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Full Length Research Paper

Understanding the crisis of development in Africa: Reflections on Bedford Umez's analysis

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Despite the presence of huge mineral and human resources found in Africa, the continent has remained a victim of underdevelopment. This has prompted several efforts by scholars, African leaders and the international development agencies to understand and solve the development crisis. This paper is a review of Bedford Umez's analysis of the development crisis in Nigeria. The paper exposed the implications of Umez's analysis bearing in mind the realities of the Nigerian environment. The paper concludes that simple as they could appear to be, the policy prescriptions suggested by Umez are worthy of attention since they will help in solving the crisis of development in Nigeria.

Key words: Development, underdevelopment, politics, Umez, Nigeria and Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Presently, the crisis of development is the most serious problem facing Africa. This is because the continent has remained largely underdeveloped despite the presence of huge mineral and human resources. Several decades after the end of colonialism, most parts of Africa is still fighting with problems such as high poverty rate, lack of basic infrastructural facilities in all sectors of the economy, unemployment, high mortality rate, political instability and insecurity of lives and property. For example, Nigeria the most populous African country, according to the United Nations human development report (2005), out of 177 countries, ranked 158 in human development index,165 in life expectancy at birth,121 in combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment and 155 in GDP per capital. Recently, Suberu (2007: 96) also had said of Nigeria that "it earned around US$500 billion in oil revenues since the 1970s, yet remains mired in poverty, unemployment, a bourgeoning domestic debt, infrastructural squalor, abysmal health and educational services, and attendant social frustration and unrest''. Nigeria reflects most parts of Africa in that it inherited arbitrary state boundaries from its colonial age and was under military authoritarianism for most part of its existence as a nation.

Against the background of Africa's development crisis, emanated the debate on how to solve the crisis of development in Africa. This debate has been a hot one and is dominated by two major related themes, namely: the controversy over the actual meaning of the concept of development and the appropriate path to development. However, despite the disagreement among scholars, global policy makers and institutions over these issues, numerous attempts have been made to understand and solve the crisis of development in Africa.

In the early 1960's, shortly after most African nations got their independence, western bourgeois scholars popularized the modernization theory which was designed to assist Africa nations in the course of development. The summary of the modernization theory is that if Africa must develop, then it must follow some sort of procedure already adopted by the west. It is within this frame of thought that we can locate the views of Rostow (1960), Almond and Coleman (1960), Almond and Powell (1966), and Pye (1966). At the level of policy making, African leaders, their western counterparts, and the international development agencies have all for a long time struggled with different strategies and plans that are aimed at solving the development crisis.

Among African scholars, different schools of thought have emerged to proffer suggestions aimed at solving the problem. In the early 1970s and 80s, scholars like Walter Rodney (1972), Claude Ake (1982), Okwudiba Nnoli (1981),

and Daniel Offiong (1981) used the Marxian perspective to explain the cause of under development in Africa. For these scholars, the problem of under development in Africa cannot be explained outside the impact of colonialism, neo-colonialism and dependency. As Claude Ake pointed out:

> "The present conditions of the third world countries are not in the least analogous to the conditions of the industrialized countries in the earlier stages of their economic development. The present condition of the third world is the effect of the slave trade, pillage, colonialism and unequal exchange (Ake 1982: 153)".

In a similar manner, Walter Rodney after a thorough examination of the origin and trends of underdevelopment in Africa bluntly asserts that:

> "African development is possible only on the basis of a radical break with the international capitalist system, which has been the principal agency of the under development of Africa over the last seven centuries (Rodney 1972: 7)".

