

A search for an alternative Afro-centric development theory

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Introduction

This paper will try to define the term “Development”, and to overview its historical evolution. Then it will try to find out problems facing development in Africa generally and Sudan in particular. Those problems are the main barriers to development practices been carried out all through Africa. The paper will go further to propose an alternative method for development in Africa under its prescribed conditions and the current global circumstances. This method depends mainly on a true partnership between national authorities, people, and the international world.

Southern Sudan –as part of Africa – approaching the peace time been brought through a true partnership between Sudanese people (Sudan government and SPLM) it is a serious developmental era that indigenous people and the international world committed themselves to, with a hope that it can offers an a promising example to whole Africa, not only in overcoming destructive conflict, but also proceeding to achieve development.

Evolution of the term and the vague definition

When the term “development” was first introduced, it was an economic term: that is “**economic development**”. It aimed at bringing the new independent countries to the living standards of the Western developed world. So the newly independent countries would replicate the evolution undergone by industrialized countries, which were considered as the model to strive towards.¹ This approach to development has strong theoretical roots in Western, capitalist utilitarian economics.

Since fifties the dominant concept of development is that it synonym to economic growth. The independence of several countries considered by the west as (underdeveloped) and in the context of the cold war with USSR, the West had to assure that those states should not move to communism by developing them through economic growth. Rostow and others have laid the theoretical basis for this actions by saying there where five predominant stages which all countries would follow: the traditional society , the pre-conditions for tack-off, the tack-off, the drive to maturity, and the age of high mass-consumption.

These stages would basically lead from tradition to modernity. To Rostow, colonialism is necessary so as to make development faster and to organize societies incapable of self organization.²

Further attempts at finding alternative development theories were then made through the “**basic needs approach**” to development. This is because instead of growth, people discovered that 40% percent of the people in the south lived in absolute poverty resulting from inability to satisfy there basic needs. So development priority should be directed to satisfy basic needs. The concept of "basic needs" first appeared to denote “the minimum standard of living which a society should set for the poorest group of its people”³. So (Development) in continent like Africa been used (to imply the overcoming of hunger and sickness).

And since human beings can not just be satisfied with an "animal minimal existence" the concept moved forward to means "**the improvement of human life conditions**".

Although the basic needs approach initially emphasized that the objective of development was to provide the conditions for a full human life (material, social, cultural and political), in operational terms, it focused on a minimal decent life, defined in terms of health, nutrition, literacy and the goods and services needed to be realized, such as shelter, food, health services, sanitation, safe water, primary education, housing and related infrastructures.⁴

And although it introduces a multi-dimensional and non-monetary conception of well-being, but it is also still has a dynamic meaning similar to permanent changes depending on the moral values of heterogeneous people in different times and places.

Lately, "**Human development**" approach was introduced; UNDP published its first human development report in 1999 introducing a human-centered definition. Human development is defined as "both the process of widening people's choices and the level of their achieved well-being"⁵ a level of well-being that includes, among other things, access to income and all resources needed for a decent standard of living, a long healthy life, education and access to knowledge, political freedom, guaranteed human rights, concern for the environment, and concern for participation.

"Human development" is the most multidimensional approach that "enables all individuals to enlarge their human capabilities to the full and to put those capabilities to their best use in all fields – economic, social, cultural and political."⁶ Here by, although human development approach concentrates on (people's choice) but as we know people have different choices depending on their ideologies, culture, norms, traditions, and aspirations.

This is why the concept (Development) until now has no a universally accepted meaning agreed upon by whole thinkers, and it is always dynamics, because it depends on (personal and collective moral values in different time and places). This fact is of a great importance to this paper trying to describe a way and method to be applied in developing Africa. It means that we have to look in traditions, believes norms, and aspirations of the people in Africa as whole and the people of the Sudan in particular; and to describe or to find the suitable way of development.

Failure of development theories in Africa

Alienation

Now it become clear after centuries of failing experiences that reaching the stage of the developed countries can not be achieved through imitating or stereotyping western methods of development. This will automatically impose another question: what is the alternative method? Here I introduce an alternative development method based on partnership as an alternative to Euro-centric development theories because the later stems from European circumstances and environment peculiarities and not universal, humanistic values as western thinkers try to shadow. This is why we get the result that implementation of western methods and theories of development do not lead to development but to a methodological crisis. Our backwardness now is due not to failing to follow western methods and theories, but to the following of them. Because development theories conducted in Africa which appears as an imitation to the western

academic outputs , speaks about modernity, rationality, and scientific method in opposition to traditionalism, values, norms, believes ...etc. which are the basic requirements of the primitive stage that we should bypass it if we need to be modernized. Adopting such (scientific methods) by African researchers forced them to reject African values, beliefs, traditions, and norms. This leads to the production of a superficial alien knowledge in African environment; and to the subordination to the west.

