

## **DEVELOPING A POST-CENTENARY NIGERIA THROUGH ASOUZU'S IBUANYIDANDA ONTOLOGY**

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### ***ABSTRACT***

Any meaningful effort at nation building and development begins with the philosophy adopted by the nation. Such a philosophy ought to be adapted to the mentality, traditions, occupations, aptitudes and general worldview of the citizens. However, the major problem that has Nigeria over the years is that Nigerian philosophical system tends to be more of a colonial inheritance, perpetuated by agents of imperialism. This entails that as a nation, Nigeria has copied systems of ideas and models from other countries, without realizing that just as our problems differ from theirs, so must our solutions differ. This is despite the fact that some actors have appeared at one time or the other on the Nigerian philosophical scene whose philosophies could be harnessed today for integral development in Africa. One of such philosophies is Asouzu's Ibuanyidanda philosophy. This paper explores Asouzu's Ibuanyidanda philosophy as a panacea to the development challenges faced by Nigeria today. Using the expository and evaluative methods of philosophical enquiry, the paper argues that if Nigeria must make progress in terms of development she needs to reconstruct her citizen's mindset especially her leaders to begin to see and treat all existing beings as "missing link" of reality. The paper surmises that leveraging on indigenous philosophies, especially Asouzu's Ibuanyidanda philosophy is capable of addressing the developmental scheme of Africa in general and Nigeria in particular, especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

*Keywords: Development, Post-Centenary Nigeria, Indigenous Philosophy, Ibuanyidanda, Complementarism.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

For the benefit of hindsight, prior to the advent of the colonialists into Nigeria, much of what constitutes modern day Nigeria was a fragmentation of individual states along ethnic divides. "Among the major kingdoms were the Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Benin, Efik and Nupe" (Nyityo 7). These among other individual kingdoms, chiefdoms and fiefdoms were autonomous and self

governing. However, after the Berlin Conference, and the subsequent struggle and partitioning of Africa, things were not to remain the same.

The tale of Nigeria from about 1849 until it attained independence in 1960 is largely the story of the transformational impact of the British on the peoples and cultures of the Niger-Benue area. In 1849 the British created a consulate for the Bights of Benin and Biafra. The result, in the long run, was that the British converted the coastal consulate and its immediate hinterland into the Oil Rivers Protectorate in 1885, which, in 1893, transformed into the Niger Coast Protectorate (Gaubu 84). This region was to become known in the middle of the twentieth century as Eastern Nigeria. In 1862 the British annexed the Lagos Lagoon area and its immediate environs and converted same into a crown colony. Similarly, by 1897, British influence and power had overflowed the frontiers of Lagos to all of Yorubaland which was subsequently attached to Lagos as a Protectorate. The political and administrative unit which came to be known as Western Nigeria in the 1950s was as a result of this. Similarly, in 1888 the Royal Niger Company acquired political and administrative powers over a narrow belt of territory on both sides of the river from the sea to Lokoja, as well as over the vast area which, in the 20th century, came to be known as Northern Nigeria. Thus, by about 1897, the three blocks of territory had emerged, as British colonial possessions. With these three units then brought under the Colonial Office, the situation was created in which the management of their affairs came to be informed by the same theory and practice of administration (Nyityo 11).

With the territories so marshaled out, the way was paved for the amalgamation of 1914 which could be described as the approach that culminated in seeing and treating Nigeria as one political entity, and Nigerians as members of one political family. After the amalgamation, it was only in the 1954 Constitution, which remained in force until Independence in 1960, that the Lugardian principle of centralization was replaced by the formula of decentralization as a matter of policy in the administration of the Nigerian state (Gaubu 86). One must surmise here that although Nigeria was the creation of European ambitions and rivalries, its peoples had their cherished history of freedom and independence before the arrival of the British. Today, a critical look at the entity called Nigeria and her developmental situation leaves any sane mind to wonder where we have really gone wrong.

## CONCEPTUALISING DEVELOPMENT

It has been difficult to define the concept development in way that is acceptable by all scholars for all time. However, Cleveland opines that development can be defined in a manner applicable to all societies at all historical periods as “an upward ascending movement featuring greater levels of energy, efficiency, quality, productivity, complexity, comprehension, creativity, mastery, enjoyment and accomplishment” (51). Development is a process of social change, not merely a set of policies and programs instituted for

some specific results. During the last five centuries this process has picked up in speed and intensity, and during the last five decades has witnessed a marked surge in acceleration (International Commission on Peace and Food 31).

Development is governed by many factors that influence the results of developmental efforts. There must be a motive that drives the social change and essential preconditions for that change to occur. The motive must be powerful enough to overcome obstructions that impede that change from occurring. Development also requires resources such as capital, technology, and supporting infrastructure (Jacobs 89). The critical variables that indicate the level of development in a country are many and varying. The first recognized by Oladiran is the rate of poverty reduction (120). The extent to which poverty is reduced also exposes the level of development. This point is related to equitable distribution of income. The extent to which a nation formulates and implements policies that can help reduce illiteracy, disease, malnutrition etc is a pointer to the level of development. It would have been strange for a country to claim to have achieved economic progress and modernization if the extent of poverty prevailing keep on increasing instead of decreasing (Cleveland 109).

The Gross National Product (GNP) is also an important index of development. According to Macfarlane and Van Harten, the GNP provides comprehensive picture of the economy, it shows what is produced, the level of agriculture as well as distribution of income. The maximization of the growth of GNP shows the level of development. Some countries do this through capital accumulation and industrialization. Others pursue the same goal through improved performance of the factors of production and improved techniques of production. The rate of growth of GNP is used as an index performance of the economy. It determines countries that are developed and those that are not (110).