In the present era of globalization, another school of thought strongly argues that globalization constitutes the major obstacle facing Africa's effort to develop. This is because of the fact that the benefits of globalization are not equal and just for all the regions of the world (Asobie, 2001; Olukoshi, 2004) . It is therefore suggested that since a major feature of the globalization process is that it cannot be halted or ignored, the success of the development enterprise in Africa now depends on the mode of its integration into the global capitalist economic system (Ajayi, 2004: 2). Yet, there are scholars who believe that Africans should be held responsible for the present pathetic state of underdevelopment in the continent. Recently, it has been said that Africans through the instruments of inept leadership, corruption, authoritarianism, endless political crises, military rule, civil wars and lack of concern for the poor, have contributed more than any other people to the cause of underdevelopment in the continent (Falola, 2005: 3).

The views expressed above are appreciated, which in summary imply that no adequate understanding of the crisis of development in Africa could be achieved without taking into cognizance the effects of three major factors. First, colonialism, neo-colonialism and dependency. Secondly, contemporary globalization and thirdly, the role of the African ruling elite. It is also worthy to note that more suggestions are still offered on how to solve the crisis of development in Africa. It is in acknowledgement of the contemporary challenges and realities confronting the African continent, that Bedford Umez (2000) in an insightful and captivating work provides useful insights for understanding the crisis of development in Africa using Nigeria as a case study. Umez argues that Nigerians have contributed more to her problem of under development than any other people. Further, he also presents four perspectives which he believes offers more fundamental and comprehensive explanations of the problems of development in Nigeria. The four perspectives, which will be discussed later in, this paper, are: the prevalent value system, inferiority complex, language and collective ignorance. Profound and insightful as they appear, Umez's analysis has its strengths and weaknesses hence it needs to be reviewed.

This study seeks to review Bedford Umez's analysis of the crisis of development in Nigeria. The paper intends to bring to fore the implications of Umez's analysis bearing in mind the realities of his analysis and conclusions. The paper is structured into four parts. After the introduction presented in this section, the study proceeds in section two to highlight Umez's core arguments. Section three provides a critique of Umez's analysis, and the brief conclusions of the study are presented in section four.

UMEZ'S CORE ARGUMENTS

Nigeria: Real Problems, Real Solutions (2000) is Bedford Umez's contribution to the discourse on the crisis of development in Nigeria. In his analysis, Umez begins by providing a review of what he calls the three long standing perspectives that have been used by scholars in the past to explain Nigeria's problem of underdevelopment. The three perspectives namely are: colonial legacy, corrupt leadership and democracy leads to economic growth. The colonial legacy perspective argues that the problem of underdevelopment is traceable to the origin of the Nigerian state by the British colonial authority and the exploitative nature of Nigeria's colonial and post-colonial experience. The corrupt leadership perspective believes that corruption and mismanagement on the part of the leadership has been the bane of development in Nigeria. Chinua Achebe's (1983) analysis of the leader-ship problem in Nigeria is located within this framework. The democracy leads to economic growth perspective which links the cause of underdevelopment to the long absence of democracy caused by military rule (Umez, 2000: 29 - 39). After a careful examination of these long standing perspectives and their impact in explaining the problem of underdevelopment in Nigeria, Umez concludes that:

> "They do not offer a fundamental explanation of the current development problems in Nigeria; they explain little of the country's internal contradictions. Consequently, they provide an inadequate guide to formulating appropriate and lasting policies and sound strategies to address those problems and internal contradictions in Nigeria (Umez, 2000: 25)."

It is from the above premise and conviction that Umez proceeds to present his understanding and explanation of

the development problem, which are contained in the four perspectives mentioned earlier. His central argument is that the current problems of development in Nigeria are fundamentally linked to the issues presented under these perspectives. Before his exposition of the issues contained in these perspectives, Umez authoritatively claims that they are "the most effective solutions to move Nigeria forward" (Umez, 2000: 22). The four perspectives could be summarized thus:

The prevalent value system: The central argument of this perspective is that since the values of a given society provide insights into how the attitudes and actions of individuals within that society affect development endeavors, it is necessary to understand the prevalent Nigerian value system as a guide to solving the problems of development in Nigeria. This perspective links the crisis of development in Nigeria to the dominant value system which is defined as 'one that glorifies and endorses corrupt and illegal means as necessary, normal, and sufficient means to ends' (Umez, 2000: 53). The prevalent value system perspective identifies the following factors as the consequences of the Nigerian value system which in turn have created problems for development:

1. Embezzlement of public (and company) funds.
2. A free-rider mentality.
3. Dishonesty.
4. Disobedience to laws.
5. Disregard for the opinion of experts.