Subordination

For centuries, Africa has been integrated into the world economy mainly as a supplier of cheap labour and raw materials. Of necessity, this has meant the draining of Africa's resources rather than their use for the development of the continent. It is time that African resources are harnessed to create wealth for the well-being of its peoples.

So, the need for an alternative method for development instead of the western development theories finds its justifications in the following:

1. Western development theories affected by and reflect western peculiarities and social environment.
2. Western development theories in spite of its acceptable principles such as freedom, rule of law, knowledge, it calls for apportion of religion, traditions, values
3. They call for neutralization of the state, at the time that state in Africa is an important instrument for development, because we have no strong coherent civil society.
4. Western development theories are methods for stability at the time that we need methods for change.
5. Western development theories lead Africa to subordination to the west; losing its identity and confidence.

Indigenization and equalized method of partnership (As alternative method of development)

Something new out of Africa

Signs are emerging that things may be changing. Twenty years ago it was commonplace for African countries to be run as dictatorships; today such governments are a minority. Democracy has new life. In the past five years, more than two-thirds of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa have had multi-party elections – number of examples of peaceful democratic changes of government. War has given way to peace in many places. Where change has occurred a new generation of political leaders is emerging, many of whom voice a new commitment to the common good of the people. The old Organization for African Unity, with its policy of 'non-interference' in the internal affairs of other African states, has been transformed into the much stronger African Union which has a policy of "non-indifference" to the suffering of the citizens in neighboring countries who do not respect democracy, human rights and the need for peace. They have set up, as an arm of the African Union, a program entitled the New Partnership for Africa's Development

(NEPAD), which sees better government as an essential prerequisite of Africa's development.⁷

In the Sudan we are approaching a new era. War is to be stopped completely in the whole country using the comprehensive peace agreement as a reference and example, governance to be based on popular participation, accountability and transparency. All resources are to be directed towards development. We have promises and commitments from the outside world, who has the lion share in reaching the peace agreement, and now it has a strong commitment towards development in the south and other affected areas, donors conference in Oslo and promises from many countries are only an examples. The advanced world undertakes a new trend towards Africa as whole and Sudan in particular.

It is a historical chance/ chances for Sudan /Africa that need a clear vision, scientific planning, and faithful collaboration between government, citizens and the outside world, to achieve development.

Indigenization

As we have mentioned previously: Development was seen as a process of change from an underdeveloped stage to a developed one. The newly independent countries would replicate the evolution undergone by industrialized countries, which were considered the model to strive towards.

The feeling of inadequacy led Africa to copy the development paradigm of the West in the mistaken belief that Africa can also be developed and catch up with the West according to the same paradigm. Modernity become equivalent to stereo-type imitation, any tendency towards indigenization, self reliance, and creativity will be labeled as traditionality, backwardness at the time that imitation is the real backwardness and a real cause of being under-developed.

This loss of cultural confidence by Africans ultimately led to put the African way of life at the bottom and Western culture at the top. This is why African researchers became consumers of western development theories without any soul of criticism, creativity, and initiation.

Some African researchers have decided to reject modernity and collaboration with international community, calling for dependency on African culture, traditions, and norms rejecting the role of scientific method in life , which means depriving ones own self from the benefits of today(theories, technology, and behavior) and this is also false way.

Why we squeeze ourselves between the two false options:

- Our traditions, rejecting the scientific method?
- The science, rejecting our traditions and norms?

I think there is something in the middle: that is indigenization (originalization) of western methods of development, which means: adapting modernity to our culture, norms, and

traditions.

Indigenization will allow us to benefit from theorization by others, and to borrow them but after a comprehensive cognitive understanding that leads to absorbing, developing or modifying them to suit our norms, traditions, and needs, to the extent that they may appear as if they represent our own product and not of others.

Indigenization, self-reliance, and Afro-centrism means a scientific attempt for African development but directed towards African real foundations, cultural possessions, habits, beliefs and not an imitation to the western methods of development. (It is true that there are many habits which are not good and against development).

We should have our own scientific development theories that correspond to our peculiarities? To Way Mutharica: "Africa cannot be developed using foreign traditions and cultures."⁸

(What was required is the recognition of the knowledge that existed in these communities as constituting a good basis for social transformation and "development" in their own contexts).

Unless those who shape Africa's development take these observations in their considerations and make them integral to the way they formulate development theories, they will fail. This is why we should have our own concept/method of development.

Africa cultural heritage and development

The African people's heritage gives them self-identity, self-confidence and self-respect. It allows them to be in harmony with their physical and spiritual environment. So why we leave it behind, striving for alien development theories? To get rid of Africa cultural fallacy, Africa (African elite specifically) should respect, activate, develop, and use their own culture.

