

INTERCULTURALISM: PATHFINDER TO SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

The human society in contemporary times is peculiarly characterized by the confluence and intermingling of persons with diverse cultural identity. The multicultural dimension of various societies of the world and Africa in particular, is uniquely an immense source of socio-economic and political strength which can be harnessed and galvanized towards the utmost profitability, sustainability and progressivity of modern states. Unfortunately, the poly-cultural nature of these modern societies which allow for the co-existence of persons with relativistic cultural worldview, is often spectacted from the negative. Many societies of this kind have often experienced cases of marginalization and cultural subjugation of the minorities. Instances of ethnocentrism seems peculiarly prevalent in societies with this structural composition. Thus in this frame of reference, socioeconomic, infrastructural and political progress is often limited, if not completely absent. It is a truism, that beyond the clouds of negativities of Interculturalism, this distinct practicable concept remains uniquely propitious to the progressive sustainable development of modern states. This paper therefore attempts to examine Interculturalism as a profound driver and pathfinder of socio-economic sustainability in Africa.

Keywords: Interculturalism, Pathfinder, Socioeconomic Sustainability, Integrative Humanism, Political Development.

INTRODUCTION

The harmonious congruence and concert of Philosophical ideas has largely been propitious in tackling Philosophical and existential problems. It remains one fundamental resource of societal development and Nation

Building. Societal progressivity can largely be attained where philosophical ideas are allowed to strive and given a prioritizing attention for human sustainable development. Kwasi Wiredu affirms this when he avers that: "the function of Philosophy everywhere is to examine the intellectual foundations of life, using the best available modes of knowledge and reflection for human wellbeing" (62). Intercultural Philosophy, as a measure of philosophical contemplations from cultural frame of reference becomes therefore an essential tool which must be utilized in enhancing sustainable progress in Africa.

Africa as one of the most populated continent of the world, is blessed with rich human and natural resources. However, in the midst of its abundant resources, she has remain the least in terms of development, and can hardly compete favourably with other continents of the world. Africa and indeed many of its nations, is plagued with bad leadership, corruption, infrastructural decay and continuous civil unrest. One cannot but affirm, that leadership crisis and indeed the consistent civil unrest that are prevalent in many countries of Africa, has largely impeded on the socio-economic and political progress of Africa. Little wonder, Africa has remained at the infant stage of development and progress. This work affirms therefore, that Intercultural Philosophy is an essential tool that can be utilized to enhance socio-economic, political and consistent development in Africa.

INTERCULTURALISM

Modern human societies have largely experienced the rising consciousness in the inter-dependence of human and cultures around the world. The consciousness that humans are not self sufficient nor completely independent, has consistently triggered the desire for Intercultural dialogue and discourse, as the required progress and surmounting of current challenges amongst various nation states can truly be addressed through the concerting efforts and contributions of consisting cultural units. "Man is neither a self sufficient being, nor a being in isolation. The realization and acceptance of one's dependence and requisite support by another is an inevitable tool of progressive development" (Solomon, 164). Plato affirms that the individual is not self sufficient but has needs which he cannot supply by himself (117). 'Anyone who lays claim to self sufficiency and non relevance of others is either a sub-human or a Super-human' (Aristotle 60).

Interculturalism therefore refers to the support for cross- cultural dialogue and discourse, that challenges segregation, contest and hegemonic tendencies amongst cultures. It is the consciousness that strives beyond the acknowledgement of the existence of diverse cultures, but seek to build a concerting effort to cross fertilization of ideas and establishment of dialogues within cultures. Interculturalism is erected on the platform of Intercultural Philosophy which believes therefore that every culture has the capacity of

Philosophical contemplations and interpretations, hence the need for a consenting cultural dialogue.

Intercultural Philosophy as a philosophical framework offers the opportunity of inter-relationship and contributions from various cultures. It is a philosophical standpoint which seeks to harness the various potentials and wealth of cultures through dialogue. Intercultural Philosophy provides the ambience of discourse that projects the uniqueness of various cultures and their Philosophical points of relevance, and how such can be galvanized in tackling human existential problems. Oluwagbemi Jacobs observes that there is a possibility of attaining a viable Philosophical communication from various Philosophical and cultural background through the interplay of various cultures providing a distinct and robust discourse (303).

