THE IMPERATIVE OF NATIONAL REDEFINITION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Joseph Izundu Okonkwor*

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Abstract

When the United Nations saw that most of their Millennium Development Goals did not succeed as expected in Africa, they changed to what is called Sustainable Development Goals which set certain standards that must be met from 2015 upward (Sarvajayakesavalu,1:7, 1-4. 2015). Most of these goals for me were not realized simply because development cannot take place in a vacuum. Development takes place inside a nation and then works for all the citizens in that nation. If there is no nation or haphazard nation, we get no development or haphazard development. This paper argues that countries in Africa, and Nigeria in particular must be nationalized for any sustainable development to take place in them.

Key Words: National, Development, Sustainable Development, Nigeria

Introduction

Most of the works I have read on development are unanimous that traditional models of development have failed to explain the term comprehensively. Despite this, I like to point out that development must involve progress in every aspect of the national life of a country. Based on this, I shall argue in this paper that such positive progress that defines development may not happen in Nigeria until she gets her national definition right. Going through the history of Nigeria, it would not be proper to refer to her as a nation in the real sense of the word. Nigerian national status has not been freely defined. One may be tempted to ask: What type of nation is England and what type of nation is Nigeria? Both may purportedly be referred to as nations, yet they differ in their national pose. The relationship between a Scottish, a Welsh, an Irish and a Briton has undergone several definitions through referendums. But that cannot

be said of the relationship between a Fulani, a Yoruba, an Igbo and a Tiv of Nigeria.

In line with Agbiboa and Maiangwa (29, 4, 2013: 379–403), it is the argument of this essay that such lack of national definition has led the occupants of the Nigerian State to identify themselves more on the basis of religion and ethno-national affiliations than as nationals of Nigeria. Each constituent Nigerian national group has its own subjective understanding of what Nigeria should mean. But a unified understanding is yet to be achieved. This search for national definition must be achieved before any expectation of sustainable development.

What Is Development?

Before he started his definition of development and its measurement on international level with focus on Africa, Debraj Ray (1998:7) pointed out that development studies focused purely on economic grounds using Gross National Product (GNP) and Per Capita Income is problematic. For him *"*no one in their right mind would ever suggest that economic development be identified, in definitional sense, with the level or growth of per capita income. It is perhaps universally accepted that development is not just about income, although it has a great deal to do with it*"* He made mention of other areas of development such as removal of poverty and malnutrition, increase in life expectancy, access to sanitation, clean drinking water and health services, reduction in infant mortality and access to knowledge. But he eventually reduced his development focus on Africa to GNP, Per Capita Income and Purchasing Power Parity. After arriving at his conclusion on the underdevelopment of Africa using high earnings in Japan and America in comparison, he still blamed some of it to under-reported incomes and services in most African countries. In which case there are things that should first take root in Africa before we talk of development. That for me is; nationhood!

To make this point clearer (Gunnar 729 - 736), pointed out that; "Many of the figures on development quoted in economic literatures on developing countries are not worth the paper they are printed upon." His reason for holding this view is because those figures on development were gathered with the help of concepts that

are not adequate to local realities. Does this mean that development concerns have much to do with local realities? Yes, because it cannot take place in a vacuum. No wonder Abuiyada (2018:115) argued that "Development theories do not provide a comprehensive explanation of development as development." His reason is that "traditional development theories have failed to address the needs of the majority of people at grassroots levels." The reason for these back and forth rejection and acceptance of what development mean is that; researchers are looking for one universal meaning and measuring standard for a word which may need cultural values attached to it based on local realities in order to be complete. Thus Gunnar's (729) general position that development is a "movement upward of the entire social system", can easily be applied to any location. Another reference to the term that can help its general application is that given by Abuiyada (2018:115) where he sees development as "a hybrid term for a myriad of strategies adopted for socio-economic and environment transformation from current states to desired ones."

Yet, another angle has been thrown into the mix by Noy (2009:275–307) who pointed out that the literatures on development has begun to acknowledge the important role of religion in development. For him, there are certain values that contribute to ultimate aim of the society and common good. If Development is about filling the society withpeople that has good values, skills and motivations, then religion can help in such human transformation through its moral and spiritual teachings.

Looking at all these definitions with hermeneutic eyes, one can only interpret development in contemporary understanding to mean "positive improvement of an individual and his nation that ensures the best possible overall wellbeing for all at a particular point in time." There is thus no one type of development. There should be economic development, spiritual development, educational development, political development, religious development, agricultural development, social development. Each of these types of development become meaningful only when they improve the life of the nation and her individual citizens to the highest possible level at a particular point in time. If the above submission is anything to go by, educational development should be

able to enlighten a citizen to become a better human being where his/her skills contribute towards making life better for others. Religious development should be able to make citizens understand the subjective nature of religion and stop his religious freedom where other people's rights start. Economic freedom should be such to provide jobs, increase earnings and create financial freedom for both the nation and her citizens. Agricultural development should be able to take care of providing food to highest possible level at a particular point of a nation's life in such a way that citizens can buy food and still have enough to take care of other basic needs. Social development and other types of development should be able to improve the social life of citizens by providing clean water, adequate health care etc. Once all areas of concern of a nation which helps it to take care of her citizens are improved to the highest standard possible at a particular point in time of their existence, development is then achieved.