Trevor Manuel, South Africa's finance minister, put it, quoting an African proverb: "Until the lions have spoken, the only history will be that of the hunters". It is high time that Africa should make its history by itself. Using its own culture. By culture we are talking about far more than literature, music, dance, art, sculpture, theatre, film and sport. All of these, of course, are for any social group part of its shared joy in the business of being alive. But culture is more than the arts. It is about shared patterns of identity. It is about how social values are transmitted and individuals are made to be part of a society. Culture is how the past interacts with the future.

African culture is rich with principles that can enhance development, as we know Africa's past is one in which, in pre-colonial times, people grouped themselves through clans. Their culture was strong on kinship ties and a sense that the members of the group were responsible for and to one another. Many of these features, such as the relationship between elders and non-elders, persist today. No less here is the 'big man' culture which requires a successful member of the clan to offer patronage to other members – a phenomenon which is rarely taken with sufficient seriousness by development policy-makers. Patron-client relations should not be dismissed as temptations to nepotism and

corruption; they reveal some thing about African senses of community.⁹

Africa reality instead of borrowing

the African winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, Wangari Maathai, said in her acceptance speech in December 2004: "I have always believed that solutions to most of our problems must come from us." So why we don't look in to our reality trying to determine methods for development?

In Africa we find that for too many, perhaps a majority, the state is an irrelevance or a burden. For them their primary loyalty remains, as we have mentioned, with the family, clan or tribe. Why don't we find ways to incorporate them in the development path, Increasingly, though, something else is moving in to the vacuum. It is religion. Religion can, of course, be misused but it can also be a partner in development. Faith leaders have great influence on shaping social attitudes, community relationships, personal responsibility and sexual morals. Clerics, traditional religious leaders and Islamic imams are increasingly prominent in the fight against HIV and AIDS in Africa and Arab world. As we see religious movements are gaining a new attractiveness in this century.

Also, in Africa, we have the example of Somalia, as we know that before civil war plunged Somalia in to a condition of warlord-dominated anarchy, order was maintained by the country's traditional courts of tribal elders, the Tol. These made each clan collectively responsible for the actions of its individual members – if one man stole, his whole clan could be fined for it. In most parts of the country the power of the Tol has been abolished by the warlords. But in Somaliland, a place of modest but ordered prosperity, the Tol has not only been retained: it has been incorporated in to the second chamber of parliament.

Destruction of native administration in Darfur- Sudan leads to a brutal conflict with massive atrocities.

Also we find that the position of women is of particular concern, not merely as a matter of human rights, but also because all the evidence agrees that they make a greater contribution to economic life. Women are the backbone of Africa's rural economy, accounting for 70 per cent of food production, most of the selling of the family produce and half of the animal husbandry in addition to food preparation, gathering firewood, fetching water, childcare and the care of the sick and the elderly. Women spend most of the earnings they control on household needs, particularly for the children. In our new method for development, women should attract much of our concern.

The overall lesson is that outside prescriptions can succeed only where they work with the grain of African ways of doing things. They fail where they ignore, or do not understand, the cultural suppositions of the people they seek to address.

Those who rush to offer pre-packaged solutions from the developed world proved to be failed; those who understand culture of people succeeded.

New forms of partnership instead of subordination

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) recognizes that there have been attempts in the past to set out continent-wide development programs. For a variety

of reasons, both internal and external, these have been less than successful. However, there is today a new set of circumstances that may allow for another trial:

Democracy and state legitimacy have been redefined to include accountable governments, a culture of human rights and popular participation as central elements. Across the continent, democracy is spreading, backed by the African Union (AU), which has shown a new resolve to deal with conflicts and censure deviation from the norm. These efforts are reinforced by voices in civil society, including associations of women, youth and the independent media. Across the continent, Africans declare that they will no longer allow themselves to be conditioned by circumstances.

Role of the people:

Africans declare that they will determine their own destiny and call on the rest of the world to complement their efforts. African people should not wait passively for state, or the outside world to develop them, they should take the initiation and the leading. The backbone of development in Africa is (African people themselves) not the outside world. African states should depend on their people, raising on them the hope, self-confidence, and spirit of challenge. African people are the real alliance to the state on the struggle for development not the outside world alone.

Role of the states:

African governments are now much more resolute about regional and continental goals of economic cooperation and integration and they declared that they would take joint responsibility for the following:

- Strengthening mechanisms for conflict prevention, management and resolution at the sub-regional and continental levels.
- Promoting and protecting democracy and human rights in their respective countries and regions, by developing clear standards of accountability, transparency and participatory governance at the national and sub-national levels.