Interculturalism as the attitude and practice of cross-cultural relations, and intercultural breed of ideas and believes, seeks the harmonious inter-relationship of cultures from their points of relevance. Interculturalism as a Philosophical standpoint affirms that every culture is relevant, and has something essentially unique to contribute to the advancement of ideas and knowledge. In this light therefore, it allows for interrelations, coexistence and the concertual contributions of cultural uniqueness from their point of relevance. Every culture therefore is allowed to contribute to the progress of the whole. Ted Cantle affirms, that Interculturalism is about changing mindsets by creating new opportunities across cultures to support intercultural activity...its about thinking and acting interculturally (12).

Dialogue stands as one key feature of Intercultural Philosophy. Various cultures can truly interact in a meaningful and fruitful manner, through dialogue. "meaningful dialogue cannot exist if people are not prepared for it" (Barrett 13). This implies therefore that Intercultural Philosophy, its practice and success, is largely dependent on the various unit of cultures that constitute the whole.

AFRICA'S PREDICAMENT IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

Africa can undoubtedly be affirmed a blessed continent with tremendous human and national resources. As a continent with a very high population, it is said to have about 1.3 billion people living in 54 countries in Africa. It is blessed with immense natural resources. The continent is said to hold about thirty percent (30%) of the world's known mineral reserves which include cobalt, uranium, diamonds, golds as well as significant oil and gas reserves (Tom 18). With the tripling of global mineral and oil prices in the past decade, Africa made profound wealth through mining.

According to International Monetary Fund, four top African countries (Egypt, Nigeria, South Africa, Algeria) posted GDPs of more than 500 billion dollars in 2020 (Tom 18) This implies therefore that with its immense mineral resources, Africa generates so much wealth yearly.

Beyond the rich natural resources in Africa, Africa is also largely blessed with human capital. The tremendous human resources in Africa cannot be denigrated, as it contributes immensely to the sustainable development of the individual countries around Africa. However, one cannot but affirm that despite the tremendous natural and human resources in Africa, it is said to be one of the poorest continents in the world. Africa and indeed its countries are plagued with untold poverty, insecurity, poor infrastructural development, poor health care and high death rate. Unfortunately, Africa is largely characterized by all the negativities that prevail in the human race.

Asouzu observes that the Africa we know is the Africa that is depicted by failure and bad governance. For him, the Africa we know, is characterized with:

things as Ebola, AIDS, malaria, refugee problems, massacre, famine, hunger, debt burden, failure and retrogression, tyranny, ethnic clashes etc. In this way, the Africa we know is the Africa that people can plunder with ease and nothing happens. This Africa is the pawn of politicians, international business people, adventurer, and power brokers. They use it at will to achieve selfish objectives at the detriment of Africans themselves (Asouzu 216-217).

The paradoxical situation of Africa that is ridden in poverty while the midst of wealth is largely perplexing and worrisome. It is without gainsaying the fact, that many countries in Africa are burdened with debt crisis, infrastructural decay, infant mortality, and various forms of ethno-religious and political crisis. Nigeria for instance is a country blessed with tremendous mineral resources, large oil revenue, yet its citizens are poverty stricken and contend with lots of socio-political problems including insecurity.

One cannot but observe that poor and ineffective leadership and indeed leadership crisis is one of the key causes of Africa's predicament and malady. Many countries in Africa are plagued with leadership problems. There is a crisis of leadership, as some leaders are either grossly ineffective and inept, others are largely involved in corrupt practices.

Suffice it to state, that the problem of 'God Fatherism' where certain political leaders and acclaimed fathers 'anoint' or select people who are loyal to them, contributes to destroying the principle of meritocracy and uphold mediocrity. In this sense, people who are less qualified are made to lead others, only because they are found loyal to their 'Godfathers'.

Corruption in leadership can be identified as one of the problems of Africa. Many African leaders hardly separate their private funds from public fund. The menace of corrupt practices, where leaders appropriate public funds and properties as theirs, is largely prevalent in African societies. While corrupt practices are perpetrated without severe sanctions, politicians unabatedly exalt their private interest above the common good of the generality.

Tom Cante identifies 'illicit financial flow', as another cause of Africa's poverty amidst wealth. For him;

the illicit movement of money or capital from one country to another, the exploitation of mineral resources has all too often led to corruption and a large proportion of the continent's resources and revenue benefiting local and foreign elites rather than the general population...such illicit flow undermines social development and stifles inclusive economic growth...Instead of investing resources into improving infrastructure, health and education, political elites often in collusion with mining companies, have siphoned off proceeds from the continent's mineral and oil wealth, having their own pockets to the detriment of ordinary Africans (21).

