

## **The North Divide and The Under-Development of the Third World Countries in The 21century**

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### **Abstract**

This paper considers the development dichotomy between the global north and the third world country. The focus of this paper is not about the global north but the underdevelopment and development options available to the third world countries or under-developed countries, and these countries can be found in African, Asia, South America, etc. It highlights the various theories of development and the flaws associated with such theories, such as modernization, dependency and alternative development theories to operationalize, how development is understood along the development trajectory. The paper also highlights the causes of underdevelopment in some third world countries and finally proposes ways forward for these countries to encompassing strong institutions, culture and development, transfer of technology and some of these countries, strategically positioning themselves in the world capitalist system.

**Keywords: North-South Divide, Underdevelopment, Capitalism, Third World, Strong Institutions**

### **Introduction**

'Today, the lighthouse of development shows cracks and is starting to crumble. The idea of development stands like a ruin in the intellectual landscape. Delusion and disappointment, failures and crimes have been the steady companions of development and they tell a common story: it did not work. Moreover, the historical conditions which catapulted the idea into prominence have vanished as development has become outdated. But above all, the hopes and desires which made the idea fly, are now exhausted as

development has grown obsolete' (Sachs, 1992, 3). The growing gap between developed and developing countries has dominated international relations and diplomacy for a long time. This gap has led to constant capital influx from the developed countries to those in the Third World including Africa; with the goal of helping them overcome their problems and reduce the gap.

The debate concerning the underdevelopment and development of African continent and other equally poor parts of the world is not a new phenomenon in the development discourse but can be traced back to antiquity. There exist a number of reasons deduced to the present condition of Africa which might be termed as development crisis. This is because the continent has remained largely underdeveloped regardless of the presence of huge natural resources (gold, cocoa, bauxite, oil, diamond, timber) and human resources based. Several decades after the end of colonialism, most parts of Africa is still fighting with problems such as high poverty rate, corruption, lack of basic infrastructural facilities in all sectors of the economy, unemployment, high mortality rate, political instability and insecurity of lives and property.

'It is impossible to talk about development without referring to concepts such as poverty, production, the notion of the state, or equality. These concepts first rose to prominence during modern Western history and only then have they been projected on the rest of the world' (Sachs, 1992, 5). For example, Ghana touted as one of the best democratic and politically stable countries in Africa and Nigeria the most heavily populated African country, according to the United Nations human development report (2011), ranked 135 and 156 respectively out of 187 countries (UN, 2011). Against the background of Africa's development crisis, emanated the debate on how to solve the crisis of development in third world countries. This debate has been a blistering one and is dominated by two main related themes, namely: the argument over the actual meaning of the concept of development and the appropriate pathway to development (Ikenna, 2009). However, despite the discrepancy among scholars, global policy makers and institutions over these issues, numerous attempts have been made to understand and solve the crisis of development in third world countries, for instance countries in Africa.

With regard to the history of development and underdevelopment, there exists limited literature. However, the origin of development and underdevelopment is associated with the speech of President Truman of United States.

That very day, the day Truman took office as the 33rd president of United States, a new epoch was opened for the world, The EON' of development. President Truman in his

speech on that day asserted that 'we must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas.

It is worth noting that, President Truman was not the first person to use the word-development. A former member of the Secretariat of the International Labour Organization by name Wilfred Benson was probably the first person to have invented the word- development when he referred to underdeveloped areas in his writing piece on economic basis for peace in 1942. The expression by Wilfred Benson found no echo from the experts in the field of development studies and the public, hence its extinction at the time.

However, the word development only acquired relevance and the echo from the experts and the public when President Truman presented it as an emblem of his policy direction as the 33rd President of United States. Since then, development has signified at least one thing: to flee from the undignified state called underdevelopment.

### **Development and Under-Development**

Development constitutes a process; the concept is normally used at a fairly general level. It includes a wide variety of changing features. It is in common usage equated with improvements. The word development thus has a positive connotation regardless of how it is defined. To pretend otherwise, as Seers (1972) says, is just to hide one's value judgements.