True partnership between people and the state (Good governance and capacity-building)

The Globescan survey commissioned by Commission for Africa reveals that for most Africans, the primary responsibility for creating the problems in their country is laid at the door of their national governments: 49 per cent of those surveyed blamed their own politicians – three times more than blamed the formal colonial powers, 16 per cent, or rich countries, just 11 per cent. In spite of that it is also true that state with a sound constitution constitutes a corner stone of development. that means a state which has the ability to maintain peace and security and protect the freedom and human rights of its citizens, to design policies that will enable ordinary people to build a better life, and to deliver the public services required by its citizens is very important.

But there is another key condition that is required for good governance. It is accountability.

Accountability: By accountability we mean a system which ensures that governments are answerable to their people for the way they run the country.

Governments must be answerable to all their people, including the poorest and most vulnerable. Improving accountability is the job of African leaders. They can do that by broadening the participation of ordinary people in government processes, in part by strengthening institutions like parliaments, local authorities, trades unions the judicial system and the media (i.e. build the capacity of the people). Building capacity of the people takes time and commitment. Weak capacity is a matter of poor systems and incentives, poor information, lack of freedom and political participation, technical inability, untrained staff and lack of money. Governments in Africa as general, and the government of Sudan should carry its responsibility that all paving the way for a true partnership between her and the people.

Transparency: For political leaders to be held accountable, citizens must have proper information about government revenues and budget allocations. Openness makes it more likely that resources will be used efficiently. By contrast, a lack of transparency encourages corruption. Transparency is especially important in countries rich in mineral wealth. All the evidence shows that oil, for example, usually enriches only the ruling elite. For the vast majority of the population mineral wealth often appears merely to increase corruption, poverty and political instability. African electorates need to demand that government books on revenues from mineral extraction be opened to public scrutiny. Sudanese people until now know nothing about petrol contracts, and petrol revenue.

Role of the developed world

In exchange for Africa's governing elites holding each other politically and economically accountable, the industrialized powers of the world will supplement Africa's peacemaking efforts, and their attempts to eradicate poverty.

Pushing development in Africa requires a partnership between Africa and the developed world, which takes full account of Africa's particular circumstances. The developed world must stop doing those things, which hinder Africa's progress. And this is a vital moment for the world to get behind Africa's efforts. Donors must change their behavior and support the national priorities of African governments rather than allowing their own procedures and special enthusiasms to undermine the building of a country's own capacity.

African regional organizations and the UN can help prevent and resolve conflict when tensions cannot be managed at the national level, through, for example, effective early Warning mediation and peace keeping. Sudanese conflicts in the South and Darfur are examples of the successful help. Donors can support this by providing flexible Funding to the African Union and the continent's regional organizations; and supporting the creation of a UN Peace building Commission. The co-ordination and financing of post-conflict Peace building and development must be improved to prevent states emerging from violent conflict from sliding back into it.

Here some questions are to be asked:

- Can governments really be trusted to hold each other accountable?
- Who will hold the international community accountable?

- What about power politics in Africa? Will it not again bedevil this project?
 - Is there any room for a genuine partnership between people, governments, and the international community aiming at development of Africa?
- It will be a very long road with many obstacles that this paper seeks to draw its map.

Conclusive notes and recommendations according to this paper are:

1. Emphasizes on the key role of the people, whether individuals, community based organizations, or community leaders in development. African people should take the initiation and the leading role to development.
2. It is true that African societies are still fragile, diversified, unorganized and in need of any external help, but any external negative intervention can harm African societies very deep. So while they should not ignore the importance of the role of the outside world particularly the international organization and donor countries, avoiding confrontation with them, they should know that the blindly following, and the senrendorous waiting for the western salvation can not lead to development.
3. Stereo-typing the western methods of development can not lead to development; we should have our own ways of development.
4. We should not depend mainly on the outside world. The backbone of development in Africa is (African people themselves) not the outside world. African states should depend on their people, raising on them the hope, self-confidence, spirit of challenge, building their capacity, and offering them ways and means for participation
5. Africa should stand constantly for a true equalized partnership with the outside world, and should prepare itself for a huge challenge if the outside world insist on giving priority to its interests; and it should prove that it deserves respect and treatment on an equal basis.

¹See for example Rostow (1960) where he develops his well-known “stages of development”: traditional society; preconditions of growth (rationality, economic calculus, scientific knowledge); take-off (radical transformation of existing structures,

increase of saving rate); maturity (leading sectors); society of mass consumption.

² Rostow: the stages of economic growth

³ ILO (1976:7).

⁴ See Stewart (1985).

⁵ UNDP (1990:9). See also Griffin and McKinley (1994), Qizilbash (1996 a,b) and ul Haq (1995)

⁶ UNDP (1994:4).

⁷ Commission for Africa report

⁸ One Africa, One Destiny: Towards Democracy, Good Governance and Development (wa Mutharika 1995)

⁹ Commission for Africa report