In summary, all these issues discussed under the prevalent value system in the words of Umez, "produces, at the general level, a corrupt and inept leadership, which ultimately misappropriate public funds, thereby creating problems of development" (Umez, 2000: 58)

The inferiority complex perspective: This perspective argues that at the root cause of corruption and the embezzlement of public funds only for such looted funds to be sent abroad, lies the issue of inferiority complex. The perspective views as abnormal the practice where Nigerians who are entrusted with public funds do steal such funds and then stack them in foreign banks where it will be of no benefit to Nigeria. The irony of this practice as the author points out is that leaders of these foreign countries in return see Nigerian leaders as corrupt, uncivilized, and nasty thugs (Umez, 2000: 61).

The language perspective: The language perspective seeks to demonstrate how the power of language has affected the mentality of Nigerians. According to the author, the use of such phrases like paint someone black; black sheep of the family; black book; black market; black devil; black death; black magic; black widow etc has succeeded in demeaning, desecrating and dehumanizing especially black Africans. The implications of this, which in the words of the author are ''damaging, terrifying and enormous (Umez, 2000: 66) are as follows;

1. At the macro level, it has created a situation where Africans consciously or unconsciously have come to accept that black people are of no good that is, the word black is used to describe anything that is bad.
2. It has tarnished the image of Africa. Because of this even Africans in the Diaspora do not have regard for Africa.
3. It has also created a sort of distrust and disrespect among Africans.

The collective ignorance perspective: Within this perspective, collective ignorance is conceived as a situation where a set of misguided Nigerian leaders out of sheer ignorance believe that they are the only ones who are capable of ruling the country. The problem of collective ignorance, as the perspective argues is responsible for a lot of contradictions and problems in Nigeria. Some of these problems include:

1. Lack of conscience among 'chosen' Nigeria leaders/elite
2. Starvation of the 'masses' by the leaders
3. Accepting bribery and corruption as normal
4. The embezzlement of public funds with impunity.
5. The shameless trips to foreign countries for routine medical check-ups and treatment by the leaders without any attempt to provide such hospitals in Nigeria.

After his exposition of the four perspectives, Umez went further to highlight some illusions held by Nigerians, which to a great extent have compounded the crisis of development. These illusions could be seen from two basic angles, namely:

1. That Nigerian is still a young country; after all, it took the United States over 200 years to be where it is today.
2. There is corruption everywhere.

Umez concludes his analysis by providing suggestions on how to address the problems of development. These suggestions that are in form of policy recommendations are listed below;

1. The need for citizenship education and a centre for the study of ethnics.
2. The taming of destructive arrogance and class consciousness among Nigerians.
3. The involvement of parents in the campaign for real education.
4. The involvement of the media and other agents of socialization in the crusade to reeducate Nigerian children and the public at large on better ways of life.
5. The elimination of illegal and fraudulent acts.
6. The need to urgently address the 'brain drain' problem.
7. The investment of Nigerian resources in Nigeria curing the disease of ignorance and inferiority complex.

8. Teaching leadership qualities
9. A weekly address by the President of Nigeria.

A CRITIQUE OF UMEZ'S ANALYSIS

Umez's work is a reexamination of the crisis of development in Nigeria. The work importantly points to the fact that the crisis of development in Nigeria still remains unresolved after several decades of the pioneering works of African scholars like Rodney (1972), Ake (1982,1995), Nnoli (1981), Offiong (1981) and Achebe (1983) and the efforts of international development agencies such as the world bank, united nations and the international monetary fund .

