

# **Rethinking Third World Development: An Analysis Of Contemporary Paradigms**

**IKECHUKWU G EZIAKOR\***

## **ABSTRACT**

The issue of Third World development in general, and that of African countries in particular, has been the subject of much debate in recent times. Many controversial issues remain unsolved as the quest for appropriate development paths continue. This paper reviews the early dominant paradigm *vis-a-vis* the new conceptualisation for achieving appropriate national development in the Third World in general, and African nations-states in particular.

On the basis of the identified shortcomings in the early conceptualisations of Third World development the contemporary paradigm for the achievement of a people-centred and/or need-oriented, as well as an ecologically sustainable, development have been delineated and analysed.

## **Introduction**

Since the early '70's, the deficiencies associated with the early models of development (such as the excessive emphasis on economic growth *per se* through capitalisation and industrialisation, as well as on centralised planning and decision-making without concern for popular participation and equity issues) appear to be dawning on development scholars and planners alike. For instance, it has been observed that, even by the late 1960s, most Third World development analysts had become aware of the apparent incongruities existing between the development goals of many Third World nation-states, their extensive labour supply conditions and the large-scale, capital-intensive, and labour-saving technologies they were importing from the industrialised countries (Old, 1977: VII). In order primarily to satisfy the whims and consumption patterns of the small minority (the indigenous power elite and bureaucrats), the early national development policies emphasised the importation and/or domestic production of luxurious consumer goods. The establishment of car assembly plants, breweries, and the construction of airports and skyscrapers, etc were the hallmarks of early Third World development. In other words, the early development strategies were strongly skewed in favour of the rich and privileged in the Third World, thereby widening the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' in these societies.

+ School of Agriculture, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi, Nigeria.

By being predominantly capital-intensive and labour-saving in nature, several authors (Jequier, 1976; Seers, 1977) have observed that the imported large-scale technologies result in a worsening unemployment situation and income distribution patterns in the developing societies, thereby exacerbating the impoverishment of the majority. According to Franke and Chasin (1980), before the advent of colonialism and the imposition of alien Western development patterns and lifestyles on the indigenous systems, the peoples of most Third World nation-states had not only developed stable production patterns, but also remarkably effective means of utilising their natural resource endowments in ways that were well-suited to their tropical ecological conditions. But since the colonial intervention and the attendant marginal incorporation of Third World economies into the world capitalist system, poverty assumed tragic proportions (Rodney, 1974). Accordingly, several scholars (Crowder, 1966; Rodney, 1974; Igbozurike, 1976) have remarked that the traditional African subsistence agricultural production systems were far from being backward, and that, especially before the colonial destabilisation of their economies, Africans enjoyed the material comfort that resulted largely from settled farming.

It is now being strongly argued that an understanding of the process of national development would require more comprehensive analyses of both the internal and external contexts of development than had been previously considered. In addition, there is now a call for a 'New International Economic Order' (NIEO) which would find expression in the initiation of a new set of 'rules of the game' regarding trade, aid packages, investment patterns, monetary relations, and decision-making processes between the developed and the developing societies (Henriot, 1979). The thrust of the NIEO document is the unequivocal call for the respect of the sovereign equality of all nations and their inalienable rights over their specific natural resource endowments, as well as the regulation and supervision of the activities of multinational corporations (MNCs), and the implementation of equitable trade agreements (United Nations, 1974). According to Mazrui (1975:134) the essential requirements for a mutually beneficial relationship between the rich and poor nations is the belated but directly "needed transition from an interdependence based on hierarchy and Western charity to an interdependence based on symmetry and mutual accountability".

### **Conceptualisation of Appropriate National Development**

It is, therefore, being strongly contended that Third World development can no longer be misconstrued as being synonymous with the massive and indiscriminate importation of complex, capital and energy-intensive technologies from the largely temperate environment of the industrialised countries into the tropical conditions of the developing world. Furthermore, it should not be equated with mere increases in GNP and per capita income - irrespective of the distributional effects of such increases in economic growth. Education levels, employment generation, housing, health, and nutritional standards of the citizenry, as well as social justice and equity in income distribution, have all become essential indicators of the level of appropriate national development. In essence, the eradication of mass poverty, ignorance and disease, as well as the promotion of a 'self-reliant' development through the active involvement and popular participation of the citizenry in the identification, planning, and implementation

of development projects are now regarded as major objectives of the contemporary paradigm of development.

Schumacher (1973:168) has aptly remarked that development does not start with goods, or the marketing and/or purchase of industrial products. Rather, appropriate development must start with "people and their education, organisation, and discipline". It is in the light of this current awareness about the important ramifications of appropriate national development that Case and Niehoff (1976:9 in Woods, 1977:1) have also remarked that:

"one of the most significant changes in the theory and practice of development may be described as the demise of the GNP concept, ie the repudiation of the assumption that if the gross national product (GNP) is increased, the benefits of such increase somehow automatically 'trickle down' to large numbers of people."