Corrupt practices depicted in illicit transfer of funds, have not only left Africa and its people poor, but have left the continent in a devastated dilapidated state. This is portrayed in the humongous underdevelopment and lack of infrastructure.

Ethno-religious and political crisis is undoubtedly another source of untold malady in Africa. Many African countries are largely bedeviled with ethno-religious crisis that has immensely truncated socio-political progress and development. One cannot but hold, that the struggle of supremacy and relevance amongst different socio-cultural groups in Nigeria, and many African countries have greatly limited the speed of progress. The various ethno-religious and cultural groups strive to outshine others, with the intent of benefiting more from the common wealth of those countries.

Again, the denigration of certain groups and the inequitable distribution of the nation's resources can arouse the feeling of marginalization, thereby causing civil unrest. In Nigeria for instance, certain groups feel grossly marginalized and unfairly treated in the organization of the state. This has stimulated agitation from various ethnic groups requesting for self-determination.. Michael Nwokedi and Ngwu observe that; "Nigeria's eighteen years of civilian rule has been dotted with incessant ethno-nationalist agitations which have often threatened the peace and tranquility of the Nigerian State and the orderly conduct of public and private businesses" (2).

Sustainable Development in Africa can truly occur where there is an Integrative approach, that harmonizes the interest of various ethno-religious groups toward the progressivity of the Nation state. Intercultural Philosophy and indeed Integrative Humanism stands tall as a reliable panacea for sustainable development in Africa.

AN OVERVIEW OF INTEGRATIVE HUMANISM

Integrative Humanism is a Philosophy which advocates the harmonious integration of various units of reality from their points of relevance. And it is the brain child of Professor Godfrey Ozumba. As a Philosophy, Integrative

Humanism gains its inspiration from the Igbo-African cultural worldview – NjikokaAmaka, which means- to integrate is better than to disintegrate. Integrative Humanism therefore is an Integrativist Philosophy, which believes in a proper identification of various units of existence and integration of same from their points of existential relevance. 'It sees reality as having both physical and spiritual dimensions, past and present, as well as harmonized future framework in which seemingly opposed variables unite without contradiction to achieve progress and epistemic wholeness' (Ozumba 6).

Integrative Humanism is ratio-empirico-spiritocentric in approach. It explores physical and spiritual insights in providing relevant answers to questions that confront man's daily existential experiences. As a Philosophy of Integration, Integrative Humanism holds that reality is multidimensional, and its multidimensionality can adequately be appreciated when all its units are perceived from their points of distinct relevance. The methodical expression of Integrative Humanism are contextual, analytic, complementary and mutual integration. It integrates realities of various forms primarily from their points of contributory relevance.

Ozumba affirms that this Philosophy enhances the management of relevant variables in a context-dependent dynamic network for resolutions of tasks that would rather prove difficult for non-sequestered and non contextualized theoretic frameworks. It bridges the gap between one culture and another and between one Philosophical tradition and another (Ozumba 6). Integrative Humanism advocates for theistic Humanism. In thus regards, it affirms the complement of spiritual realities with the physical, and the complement of faith and reason. As a brand of Humanism, it believes that all ideas, views and values must be galvanized towards the protection of the existence and interest of Humans.

Integrativism remains central in the interpretation and expression of this Philosophy. This for Ozumba implies 'harnessing, processing through engrafting of different components of knowledge. It is a method of Circumspective inquiry with the sole end of systematic and purposeful welding of ideas' (Humanism 41). Integrative Humanism as a Philosophy, captures the essence and desires of Intercultural Philosophy. In this regards therefore, Integrative Humanism can be contextually applied here as an approach of Intercultural Philosophy. Suffice it to state, that Integrative Humanism promotes the 'harmonization, unification and integration of various distinct realities towards the profitability of man' (Solomon 73).

INTERCULTURALISM AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

The sustainable progress and development of Africa has remain one of the distinct desires of scholars and Africans around the world. This is because the paradox of poverty despite the tremendous wealth in Africa, calls for concern. In chatting a way forward therefore, one cannot but affirm that

Interculturalism, through a proper Integrative approach remains key to the desired sustainability and development of Africa.

As a continent made up of many countries that are heterogeneous and multicultural, the need for 'Interculturalistic Integrativism' becomes fundamentally necessary. The various ethno-religious and cultural groups in many countries of Africa must be allowed to flourish in their peculiarities, and their distinct functionalities and resources – human and natural, harnessed towards the progressive development of the state. 'Interculturalistic Integrativism' is the practice that allows for decent cultural dialogue amongst the various ethno-cultural units, while harnessing integratively their potentials towards the development of the nation. Ethno-religious and cultural groups therefore must be spectacted not from a divisive hegemonic perspective, but from an Interculturalist Integrative perspective, which seeks to provide equitable opportunities and privileges to the various constituting units.