Moreover, it is often difficult to separate the positive from the negative in a process of change. For instance, the building up of formal education is in most cases a good and necessary element for change. In many Third World countries formal education may nonetheless have negative side-effects such as alienation regarding strenuous work in, for instance, agriculture. Due to the arguments above one may opt for adopting a definition of development which is goal-free. Brookfield (1975) takes this stance when he defines development as "the whole process of change brought about by the creation and expansion of an interdependent world system".

In analytical work it is, however, necessary to establish a concept with a specified content and regarding the process of development also to give the concept a positive meaning. Since concepts such as change and evolution (which are broader concepts) cannot replace development as a general, descriptive and goal-free concept, it seems essential to refrain from defining development in a detailed manner. *Development* should instead be used, as

is usual, to denote a complex process of change that may, although not necessarily in the short-run then later, result in improved levels of living for the world's population at large, that is, the collective betterment of mankind. In thinking about development it is easy to fall prey to the use of a framework of mechanical evolution, of thinking in linear historical sequences leading to a typical modern Western (or Eastern) society.

According to Todaro and Smith (2012:16), 'development must therefore be conceived of as a multidimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes, and national institutions, as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and the eradication of poverty'. This presupposes that development is not purely an economic phenomenon but rather a multi-dimensional process involving reorganization and reorientation of entire economic and social system and it is a process of improving the quality of all human lives with three equally important aspects- which are basic components or core values serve as a conceptual basis and practical guideline for comprehending the inner meaning of development. These core values are sustenance, self-esteem and freedom and these represent a universal goal sought after by individual and society.

The above definition of freedom is in tandem with Amartya Sen notion on development. He also defines development strictly converse to that of economic point of view. According to him, all individuals are gifted with certain set of capabilities while it is simply a matter of realizing these capabilities that will allow a person to escape from poverty and their state of un-freedom. The un-freedom comprises lack of education, illiteracy, poor health, malnutrition, etc.

In fact, one should strive for an acceptance of multitudinous cultural definitions of the good life. Thus, the concept has a certain amount of vagueness. This is as it should be; the concept should refer to a movement of a society as a whole to a better but undetermined position or Development in my personal view has to do with qualitative and quantitative improvement in all aspect of human endeavour comprising the economic, political, cultural, environmental, social, etc.

The terms North and South or under-developed countries are used in scientific as well as political discourse to describe the relationship between the rich and industrialized countries on the one hand and the poor, less industrialized countries on the other hand. Despite the geographic connotation, the dividing line between North and South (under-developed countries) is not a spatial one since several countries from the Southern Hemisphere belong to the North and vice versa. Instead, central to the concepts of North

and South are different economic, political, and social structures, which together generate a specific level of development, which can be measured using a variety of indicators such as gross domestic product (GDP) per head, productivity, unemployment, illiteracy rates, infant mortality, life expectancy, etc (Bhagwati J. :1997).

While economic and social indicators describe the structural aspects of the North divide and South or under-developed countries, a political analysis of the North and South conflict has to deal with the emergence of different coalitions and institutions, representing the interests of South or North in the domain of international politics. The history of the developing countries also plays an important role in this context since it was the experience of colonial subjugation and oppression which contributed to the formation of a common, anti-colonial identity in the South. This article makes use of both definitions of North and South: one of them describes the structural features of the North–South relationship and one relating to North and South as political forces, themselves shaping world affairs (Jameson K. P. and Wilber C. K.:1996).

In the 1950s and 1960s backward regions and less developed countries were commonly used. In contrast to these concepts, the concept "proletarian states" was used to point at the relations between nations as the main explanation for poverty and relatively permanent structural imbalances, that is, underdevelopment. In the 1970s underdeveloped countries gained popularity, as did the more optimistic term developing countries. Personally, I prefer poor countries to the former term but since poverty includes both a quantitative position and a structural dimension, neither poor nor underdeveloped are appropriate designations.