Development, Nation and Nationalism

From what we submitted above, development cannot take place in a vacuum. Individual development should happen within a person and manifests in the way he lives his life and relates with others in his/her community. If we talk of national development, it takes place both inside the said nation and her citizens to improve their standard of living to the highest possible at a particular point in time of their existence. So; a nation, state or country is somehow intrinsic to the idea of national development. Thus for development to happen, it must be inside a nation and when there is no nation, there is no national development. At this point, we need to look into the very idea of nation to help us understand the level lack of national definition can impede development especially in Nigeria.

Early Conceptions of Nation

According to Gellner (1983: xvii), earlier studies of nationalism viewed it as a negative philosophical ideology. Kedourie (1993:1) supports this notion when he referred to 'nationalism' as, 'a threatening militancy movement' and 'a modern form of primitive tribalism'. Thus nation and its nationalism assumed at some point a negative connotation which saw it as irrational and aggressive. This

view seems to be exacerbated by the Nazi German nationalism which caused the World War II. According to Kedourie (1993), appeal to ethnicity as a means to capture state power started in Germany once modern politics is concerned. It was the aggressive nationalism of the Nazis in Germany that caused the Second World War. The defeat of Germany by the allied forces in 1945 also brought with it the defeat and rejection of ethnic nationalism that time. (Lecours 2000:155). This is because scholars started presenting nationalism as aggressive ethnicity. When decolonisation started in Africa around 1946, the conquered people could not fight for independence with their ethno-national affiliations considering this rejection. The anti-colonial African nationalists therefore had no option than to define nationalism in civic terms. During colonialism, the anti-colonial nationalists had to play down ethnicity or its role in state building in order to present a united front as they fought for independence.

This move was to have its own consequences. In playing down ethno-national affiliations, the Nigerian nationalists affirmed tacitly the European colonial borders with all its defects. Later, in (Article III 'Principles'), African countries were to accept African colonial borders in their 1963 conference. However, ethnic nationalism took the central stage within many African states shortly after the departure of the imperial overlords. The question is: based on the work of Lecours (2000: 153-166), should 'nations' and 'nationalisms' be defined exclusively in either civic or ethnic terms or both? The quest to answer this type of question although not very evident then introduced a critical phase in the study of nations and nationalism. Such critical study started with Gellner's modernism. (Gellner: 1983).

Primordial Theory of Nations and Nationalisms

This school of thought according to Geertz (1973) seen ations as a natural or 'a given' phenomenon. Its focus is on the naturalist conception of the term nation. According to dictionary.com, 'primordial' means "constituting a beginning; giving origin to something, original; elementary." This theory is based on the etymological meaning of the term 'nation'. The term originates from

a Latin word 'natio' and old French word 'nacion' meaning 'birth' or 'place of birth'. In the words of Smith (2001:52); nations are primordial, meaning that "nations, ethnic groups, and races can be traced to the underlying genetic reproductive drives of individuals" and evolved or naturally originated from state of nature. In this instance, people voluntarily surrender their sovereignty to their cultural group leaders in exchange for certain rights as members of that nation. They therefore believe that, "nations have existed since time immemorial.

Herder (Sikka 2004:183), one of the major proponents of this theory saw 'nation' as language groups. In this regard, every language group is seen as a nation since it is hard to socially construct a language. These unique languages also embody in them and transmit to their future users, unique values that promote national spirit (science.jrank.org). Harold (1975), brought out many points that defines nation in primodialists' terms which he referred to as basic group identity.

Perennial Theory of Nations and Nationalism

According to Smith (2001:49-51), the perennial theorists hold that nations are group identities that exists in every age from generation to generation. They differ from the primordialists who hold that nations are natural. For them, the fact that nations existed from time immemorial does not mean that it is natural (Smith 2000:35, 2001:49). According to Spencer and Wollman (2002:27), perennialists believe in recurring nature of nations throughout human history. From their writings, such authors as Seton Watson (1977),(Gillingham (1992), Hastings (1997) and Renan (1882), can be classified as perennialists. They believe that the idea of nationhood can apply to many cultural and political communities in every age (Smith 2000:35).