There is, therefore, a growing tendency to incorporate distributive justice, mass poverty eradication, and other germane socioeconomic, cultural, ecological, and geopolitical goals as essential components of the contemporary paradigm of national development. Rising unemployment, inequality, and the attendant deterioration in welfare and quality of life of the poor majority in developing nation-states (even where there are recorded increases in GNP and per capita income) have also led to disenchantment and loss of faith in the early models of development. Presently, the social welfare and economic well-being of the citizenry in the Third World are regarded as the fundamental concern of the new development paradigm. In sum, the contemporary paradigm of national development is characterised by the following essential elements:

### *1. The Basic Human Needs Approach is now viewed as central to national development*

This strategy for national development emphasises the importance of the equitable distribution of social amenities, and also strongly urges the provision of minimally acceptable levels of essential human needs. These fundamental requirements include the provision of profitable employment opportunities, housing, water supplies, education, health facilities, electricity, transportation, etc, as well as non-material needs, such as grassroots participation in programme design, planning and implementation. There is also a call for the promotion of sociocultural identity and the establishment of a high sense of purpose in life and work (with the sociocultural components harmonising with the material needs) to foster solidarity and a high sense of belonging among the citizenry (Streeter, 1979).

The 'new' approach to development does not seem to be an entirely new concept. It has been likened to the 'subsistence norm' concept which has been advocated since the 50's as a basis for ensuring an optimum income distribution among the citizenry. Schickele (1950:9) postulated that the best income distribution is essentially "one that equalises opportunities among all individuals of society". The implication of this assertion, when translated into feasible terms, demands that (Schickele, 1950:9):

"everyone should grow up and live in an environment of at least minimum adequate standards of health, nutrition, clothing, shelter and education."

However, according to Schickele, the exact determinants and quantitative content of the minimum adequate standard of essential human needs would be contingent upon the

sociocultural patterns, the state of the art, and the magnitude of the social product relative to population. In other words, it may be unrealistic, if not preposterous, to expect the same (or even similar) levels of 'minimum adequate standards' in, for example, an industrialised and prosperous country 'X', as compared to a developing, and perhaps economically stagnant, country 'Y'.

Nevertheless, it has been strongly argued that nation-states would derive more social benefits through the provision of subsistence claims to the citizenry as opposed to the denial of such amenities. However, as evident in most Third World nations (where such claims have either not been met directly, or the opportunities for their realisation are non-existent), the consequences have been grave - in terms of mass poverty and starvation, political instability, and unmitigated social tension and violence. Therefore, the need for the incorporation of a basic needs approach to development programmes of Third World countries cannot be overemphasised.

## 2. *Greater emphasis is now placed on the design and introduction of profitable small scale, labour-intensive, capital and energy-saving technologies*

It is essential to concentrate efforts on the design and introduction of simple, low-cost, yet efficient, technologies that will be both accessible and affordable in relation to the poor of developing countries. This is now being stressed by most Third World scholars and development analysts. Apart from the exorbitant costs of most complex, high-energy technologies, available evidence also indicates that their inherent complexity frequently render them inscrutable and incomprehensible, especially to the illiterate majority that constitute the target population in the Third World. Furthermore, most large-scale technologies also tax other scarce production resources (including energy, capital, and high-level managerial skills) that are not readily available in developing countries. Using Mexico as a case in point, Grant (1973) has observed that government policies aimed at promoting large-scale farms and urban-based factories (to the sheer neglect of small-scale, labour-intensive producers) have not only increased unemployment levels, but have also widened the income disparity between the rich and the poor.

Accordingly, several writers (Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971; Zaltman and Duncan, 1977) have demonstrated that the complexity and non-compatibility of innovations (generally large-scale imported technologies) are inversely related to their rate of adoption and profitable utilisation by a specified target population. In addition, other researchers (Navarro, 1977; Norman, 1980) have observed that a sound developmental approach should, first and foremost, be aimed at building upon rather than destroying what is already in place. In other words, there is a call for the preservation of innumerable time-tested and indigenous production technologies in the Third World. This assertion seems to have arisen out of the increasing realisation, backed by empirical evidence, that many relatively simple traditional production systems, which have been used successfully for generations in the Third World, have been found to be quite sound. The implications of these findings are quite clear: a strong case is now being made for not only the preservation, but also the improvement, of such indigenous production systems and practices. Thus, there is a case for the integration of traditional (or

endogenous) practices and relevant modern (or exogenous) production systems in the process of designing appropriate technologies for the populace. By doing so, it is envisaged that the values, aspirations, and cultural patterns of the target population, as well as the inherent characteristics of their ecosystems, would have been duly considered in the development of improved technologies for their adoption and beneficial utilisation.