One cannot but observe that every ethnic and cultural group is peculiarly unique, blessed with diverse resources and has the capacity of contributing positively to the progress of the whole. In this light therefore various ethno-religious and cultural units, must be harnessed and integrated from their points of contributory relevance. Suffice it to state, that in attaining profitable sustainable development in Africa, there must be effective leadership. The crisis of leadership must be duly addressed by electing competent empathic leaders who have the interest of the populace at heart. In this regard therefore African leaders must be empathic and altruistic in nature, and must be ready to put the common and general interest of the people above his private or personal interest.

Furthermore, the practice of favouratism, which elevates and favour one cultural group over and above others, must be overturned. All units of existence in African countries must adequately be accorded equal privileges and opportunities, and made to contribute to the consistent growth of the country and continent.

African nations must necessarily and consciously work towards the unification and integration of diverse unit that constitute their being. In this regard conscientious efforts of nation building becomes inevitable. The task of nation building therefore requires a consistent effort of building a common identity, values and believe system that unifies the various composite groups. Abraham Gambari affirms that Nation-building, 'is about building a commonsense of purpose, a sense of shared identity, a collective imagination of belonging. It is building the tangible and intangible threads that hold a political entity together and gives it a sense of purpose' (3). Building a nation is identified by Walker as the most common form of a process of collective identity formation with a view to legitimizing public power within a given territory (Walker 8). Elaigwu, further observes that nation building involves the acceptance of other members of the civic body as equal fellow members of a

cooperate nation a recognition of the rights of other members to a share of common history, resources, values and other aspects of the state. (18)

Iyase and Egberi affirms that a successful actualization of Nation building requires a lot of effort, one of which is the creation of Integrating Ideology. In their words,

a nation as one of the preconditions of Nation Building requires some form of ideology that legitimizes and justifies a national self interpretation of the respective community...a uniting, unifying and integration ideology does not necessarily replace previous ideologies and identities, but has to exist and to be strong enough to convince the members of the subgroups that they have also something in common, which is meaningful and important' (44)

African nations therefore must ensure the peaceful coexistence of citizens and their harmonious relationship, towards the advancement of the state. It is important affirming therefore that the sustainable development and progress of Africa can also largely be attained where the problem of corruption is address. African leaders therefore must lead and live beyond corrupt practices. The nations and continent's resources must be properly utilized for the utmost profitability and benefits of the populace. There must be a distinction between public funds and private funds. In this regards all illicit financial transfers must be stopped. Money from different countries of Africa must be utilized in the Infrastructural development and progress of the country and continent.

African resources – natural and human must be properly utilized for the progressive development of the continent. In this regards the mindset, attitude and positive lifestyle of Interculturalism through an Integrative approach, must be adequately utilized. 'Interculturalistic Integrativism' therefore is an essential tool of sustainable progressive development of Africa which must be upheld and utilized.

CONCLUSION

In concluding this paper, it is important to affirm that Africa as a great continent with immense wealth and resources, can consistently build a progressive structure that can enhance sustainable development. She is naturally endowed with immense natural and human resources that can contribute meaningfully to the lives of her citizens and to the world at large. In doing so Africa needs to rise to the challenge of addressing her leadership problems. Effective leadership must be genuinely erected and the interest of its ordinary citizens made paramount. The rise and fall of nations are most often largely dependent on leadership, hence African leaders must be at the fore of tackling Africa's myriad of issues that can limit or truncate sustainable development. The menace of corrupt practices that feature the embezzlement of public funds and the siphoning of same for selfish gains, must be stopped. The heterogeneity of African nations, where several atomic ethno-cultural units

make up a whole, must be seen from the perspective of strength, and its gains properly utilized for the utmost profitability and progressivity of the nation states, and Africa at large. The Intercultural disposition of fair play, dialogue, equitable distribution of resources amongst the constituent ethno-cultural groups must be adequately utilized for Africa's Economic, Political, scientific and technological development. Various ethno-cultural and atomic units of existence, must be Integratively harmonized to the development and profitable progress of Africa. The 'InterculturalisticIntegrativism' of various cultural unit from their points of relevance and the harmonious integration of relevant factors and categories of progress, can in no mean measure enhance profound development of African nations and indeed African continent.

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