According to Renan in his 'Qu'est-ce qu'une nation' (1882), the nation like the individual is "the culmination of a long past of efforts, sacrifice and devotion". He argues that the ancestral cult is the most legitimate of all cults because the ancestors made us what we are today. It is a cult that represents a heroic past of great men of glory. This is for him "the social capital upon which one bases a national idea. To have common glories in the past and to have a

common will in the present; to have performed great deeds together, to wish to perform still more. These are the essential conditions for being a people."

Ethno Symbolism as a Theory of Nations and Nationalism

This theory borrows largely from the three earlier discussed theories of nations and nationalisms. It concentrates on making use of ethnic historical symbols to explain the formation of modern nations and nationalisms. According to its chief proponent Anthony Smith (2001:49-50), it arose because there are certain cultural and historical facts that modernism fails to explain. Again it seeks to shed more light on the emergence of new nations which perennialists and primordialists find hard to fathom. Smith pointed out that in considering the modernity of nations, one may want to understand what the nature and role of nations are in history. The main concern of ethno-symbolists is the question of how the earlier forms of collective identity influence the formation of modern nations. Two other conspicuous authors in this regard are Armstrong (1982: Vii, 410) and Hutchinson (2000: 651-669) among others.

The theory shies away from concentrating on political, economic and socio-biological factors which are purely external factors and focuses rather on internal cultural dimensions of symbol, memory, myth, value and tradition. As smith puts it, while taking cognisance of the objective factors which abound in and define modern nations, ethno symbolism pays more attention to such subjective factors as sentiment, value, memory, myth and symbols in such a way as to understand the 'inner worlds' of ethnicity and nationalism (2001:50).

Modern Theory of Nation and Nationalism

As the name implies, the proponents of this theory hold that nations and nationalisms are modern developments. Scholars of modernism are Hetcher(2013), Tom Nairn(Blaut:1980), Ernest Gellner(1983), John Breuilly(1993:3), Anthony Giddens(1985), Paul Brass (1979:69),Eric Hobsbawm (1990:47)and Benedict Anderson(1991:5) saw nation as 'imagined political community.' The modern theory of nationalism in its entire variations can be summarised thus; all nations are driven by modern political and

economic ideas and designed or engineered perhaps through education. According to Smith (2001:48-49), Modernists don't believe that there were nations in the pre-modern societies. Most importantly they all believe that nations must be congruent with the unit of governance.

The Concept of State in Contradistinction to Nation

Based on the fact that the major confusion in understanding nations and nationalism is in the scholarly conflation of the 'nation' with the term 'state', the meaning of the state as we shall describe here would have to be in reference to the nation. The state according to Connor (1994: 93), can be defined as "the major political subdivision of the globe." It can be seen as a political unit geographically located somewhere on earth in terms of longitude and latitude and can easily be defined in such physical terms. This is quite different from the 'nation' which does not need geographical location as an essential defining character. For him (92, 190-213), the essence of the nation lies in the feelings, intuition, beliefs and sense of its members. In the words of Handler (1988: 6-8.), the 'state' is viewed as a rational, instrumental, power-concentrating organization. But the 'nation' as a human group may or may not control its own state, the same way the 'state'as a political organization may or may not correspond to one nation. Daniele Conversi (2002) toes this part too when he defined a 'nation' as a human population sharing historic memories centred on a myth of common descent.In agreement, Geertz (1973: 259-260),observed that even if the cultural symbols of blood, language and common decent negate the reality, the most important essence of the nation is its real or assumed origin and common goal. For Connor (1994:100-103), this assumption is psychological and expresses itself in the feelings and beliefs of the social group members. This is the notion of nation that this paper adopts and promotes.

Having gone thus far, we have realised that the major mistake scholars make in national discourse is the conflation of the term 'state' with the term 'nation'. This mistake is more prevalent among the modernists such as Anderson (1991), Gellner (1983) and Breuilly (1993). The point is that the scholars are working hard whether knowingly or unknowingly to stripe the 'nation' of its

psychological characteristics with which it can elicit sacrifices from her members and are trying to recreate them in the 'state'. This is very important because, a state may be termed national to the extent it is able to imbibe these national essences whether real or assumed. Connor (1994:97) noted that when a nation controls its own state, that is, when the psychological bond becomes coextensive with political bond, it is known as a 'nation state'. That is; where there is one nation for a given state and one state for a given nation. This according to him is very rare.

In actual fact, majority of states are made up of many nations while members of a nation might find themselves in two states. One example is the Irish people who can be found both in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. Smith (2001:17) pointed out that if a multi-ethnic state aspires to nationhood and seeks to be unified but not to become homogenous through measures of integration, we speak of state-nations. Examples of state nations are the African colonial constructs such as Nigeria which brought together many ethno national groups under one state. Once this integration is realised and national psychology of real or assumed shared past achieved, the multi-ethnic state becomes a national state. Based on this description, many African states, Nigeria inclusive, are still potential national states.