It is necessary to begin with an attempt to debunk Umez's claim that the previous efforts made by scholars to understand the crisis of development in Nigeria have failed to offer a fundamental explanation of the current development problems. This claim is not only incorrect but also unfair. The reason is that even the new perspectives provided by Umez still cannot be properly understood without making reference to the three perspectives that he had already criticized and dismissed. This will be demonstrated with only one of the old three perspectives: that is the colonial legacy pers-pective. It is not possible to completely ignore the impact of colonialism on the current crisis of development as Umez would want us to do. The past we all know always has important lessons for the present and the future. In this sense, the prevalent value system perspective that Umez used in his explanation still has a link with colonialism. Disobedience to laws, dishonesty, embezzle-ment of public and company funds that characterized our prevalent value system are all social vices that came up as a result of colonialism. Scholars like Peter Ekeh (1975, 1983) had tried to demonstrate how colonialism in Africa affected the social structure and in the process created two publics instead of one (Ekeh's theory of colonialism and two publics) . It is the existence of these two publics that account for disobedience to laws, embezzlement of public funds and dishonesty in our national life. This is because Nigerians believe that the state (which equates to what Ekeh calls the civic public) exists not for their interest hence its laws are not to be obeyed. It is also this kind of feeling and orientation that explains why elected and appointed leaders do embezzle public funds.

Umez's inferiority complex perspective also has a link with colonialism. Scholars have demonstrated how colonial policies subjugated, humiliated and intimidated Africans during the colonial era. It could be, therefore, argued that the present situation of inferiority complex among Nigerians, which Umez rightly believes, is a problem for development had its foundation laid by the colonialist. What is required now is the type of leadership that will re-orientate Nigerians on values that will make them believe in themselves. Such a leadership as Asobie (2008: 1) has recently pointed out must not be preoccupied with winning and retaining power and then using the power to serve themselves and deal with their enemies.

The point is that the four perspectives presented by Umez cannot be properly understood without recognizing the role colonialism played in bringing them up. Some other scholars have always appreciated the fact that while Africans cannot be exonerated from fueling the crisis of development in the continent, the colonial legacy factor had strong consequences that it cannot be ignored. As Falola (2005: 6) puts it "To understand contemporary Africa, we must turn to the colonial past and see the stamp of the legacy of that era on the present."

The place of corruption in Umez analysis draws attention in this study because as Lawal (2007: 4) has rightly pointed out, '' African presents a typical case of the countries(sic) in the world whose development has been undermined and retarded by the menace of corrupt practices''. Recently, the African union is reported to have said that corruption drains the region of some $140 billion a year which is about 25% of the continent's official GDP (Ribadu, 2009).The consequence of this has manifested in the absence of basic infrastructures such as schools, roads, hospitals and a myriad of other problems which invariably leads to political instability. In the Nigerian context, where 75% of the citizens live on less than US$1 per day while US$300 billion has disappeared from the country, Nigeria presents a classical example of how people in a resources rich country could wallow in abject poverty (Adeniyi and Fagbadebo, 2007: 7).The impact of corruption on the totality of the developmental and governmental processes in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. Underscoring the impact of corruption on the practice of democracy, Nwabueze (2007: 96) makes a painful revelation ''that the most tragic consequence of corruption in Nigeria is its effects upon the attitudes and mentality of the people. It has created a widespread feeling of frustration, of disgust and cynicism, which has in its turn undermined enthusiasm for and faith in the state.''