Since the structural changes that take place in many Third World countries are not conducive of economic and social development, the term developing country is not an appropriate description of reality generally. (Myrdal: 1968).

It has been a fashion today to split the Third World into a number of often overlapping categories of oil importing or oil exporting developing countries, low income or middle-income developing countries, most severely affected countries, least developed countries, non-oil least developed countries, island developing countries, landlocked developing countries, newly industrializing countries and others. (The rest of the world is usually divided into three categories: Industrialized countries, centrally planned economies and capital-surplus oil-exporters. The more specified and limited categories of Third World countries represent an important reorientation of the development debate because those

categories are more empirically relevant than the often extreme generalizations made in the last three decades.

Moreover, the concept Third World escapes an explicit comparison with the developed either capitalist or socialist countries. According to Lacoste (1965), the designation Third World was first used by Sauvy in an analogue with 'Tiers Eta' denoting all the disadvantaged groups in France in 1789 that were opposed to the nobility and clergy. The concept Third World is neutral. By using this concept, the scope is open for more complex explanations, and no *a priori* decision is made of the main causes of underdevelopment or non-development at a general level. The First World or the North refers to developed market economies and the Second World to the developed socialist countries. These terms are little used in the literature, and will not be applied here. The last argument for adopting the concept Third World is the implicit notion of (or hope for) a third path, an undetermined but possible path to a "sane society". At least it represents another, undefined option for development thinking and planning. The Third World is negatively defined "all nations that did not become, during the historical process of the establishment of the present World Order, industrialized and wealthy" (Abdalla 1978).

Exploitation and reshaping of the economy and distortion of social, cultural and psychological patterns during the colonial epoch are essential common factors. The category Third World is therefore still useful in spite of the existing heterogeneity regarding, for instance, population size, resource endowment and level of development. This heterogeneity, or rather different combinations of undesirable characteristics, which the Third World countries have, makes a short and positive definition less appropriate. Most countries have all or approximately all of the following characteristics: Insufficient food supply (or a skewed distribution among groups and regions), low productivity in agriculture, high population growth, physical and other resources which are unused or used by foreigners, huge unemployment, low degree of industrialization, incomplete market system, unequally developed economic sectors hampering economic circulation, large tertiary sector and social structures contradictory to economic optimisation. A region is underdeveloped when there are net flows of capital out from the region, structurally caused unproductively and increasing poverty (Frank 1967). A country is underdeveloped when it is dominated from outside and when sectors are thereby created which are not linked and have large differences in productivity (Amin 1974).

### **The North and the Third Countries Relations in Context of the Modernization and Dependency Theory:**

Modernization theory is one of the theories that explains pathway to development and gains fame in the 1950s. Modernization theory emerged in the 1950s as an explanation of how the industrial societies of North America and Western Europe developed. The theory argues that societies develop in fairly predictable stages through which they become increasingly complex. Development depends primarily on the importation of technology as well as a number of other political and social changes believed to come about as a result. For example, modernization involves increased levels of schooling and the development of mass media, both of which foster democratic political institutions. Transportation and communication become increasingly sophisticated and accessible, populations become more urban and mobile, and the extended family declines in importance as a result. According to modernization theories, endogenous factors in the countries, such as traditional, illiteracy, the traditional attitude of the population, agrarian structure, the low division of labour, the lack of communication and infrastructure, etc., are answerable for underdevelopment. Differences in structure and historical origin are considered of little importance; international dependencies are not taken into account. Rostow's five stages of economic growth feature predominantly in the 1950s. In his classic work titled, *The Stages of Economic Growth*, Rostow outlines an optimistic scenario by positing five stages of economic development which all societies in one point in time will transcend to realizing development. These stages are the traditional stage, the pre-condition for take-off, the take-off stage, and drive to maturity and lastly the stage of mass consumption (Rostow, 1990). Despite the contribution of the modernization school of thought to development discourse, it is criticized of being Eurocentric, development not a linear process, ignored the history and culture of different group of people and society, etc.