Looking at the above conceptual description, it becomes easy to understand the reason behind the conceptual confusion in our subject. Due to the fact that sometimes a nation and a state coincide and some other times a modern state may house many nations, academic laxity has reduced the terms to interchangeable usage. Yet many scholars seem complacent with the confusion which in most cases secretly underlines the opposing views among scholars.

Ethnic and Civic Dichotomy: The Imperative of Using 'Nation' as a Common Noun Qualified by an Adjective

Having looked at the theoretical discourse, its analysis and conceptual clarifications, one comes to the conclusion that there is no one type of nation. Originally and from our etymological definition given above, nation is cultural or ethnic and employed mostly as a proper noun in reference to a group of people. But

considering its sweeping modern usage, it becomes imperative to use it as a common noun. According to Grammer-Monster.com, "a common noun is the generic name for a person, place, or thing." Based on the foregoing, this paper defines nation as "any group of people; that has a homeland; has attained a great degree of integrated cohesion; and seeking or have attained some degree of self-determination either within a state or as a separate state." So when nation stands as a common noun that can be adopted by any group, some adjectives would then be employed to identify or define the type of nation we mean. This approach will then allow us room to define such words as nation-state, state nation, ethnic nation, political nation, tribal nation, federal nation etc. It will also remove such theoretical squabbles where the term 'state' is conflated with the term 'nation'.

Contextualizing the Term 'Nation' In Nigeria

The age of enlightenment and modernism helped to engender political nationalism where USA can be its successful example. The negative connotation of Nazi nationalism and its defeat also sounded a death toll on ethnic nationalism and only helped to project preference to political nationalism in our contemporary world. The word 'nation' therefore needs to drop its original concept of primordial 'origins' and 'cultural givens' as the basis of political relationship, and take up 'agreements-to-coexists', constitutions, and 'arranged togetherness' as the new basis for political relationships. Thus the cohesive and emotive spirit of 'nations' and 'nationalism'; properties it gathered from its sense of shared past or common ancestor, needed to be transplanted from their original uses and forced to the service of the 'state' and its patriotism. The result is that 'nation' has come to be used interchangeably with 'state' in the modern world politics. But when we use nation in reference to states, we must make sure that proper adjectives are used to avoid conceptual mistakes.

Nigeria is therefore not a nation per se. Since her citizens lack the psychological feelings of common origin and goal, shared past, real or imagined progenitor, the emotional spirit of real or imagined blood ties; Nigeria it yet to become a national state. Nigeria can be referred to as a state nation; meaning that her

togetherness is only defined in forced, physical and political terms and nothing else. The Nigerian state is politically one, but nationally many. Nation, based on our earlier submissions should intrinsically connote real or assumed family unity and oneness that is not forced; oneness that exists from the subconscious of the members. When the Nigerian ethnic nationalities develop a political oneness that creates emotional spirit of real or imagined shared past or blood ties, and common future it can become a national state**.**

For Sustainable Development to Happen in Nigeria: A Conclusion

In the introduction to his book on how Singapore moved from third to first world, Lee Kuan Yew (2000: xii) pointed out that "we cannot afford to forget that public order, personal security, economic and social progress, and prosperity are not the natural order of things. They depend on ceaseless effort and attention from an honest and effective government that the people must elect." This statement is very important to our understanding of national progress and development. All the things he pointed out such as economic and social progress and personal security are intrinsic part of development we discussed above. He said that the availability of those progressive conditions are not natural order of things. It takes effort from both the people and the government they elect to make development happen. Based on the above submission, development of a nation depends on the commitment of her citizens or nationals. Like we saw above, Nigeria being a state-nation and not a national state lacks united commitment of citizens towards national development. Such designate (state-nation) for Nigeria signifies political instability, ethnic strife, division, corruption and embezzlement of public fund by government actors. In a state-nation such as Nigeria, few believes in making sacrifices that would help cause development.

For development to happen to Nigerian state-nation, it must strive to become a national-state by creating those myths of common descent, those historical memories..., that common culture…, along with a mutual solidarity... and emphasize the historic kinship of its constituent ethnies and their common ties of ideological affinity." (Smith1986: 147). To achieve this, Nigerian 'top-down' federalism

which is set out in a military promulgated decree called the 1999 constitutions must be set aside. And in its place, blocks of national groups in a 'bottom-up' approach comes together to give themselves a constitution. In a national Nigeria, the issue of conflicting opposites like secularism and religious state which gives rise to Boko Haram would not arise because they would have been handled during the 'bottom-up' approach to a guiding federal constitution. In a truly federal Nigeria, each section of the country may pursue the type of development that is more conversant with their culture in a way that edifies the whole Nigeria. Once this is done, people will start working for Nigeria having been part of the making of its constitution. Their individual sacrifices will transform into development for all inside Nigeria.

***Joseph Izundu Okonkwor**
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
Anambra State, Nigeria
Email: joenwa2000@yahoo.com

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