An important point about the corruption problem in Nigeria is that the problem seems to be insurmountable even in the light of anti-corruption initiatives. Umez wrote in 2000(that is at the dawn of Nigeria's present democratic dispensation), yet close to a decade after the practice of democracy, the situation still remains the same and alarming. In a recent testimony before the US House financial services committee, Ribadu who is the immediate Chairman of one of the anti-corruption agencies in Nigeria revealed how Mr. Joshua Dariye, a former Governor of Plateau State was found by the London Metropolitan police to operate 25 bank accounts and had acquired 10 million pounds in benefit from criminal conduct in London. This is outside the $34 million retrieved domestically from his crimes in Nigeria. Also revealed was the case of Mr. D.S.P Alamieyeseigha, a former governor of oil rich Bayelsa State who was found to have acquired four properties in London valued at 10 million

pounds. This is in addition to another property in Cape Town valued at $1.2 million and the sum of 1 million pounds found in his bedroom at his apartment in London. Another interesting aspect of Umez's analysis is his attempt to dispel the illusions, which have contributed to the crisis of development in Nigeria. Two issues arise at this point. One is that these illusions are at the heart of the development crisis in Nigeria. Nigerians have continued to live under the illusion that things will get better without taking the right steps. While it must be appreciated that Nigerian has its own peculiar history, the point has to be made that Nigerians must take the decision to do the right things at the right time in order to get out from the development crisis. The attitude of trying to defend unwholesome and corrupt practices with the excuse that it is obtainable everywhere must be discouraged. The case of recent elections in Nigeria provides a good example. During the 2003 elections a lot of irregularities were observed but were not condemned in strong terms by the relevant authorities in Nigeria. This singular act did not only exacerbate the level of irregularities in the 2007 elections, but was instrumental to the belief held among Nigerians before the election that 'elections are not effective mechanism for selecting leaders' (Afrobarometer, 2006: 9). The Second issue relates to the place of the human mind in the process of develop-ment. It could be deduced that Umez placed high value on the human mind in the entire process of development. This must have informed the choice of the issues he exposed under the four perspectives discussed in his work. This is a viewpoint that will help to put to an end to the dependency syndrome in Africa. Because if Nigerians can change their value system and then discard the sense of feeling inferior to the west then there is hope for development. The idea of seeing the West (particularly the United States of America) as our road map to development has contributed to the crisis of development. At this point, it is necessary to remember Nnoli's warning about seeing the West as the Alpha and Omega of development. According to Nnoli (1982: 21) such a notion of development commits us to a wholesale imitation of others and, therefore to a wholesale repudiation of our state of being.

Finally, it is necessary to look at the four perspectives discussed in the book. The issues raised under each of these perspectives are simple and practical issues that have adversely affected Nigerian's effort to develop. Nigerians are aware of the millions of stolen money kept abroad by their leaders. We have seen public officials embezzle public funds with impunity. Because of the prevalent value system characterized with all sorts of ills, Nigerians have also seen people with questionable character parading themselves as leaders. We have witnessed warfare during elections because people want to win at all cost. All these and more have happened and will continue until we reflect on the issues raised in Umez's analysis. The beauty of Umez's analysis also lies in his bringing his personal experiences to bear on the discussion. The act has helped in making his readers feel the reality of the problem. Also, the policy prescriptions given by Umez are also worthy suggestions that will to a great extent help in solving the problems in Nigeria

Conclusion

The essence of this study as already pointed out is to bring to fore Umez's arguments. The study has highlighted Umez's core argument about how the crisis of development in Nigeria could be resolved. The study found out that the issues presented under the four perspectives by Umez are critical issues that need to be addressed. For illustration, is the collective ignorance perspective which has led to the belief among a set of Nigerians that they are the only people capable of ruling the country. This notion is behind the crisis in Nigeria's electoral system and as evidenced by the 2007 elections can lead to the breakdown of democratic process. The study also found out that there is need for attention to be given to the findings of research as contained in books, journals, monographs and reports. Research holds the key to development. Umez as pointed out earlier wrote in 2000 which imply that the events of military rule in Nigeria must have informed his arguments. Yet a decade after the return of democracy the state of the development crisis still remains the same because enough attention has not be given to the findings of research. The study concludes that Umez has addressed a contemporary problem and in doing so has contributed his quota to solving the problem and to the acquisition and expansion of knowledge. His shortcomings not withstanding, this study recommends that his policy prescription should be taken seriously by Nigerian leaders and those who are interested in the future of Nigeria as a developed nation.

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