Following the flaws in modernization theory emerges the dependency theory to explaining development and underdevelopment. This school of thought regarding development and underdevelopment discourse emerged in the 1960s. Dependency was defined as a 'situation in which a certain number of countries have their economy conditioned by the development and expansion of another' (Greig, Hulme and Turner: 2007)

Dependency theory according to Andre Gunder Frank, in his classical piece titled; *the development of underdevelopment*, he postulates that the underdevelopment of undeveloped countries or part of the world is a ramification of the unequal and unfavourable conditions they found themselves in, in the world capitalist system. To understand why a nation is poor and underdeveloped, it is futile to examining the values and attitudes endogenous to an individual but more pertinent to exploring the role a

nation performed in the world capitalist system (Greig, Hulme and Turner, 2007). The dependency theory turned the modernization theory on its head by rejecting the argument that any relationship between the traditional and the modern societies would culminate into mutual benefits or gains. For them, the possibility of peripheral development is hindered by this relationship.

In the 1970s emerged the alternative development perspective in explaining how development can be engineered across space and especially in the underdeveloped part of the world of which Africa continent is an integral part.

It is essence to take note of the fact that, dissatisfaction with mainstream development led to movement of alternative development and by mainstream development, I am referring to the meta narratives or grand theories to development which include the modernization and dependency school of thought or theory. According to the 1975 report of Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 'What Now? Another Development', development should be, geared to the satisfaction of needs, endogenous and self-reliant and in harmony with the environment. Whether this was meant to be an alternative practice of development apart from the main-stream or whether it is to change mainstream development is not quite settled (Pieterse, 1998). Alternative development to development can also imply local development with local knowledge and expert knowledge, bottom up approach with the objective directed at the provision of basic needs. A critical question is whether alternative development is an alternative way of achieving development, broadly sharing the same goals as mainstream development but using different means, participatory and people centred which is conversely to the mainstream development theories which focus on the state as their agent. It would seem this way if we consider the huge increase of development funds being directed through NGOs during the past two decades which now surpass the total annual disbursements through the IMF and World Bank. Despite the new dimension brought on board by the alternative development in the development and underdevelopment discourse with focus on NGOs and local actors as its agents, it is not devoid of censures. Alternative development has been turned on its head that, how alternative is alternative development? And also it lacks sufficient theoretical cohesion and there exist varying understandings of what is alternative development and what is not.

In the 1980s appeared the neo liberalism perspective in development landscape. Neo liberalism is seen as representative of reform under globalization. Neo liberalism ' is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets



and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. The state has to guarantee, for example, the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up those military, defence, police and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets' (Thorsen & Lie).

On the other hand, neo liberalism rests on economic liberalizations, free trade, open markets, privatization of nationalized industries, deregulation and enhancing the role of private sector in society with the minimal role of the state in the economy which had seen reflection in the Structural Adjustment Program as package for the developing countries which several African countries including Ghana, Zambia, etc benefitted from. Structural Adjustment Program is the policies implemented by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (the Bretton Woods Institutions) in developing countries in the 1980s. These policy changes are conditions for getting new loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or World Bank, or for obtaining lower interest rates on existing loans following the oil crisis which put burden on most economies especially the developing and the underdeveloped countries. Conditionality's are attached to ensure that the money lent will be spent in accordance with the overall goals of the loan. The Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) are created with the goal of reducing the borrowing country's fiscal imbalances. The neo liberal prescription has been seen as a panacea for spreading growth across space since it is market led but it has been challenged and criticized by many scholars that, it has bring more inequality across space than ever before, SAPs have failed to restore economic growth in short and medium term run, introduction of SAPs led to worse health status of people in countries which implemented SAPs and that SAPs do not address the economic constraints of Sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., low levels of technology, human resource skills, small and fragmented markets). Rapley posited in 2007, that 'structural adjustment yielded some positive gains in some of the more advanced third-world countries. However, in the poorer countries, those most in need of rapid change, it was less effective, and in some places actually did more harm than good'(Rapley 2007:4).