3. *Another essential element of the contemporary paradigm of development is the resuscitation of interest in, and a renewed awareness of, the significance of sociocultural identification, and the attendant promotion of an endogenous, self-reliant, and ecologically sustainable development*

This strategy of development stresses the importance of not only recognising the autonomy of the indigenous population of Third World nation-states, but also of providing them with requisite opportunities for mobilisation and organisation, so as to be able to "develop who they are, and what they have, by themselves, and for themselves" (Nerfin, 1986). It calls for the promotion of citizen participation in decentralised programme planning and decision-making. In other words, emphasis is now placed on grass roots involvement in 'needs-oriented' programme planning and implementation. This new approach to development is in direct contrast to the early dominant paradigm which, among other things, emphasised an authoritarian, hierarchical, and centralised planning and decision-making process in which the power elite and bureaucrats occupied the centre, while the citizenry was marginalised. Thus while the early model of development stressed a 'top-down' approach, the new paradigm stresses a 'bottom-up' approach to problem identification, programme design and execution. Owens and Shaw (1972) have observed that modernising Third World governments should aim at bridging the gap between the indigenous power elites and the masses through the formation of new forms of local institutions and organisations (or the modification and reinforcement of existing ones) in which the citizenry would be empowered to work out solutions to their own local problems.

Misra (1981:53) has observed that the early conceptualisation of development was based on the erroneous assumption that human society is homogeneous and, therefore, "imbued with the same culture, history, and level of development - no matter how one defined development". It was, therefore, assumed that it would be appropriate to base Third World development strategies on Western values, life-styles, and ingeniousness. What was ignored, according to Misra (1981), was the fact that those Western experiences and developmental patterns were peculiar not only in terms of their time of occurrence, but also with regard to their peculiar environmental conditions and geopolitical relationships with the Third World. Eziakor (1983) has, therefore, asserted that appropriate development must inevitably originate from a fundamental recognition of, and subsequent improvement upon, the indigenous production techniques within specified ecosystems. Furthermore, for national development to be real and meaningful, the citizenry should be actively involved in the identification, design, and implementation of development programmes meant to improve their welfare and livelihood. By these means a people-centred and ecologically sustainable development would be achieved.

4. *Finally, the new conceptualisation of development emphasises the need for a precise identification and analyses of both the internal (or endogenous) and external (or exogenous) causes of underdevelopment in Third World countries.*

One of the anomalies of the early model of development was the assumption that the fundamental cause of underdevelopment originated from the inherent characteristics of the sociocultural and institutional conditions of Third World nation-states themselves, rather than in their external relationships with the erstwhile colonial regimes. In other words, it was customary (if not, fashionable) to dismiss the indigenous populace as conservative and fatalistic, rendering themselves inaccessible and unresponsive to new ideas and efforts aimed at improving their welfare and livelihood. Very little effort was made to bring into focus the fact that Third World economies were forcibly and marginally incorporated into the world capitalist system on terms that were not their own. Surpluses, capital accumulation, and the subsequent development of the 'metropolis' largely resulted from the extraction of this same surplus, and the attendant decapitalisation of the 'satellite' economies.

Several scholars (Rodney, 1974; Igbozurike, 1976) have strongly argued that underdevelopment and poverty cannot be regarded as the original state of Third World nation-states. They resulted from the structural dependence and marginal incorporation of their economies into the world capital system. As already indicated, empirical studies have clearly shown that traditional subsistence agriculture, as practised in Africa, was far from being backward, and that, especially before the colonial intervention, Africans enjoyed the material comfort that resulted largely from organised farming (Crowder, 1966). According to Igbozurike (1976), poverty may have existed in the Third World, as elsewhere in the world, but definitely not to the extent experienced by the majority after the peripheral incorporation of their economies into the capitalist system. Furthermore, Rogers (1976:219) has remarked that the early models of development either ignored, or failed to recognise, the devastating effects of such external constraints and relationships as the:

"international terms of trade, the economic imperialism of international corporations, and the vulnerability and dependence of the recipients (mostly Third World countries) of technical assistance programmes (and food aid)."

