of life indices of the citizens of a particular country.

Nevertheless, Kate et al (2005), contends that for development to be termed as sustained the people, the economy and society are to be developed for at least 25 years in a sustained manner before it is regarded as sustainable development, The concept of sustainable development is intended to embrace the idea of ensuring that the future generation inherits the earth, which supports their livelihood in such a way that they are not worse off, than the present generation. In order to promote sustainable development, there is the need for citizens to participate in the economy, policy, and social development of the society. Apparently, a report by the World Commission for Environment and Development (WCED) widely known as "Our Common Future" defined Sustainable development as a "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987). For this development, the 17 SDGs primarily seek to achieve the following summarized objectives:

*Eradicate poverty and hunger, guaranteeing a healthy life.

- *Universalize access to basic services such as water, sanitation and sustainable energy.
- *Support the generation of development opportunities through inclusive education and decent work
- *Foster innovation and resilient infrastructure, creating communities and cities able to produce and consume sustainably.
- *Reduce inequality in the world, especially that concerning gender.
- *Care for the environmental integrity through combatting climate change and protecting the oceans and art ecosystems.
- *Promote collaboration between different social agents to create an environment of peace and ensure responsible consumption and production.

However, the Johannesburg Declaration elongated the definition of Sustainable Development to state "Sustainable Development is a collective responsibility to advance and strengthen the interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars of economic development, social development as well as environmental protection at a local regional and global level" (The Johannesburg Declaration 2002 as cited in Adewuyi et al 2012).

In other to achieve this, the need for Nigerians to understand their roots via the knowledge of history which gives the consciousness of oneness and ability to appreciate our common national identity becomes imperative. This is so because sustainable development involves all aspects of man and his environment.

The Path of History in Sustainable Development

From the brief discuss made on development and sustainable development it is adduced that development should be experienced at all levels - personal or national in the society. Therefore, for any nation to develop, the collective spirit of (he people must be well nurtured and propagated. Here lies the significance of history. As Arthur Marvick (1983:151 put it, 'to imagine what everyday life would be in a society in which no one knew any history... As a man without memory and self-knowledge is adrift, so a society without memory (or more correctly, without recollection) would be a society adrift.

Fafunwa captures the essence as he posits that history is to a people what memory is to the individual. .4 people with no knowledge of their past would suffer from collective amnesia, groping blindly into the future without the guide post of precedence to shape their course.

As G.W.P. Hegel and Abraham Lincoln notes respectively History leads the wise man and drags the fool', and "If we could first know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do and how to do it' (Oyeranmi 2015). This is why it is most pathetic that the study of history has been relegated to the background in various schools in Nigeria. This explains why the country remains a crawling giant. More than ever before, ethnic prejudice has become the major driving force of Nigeria's national polity Oyesanmi, 2015).

Lending credence to the above Ajayi, cited in Oyesanmi (2015) acknowledges an urgent need to imbue Nigerians with an enduring sense of history that:

"The nation suffers which has no sense of history. Its values remain superficial and ephemeral unless imbued with a deep sense of continuity and perception of success and achievement that transcends acquisition of temporary power or transient wealth, Such a nation cannot achieve a sense of purpose or direction or stability and without them the future is bleak.'

On the interaction between Nation and History, J. F. Ade Aiayi stressed that:

*History interacts with the nation. For the nation is a product of history in the sense of historical circumstances and events; and therefore the nation cannot escape from its past. At the same time, the nation is shaped by the effort of historians, among others, who try to establish the history of the nation, influence its group memory and seek to define its nationality-that is, the essence of what binds its people together what constitutes their identity, what makes them a people distinct from other peoples.

Osuntokun, (2002), corroborates that historical understanding' places a nations, developmental predicament within rational time perspectives of human evolution. This is the utility

value of history. History also helps people not to undervalue what they are and overvalue what they are not. It in turn provides confidence building strategy to any prostrate nation that is striving to grapple with present problems.

Ikime (2018) in his book *Can Anything Good Come out of Nigeria*, notes that Nigeria is composed of many certain ethnic groups with different cultural diversities. The cultural diversity evident in the country is often one of the reasons advanced for our inability to unite and to function effectively as one nation. Ikime identifies inadequate knowledge of the history and the ways of life of the various groups or peoples that make up Nigeria as one of the greatest problems our country face. According to Ikime, this attitude is what 'Professor C.C. Ifemesia has described as "blatant misconceptions and alienating type". These "blatant misconceptions and alienating stereotypes" according to Ikime only prevent us from knowing the real peoples with whom we must live and work, they make inter-personal and inter-group relations difficult and so retard national unity. If we are to grow beyond these stereotypes, we must diligently seek knowledge about Nigeria's multifarious peoples. Historians, Sociologists, Ethnographers, among others, must provide the material that will furnish this knowledge. Our educational system must insist that this kind of knowledge be acquired, certainly before our young people get into tertiary institutions.

Ikime (2018) poses the following questions, how many mono-ethnic nations are there in the world? How many nations which now have a lingua franca began with only one language? Even Great Britain, the country that colonized us, is it a mono-ethnic nation? How many ethnic groups are to be found in the United States of America? If these other nations have managed to achieve national unity, we too can do the same. He further states that the unity of any nation is invariably a product of its history. He also states that unity is an attribute, once achieved requires to be deliberately cultivated and delicately nurtured which should be manifested in developmental and other programmes consciously undertaken in the interest of that hard won unity.

That being so, he observed that too many Nigerians, including many in high places of policy-making and execution, know painfully little about the peoples for whom they make policy. Ikime notes there are ministers who have never read any history of the country over whose affairs they now preside. University teachers are no better.

In other words, national unity requires a deepening of knowledge and understanding as between our various culture groups and peoples, the promotion of a spirit of tolerance, the development of empathy. These are all attributes that require conscious effort and cultivation. The search for knowledge about our fellow Nigerians must be accompanied by a humbling awareness about the factors which shape a people (Ikime, 2018).

Little wonder, the removal of history from the education curriculum elicited various criticisms as some are captured thus:

*To me, history is the foundation of understanding life in order to move forward; it precedes development and self-understanding. I have no idea why anyone would want to commit such a crime to the upcoming generation, and everyone within the federal government agreed to that decision. Such heart break. (Favour, 2020).

I feel like strangling the Minister who removed history from the curriculum, a crime has been done to our children and our advancement. It's questionable that these things happen and we allow them to go on for so long that our children grow up intellectually stunted. A huge part of their brain is unused because certain facts are not available to them. They do not even know where the existence begins (Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian playwright cited in Favour, 2020).

It is however, pertinent to note that under the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari history was reinstated into the education curriculum. This may not be farfetched from the realization that history teaches us that the erosion of national consciousness occasions the most fundamental obstacle to national development and national integration which no doubt hinders sustainable development.

CONCLUSION

This paper provides an, insight into the connection between history and sustainable development in Nigeria. However, part of the challenges of sustainable development is the lack of historical consciousness on the path of leaders of our political and policy makers. This is why Ikime (2018), states that national unity requires a deepening of knowledge and understanding as between our various culture groups and peoples, the promotion of a spirit of tolerance, the development of empathy. These are all attributes that require conscious effort and cultivation. The search for knowledge about our fellow Nigerians must be accompanied by a humbling awareness about the factors which shape a people. This is because the knowledge of history can be used to fire the imagination and inspire the patriotic zeal of the citizenry.

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