### **Causes of Underdevelopment in the third world countries (Africa countries as a case study):**

The current state of development in the third world countries, which has been described by scholars as a development crisis cannot be explained from one perspective but several perspectives of exogenous and endogenous factors which have plagued the continent for decades.

One of the exogenous causes of underdevelopment in third world countries, Africa countries for instance, widely alluded to by many scholars in the literature has to do with colonialism and the scramble for African continent in 1880. Most African countries have been colonized by the British through the policy of indirect rule and the French through their policy of assimilation.

According to Simensen, 'colonial rule can be regarded as the next phase of Africa's integration into the international system. European policies varied considerably between regions and over time, from a brutal period of conquest at the end of the 19th century to active development efforts following the Second World War'.

Colonialism is linked to African underdevelopment from the perspective of exploitation of precious natural resources from the continent of Africa which is used to develop the jurisdiction of their colonial masters at the detriment of the African countries. For example, Ghana is been colonized by Britain and numerous resources including gold, diamond, bauxite, timber, etc. are exploited to the benefit of Britain. But the question is what about Ethiopia who has never been colonized before in its history but is still underdeveloped. One conspicuously feature of Ethiopia's level of development is that, it is lagging behind to even countries that have been colonized, for example Ghana. So the question is, is colonialism important in explaining African underdevelopment? Yes to a lesser extent since there are other equally important factors which are endogenous to Africa' underdevelopment.

The world capitalist system in which the African countries find themselves in also accounted for Africa's underdevelopment. This school of thought is widely supported by the dependency school of thought pioneered by Gunder Frank. It is argued that, it is not the existence of the world capitalist system per se which is shaped by neo liberal policies of free market, minimal role of the states, but has to do with the role played by individual states in the world capitalist system. The African countries played a very weak role in the world capitalist system with focus on production of raw material with less or no value which affects their relationship in the world market. In the 1980s, the IMF and World Bank presented a unified package, often in the form of an Economic Recovery Programme, as a condition for African countries to find a way out of the debt crisis. Central to this package is the rolling back of the state from the control of the economy, and encouraging rather a facilitator role.

According to Olutayo and Omobowale, in 2007, state capitalism that was endorsed in the colonial and the latter part of the 1960s is now perceived as a hindrance to development.

In laying greater importance on market forces for the distribution of resources, some of the policies that most African countries have now endorsed since the 1980s include: significant devaluations, removal of government subsidies and price controls, cuts in public expenditure with deep public sector retrenchments, privatization, relaxation of foreign exchange controls, an increase of interest rates to real levels, the withdrawal of protectionist measures and an increase in agricultural producer prices (Olutayo and Omobowale: 2007).

Apart from the exogenous factors accounting for Africa's underdevelopment, there are equally important endogenous factors causing underdevelopment in Africa. One of such endogenous factors is corruption. Today, most African nation-states have been independent for forty years. Unfortunately, at forty, many of these nation states have made either minimal progress or stagnated, in terms of socioeconomic growth and development. Despite the fact that the continent's problems are multifaceted, corruption, particularly in countries where it has become an integral part of the social fabric, is a major handicap to their development efforts. Corruption may be defined simply as the misuse of entrusted power for private gain (Ineke: 2010).

The financial resource involved in these corrupt deals could have been channeled into useful projects that will help to stimulate growth and development in African countries. It is also important to take note of the fact that no single regime or government in Africa after independence has been excluded from corruption saga, being rumour or truth. Taking Ghana for instance, there were corruption rumours leveled against ex-President Kufuor regime of purchasing a mansion (Hotel Kufuor), kickbacks at the seat of government from contractors, Sekyi Hughes (former Speaker of Parliament) looting government bungalow, sale of lands to NPP ministers and cronies, etc. Under the late Professor Mills regime, there exist corruption allegations and famous ones include the Woyome saga which is currently on going in court, Mabey and Johnson saga which led to firing of some ministers under his government, Dr SipaYankey, etc. This corruption allegation from Ghana is to buttress the point that, though Ghana has been touted as the most democratic country and beacon for African continent, there are still challenges of corruption which is thwarting its economic as well as its democratic gains. The question is, if Ghana being touted in such colour is riddled with corruption challenges, how much more other African countries?