### **Conclusion and policy options**

There is now a wide recognition that it is imperative to rethink the development strategies of Third World countries. There is, in particular, a discernible willingness among several Third World governments and policy-makers to draw lessons, and valuable insights, from the errors and experiences of the past. There is an increasing appreciation of the importance of emphasising a self-reliant development strategy in which normal trade and international cooperation would take place on parity basis. For example, following from the Chinese model, it has been observed that most Third World countries appear to appreciate the need to pursue an active foreign trade, while at the same time ensuring the insulation of their basic domestic economies from any disruptive effects of the linkage with the world market. The

pursuit of a diversified economy and the promotion of the production of those labour-intensive goods which labour-scarce industrialised countries need, but cannot themselves produce inexpensively, are clear testimonies to a needed policy reorientation in developing countries (McNamara, 1973).

Furthermore, in view of the negative externalities that have been associated with most Western styles of development, it has been contended that only a few industrialised countries may have actually achieved appropriate development. Available evidence suggests that the environmental degradation and pollution of air, land, and sea - increasingly conspicuous in several industrialised countries - has had pernicious effects on human health, and terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. Past development strategies have been held largely responsible for the resulting ecological imbalance and disequilibrium between humans and nature. Herein lies the relevance of advocating the promotion of low-risk, labour-intensive, and environmentally benign, appropriate production technologies for boosting the inherent potential and the productivity of the majority in the Third World. But, in emphasising the need to increase productivity of smallholder agriculture in the neglected rural sectors of the Third World, the current paradigm for national development does not ignore the need for a relevant industrialisation policy. Rather, according to Jequier (1976), an acceptable pattern of industrialisation should be one that would promote the generation of employment opportunities and the utilisation of low-cost, efficient, energy-saving technologies. In addition, a new emphasis should be placed on the production of basic necessities for the majority rather than the provision of luxury items for the minority indigenous elite. Furthermore, there is a need to decentralise the location of industrial sites, away from the urban centres, and look to the equitable distribution of public services in the educational, health care, electrification, transportation, and housing areas, and among groups and regions of the nation-state.

In analysing the internal structure of most Third World societies, Weaver *et al* (1978) have remarked that, in the absence of changes in the class structure of these countries, a new international economic order would not be beneficial to the poor majority. Accordingly, they contend that since development requires awakening people and arousing their consciousness, it would not be in the best interests of the indigenous power elite to bring about meaningful development which would imply an equitable distribution of the benefits of growth. But a people-oriented development strategy calls for the relinquishing of political power to the producer classes by every institutional means, formal and informal. According to Henriot (1979:20) this orientation has certain policy directives, including:

"the choice of leaders for their identity with the people, and their adherence to strategies and policies reflecting the peoples' interests...mass activation, or reliance on the people to emancipate themselves, which emphasises that even technical innovation (or 'R and D' efforts) must utilise three in one (administrator-technician-worker) teams in order to tap the resources of full worker participation; and participator management and avoidance of bureaucratic hindrances in order to bring initiative from below into full play."

This is the basis of the pro-Marxist contention that broad-based development in most developing countries cannot occur without requisite (and perhaps revolutionary) changes in the sociocultural, economic and political institutions in the new nation-states. These

mandatory changes are considered to be a fundamental prerequisite for putting the effective demands of the poor large majority at the 'centre' of national development programmes.

In addition, the current paradigms of national development are not only people and need-oriented, but they also stress the importance of ensuring that development takes place in accordance with sound ecological principles. It is predicated on the growing realisation that appropriate development programmes should be targeted towards the provision of the 'greatest good' for the greatest number of citizens for the longest period of time. It is also based on the assumption that citizens are not only expected to be actively involved in making decisions aimed at improving their livelihood, but that such community-based decisions must be in harmony with (and as such will not be disruptive of) the balanced relationships that should exist between humans and their natural environment. In other words, there is a call for the adoption of innovative policies for meeting the needs of the large majority of small-scale peasant producers and their families as well as the urban poor, who constitute the critical target population in the Third World. In sum, it is expected that the emerging national development programmes of the 1980s ought to be physically and biologically sound (stressing the importance of initiating ecologically sustainable programmes), as well as being economically feasible, institutionally acceptable, and administratively workable. They are programmes that should be aimed at meeting the 'felt need' of the citizenry in a self-reliant and sustainable manner.

Finally, a call has been made for the strengthening of linkages and solidarity among Third World nation-states, frequently referred to as "South-South Cooperation". As basic economic injustices continue to exist and deepen between North and South, mere calls for 'massive transfers' (a version of the former trickle-down theory) or for trade relations based on the principles of 'comparative advantage', will not provide the panacea for Third World problems (George, 1987). Rather, according to George (1987), what is needed is the creation of new institutional frameworks for the reorganisation and consolidation of the Third World in order to be better able to utilise the political instruments theoretically at its disposal (such as a united front on the debt issue) to force major concessions from the North. It worked remarkably well for the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). With careful planning and implementation, there is no reason why it cannot work as well for other sub-regional groups in particular, and for the south in general.

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