Geographical location of Africa is another factor that accounted for Africa's underdevelopment. This factor is endogenous to Africa because it has nothing to do with external forces having their influence on the continent, hence its underdevelopment. Most

of the African landmass lies within the tropical climate with no access to either the Atlantic or the Indian Ocean. This made the vast areas of the interior continent home to malaria and tsetse fly which afflict humans and animals respectively.

### **Ways to Help Develop the Third World Countries:**

First and foremost, culture and development nexus should be looked in their development effort. They should adopt policies, programmes and technologies that are appropriate and compatible with their cultures.

Some economists have confronted culture and found it helpful in understanding economic development. Perhaps the broadest statement comes from the pen of David Landes: Max Weber was right. If we learn anything from the history of economic development, it is that culture makes almost all the difference. Elaborating on Landes's theme, Japanese economist Yoshihara Kunio writes, "One reason Japan developed is that it had a culture suitable for it (Harrison, 2006). It is therefore important on the part of African leaders to focus on their culture in relation to development from economic perspective, Sen's perspective on development, etc. The culture and development nexus brings to mind the Confucian ethics which is a contemporary theory linking economic development to cultures of some countries as a ramification of observation of some countries economic progress since the World War II. Example of such countries includes Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, etc. Therefore, it is essence on the part of African countries to look inward to their culture in development effort. In fact, there are certain elements of Africa's rich cultural heritage that has led to the evolution and mastery of technical knowledge with respect to the arts, textile industry, craft, music technology and food technology, in which most African societies have made some progress, and have attracted cross geographic exchange and interaction (Ogunbure, 2011). As part of culture, Africans should patronize made in African goods and reduce their taste for foreign goods which is eroding gains that should have been made by African countries should they patronize what is produced in their countries.

Secondly, emphasis on strong institutions in African countries can be a panacea for African development and not having strong political leaders as it pertains in Africa. This is in tandem with statement by President of USA; Barack Obama when he made a statement that, Africa needs strong institutions and not strong leaders when he met late President Mills of Ghana in 2009. Having a strong institution can help fight against corruption since the system will be tight to address issues of corruption of whatever form- political corruption which is paramount in Africa as well as corruption in the civil service, etc. In addition, to combat the pernicious problem will require putting in place appropriate anti-

corruption and legal machinery; and prosecute without fear and favour. The low incidence of corruption by the governing elites in countries like Denmark, New Zealand, Sweden, Singapore, Finland, Iceland and the Netherlands is present, thanks to rational legal bureaucratic practice, is evidence that corruption can be contained (Uneke, 2010).

Finally, for the African countries when it comes to development has to do with strategically positioning themselves in the world capitalist system being perpetuated by globalization and its compelling forces. In order for globalization to have positive impacts on Africa's development, national governments must have the choice to choose among apt monetary, fiscal, trade, macroeconomic and other economic and social policies without heavy-handed intrusion by the developed countries and the multilateral institutions these countries control. In short, a more democratic international economic and political environment is a sine qua non for sustained and broad based economic development to take place in Africa.

### Conclusion

In a nutshell, the development gap between the developed (core) and the underdeveloped (periphery) countries has remained an issue among development experts, academicians, politicians and students of development studies. Various development theories of different nature meta and micro narratives on development have been advanced but the gap between the developed and the underdeveloped countries is widening by days. Various factors have been advanced for African underdevelopment comprising both endogenous and exogenous factors of colonialism and the scramble for African continent, world capitalist, corruption, geographical location and weak institutions. Despite the above causes, there is still hope for Africa's development through the options of culture and development nexus, emphasis on strong institutions in African countries, transfer of technology, strategic positioning of themselves in the world capitalist system.

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