Another indicator according to Okoye is the level of industrialization. Industrialization has been viewed as a superior way of life. Rich countries are believed to be rich because they are industrialized and poor countries are backward because they are primary producers. However, this contention has been criticized by radical scholars. Jacobs for instance, notes that rather than being an indicator of development, industrialization is an integral part of under-development and that it can no longer be considered as a solution to under development at least, in the present capitalist system. Most countries have witnessed the proliferation of industries by capitalist investors (68).

Another indicator is the rate of technological advancement. When technology is applied in the process of production, it leads to greater output. As observed by Cleveland greater production is the key to prosperity, peace and progress. Therefore, countries that have been able to develop and apply technologies are bound to be perceived as being more developed than those without technology. The level of labour output per man is another indicator. Efficiency in labour output per man is a very crucial index of development. The

ability of labour to achieve a greater output in a short time without any decrease in the quality of work depends on a number of factors. Principal among them are efficiency of other factors such as motivation, education, training and discipline. When these factors are present and labour efficiency is guaranteed, development and progress becomes inevitable (Polkingmore 90).

### THE NIGERIA WE KNOW TODAY

Integral development seems to have been exiled from the Nigerian society over the past years. Instead, the nation could be described as an entity that has been clad with underdevelopment as a garb. It is therefore apt to paint an all round developmental picture of the Nigeria we know today. Suffice it to begin by stating that the Nigeria we know today is a colonial inheritance, whose structures and substructures have been and are being plundered and milk-dried by agents of imperialism. This entails that as a nation, Nigeria has copied systems of ideas and models from Western countries, without realizing that just as our worldview and problems differ from theirs, so must our solutions differ. This is what one could describe as “the tale of the round peg in a square hole”. Thus, many Nigerians today could best be described as Nigerians in blood but English, French or Portuguese in opinion, morals and intellect.

The Nigeria we know today is a Nigeria that, as Achebe rightly submits, is suffering “simply and squarely from leadership failure” (1). Contemporary Nigeria is an unfortunate historical reality of the malignant ill of governance failure in which power is pursued, gained and wielded for everything but the purpose of development. Sobriety, Accountability, Due Process, Discipline and other allied positive values which are supposed to be determining features of good leadership seem to have become strange inversions of the Nigerian way of life. Thus, Nigerians variously face the problem of decay of available infrastructure and/or a total lack thereof, making it difficult for her to compete profitably in the global market. The Nigeria we know today is a Nigeria that is getting almost ‘unhealably’ crippled by endemic corruption. Corruption could be defined as the violation of established rules for the securing of private gains at public expense. It comes in various forms: bribery, fraud, embezzlement, clientelism and favouritism. The gravity of these practices in Nigeria has accorded Nigeria an almost unflinching placement by the Transparency International index either as “the most” corrupt or “one of the most corrupt” countries of the world.

The Nigeria we know is a Nigeria that is battered by moral decay, characterized by unscrupulous selfism, unconscientiousness, indiscipline, excessive materialism and squandermania, self-aggrandizement, bandwagonery, sycophancy, aggressive avarice, abuse of power, sacrilege and desecration of the sanctity of life in all ramifications. The core aboriginal moral values of sanctity of life, truth, justice, hospitality, authentic religiousity, fidelity, etc, that characterized traditional Africa, have been sacrificed on the altar of wanton suicide bombings, banditry, terrorism and novel forms of

assassinations. No wonder, Nigeria today is ridden with crime and criminality of various magnitudes. From occasional misdemeanors, crimes have climaxed to unprecedented cases of violent felonious crimes ranging from organized crimes of Boko Haramism and Militant Terrorism to Assassination, Cyber Crimes, Human and Drug Trafficking, Money Laundering, Rape, Banditry, etc. And we all know the consequences of these crimes and terrorism!

The Nigeria we know is a Nigeria whose majority of citizens swims in loathsome poverty. The *National Bureau of Statistics* alleges today that 63% of Nigerians live on less than \$1 per day poverty benchmark compared to 51% in 2004. There is thus a scenario in which 80% of the economic wealth of this country is in the control of 20% of the population while 80% of the Nigerian population thrives on the 20% wealth remnants.

We know today, a Nigeria whose cherished cultural values are almost going extinct due to invasion by foreign culture. It is a Nigeria where even our education is delivered in western conceptual schemes to the utter neglect of our indigenous cultural appreciation. It is a Nigeria where competitive ethnicity or tribalism is stronger than nationalism, where the problem of ethnicity has eaten so deep into the system, thereby truncating national development in various spheres. It is the Nigeria that forced Matthew Hassan Kukah to lament in the following words:

Nigeria is an enigma wrapped in a puzzle. (...) it is a nation of such enormous landmass, yet citizens are fighting over land; a nation of such incredible wealth, yet it wears poverty like a breastplate; a nation of seemingly deep religious people, yet so steep in much sin; a nation so populated by farmers and farmland, yet hunger stalks the land and the nation cannot feed itself (...) a nation with so many politicians, but no political class (...) a nation with so many believers in God, but no faith (34).

Things are going wrong on all corners. There are problems arising from poor governance and economic mismanagement, corruption and embezzlement of public funds. There are social upheavals arising from distorted border demarcations and the combination of incompatible peoples. The consequences of the above scenario have been nepotism, religious bigotry and ethnocentrism reflected in various skirmishes and life effacing crimes across the country. With such a gloomy picture painted above, it becomes clear why development has eluded Nigeria over the years. The question that readily begs an answer is, can Nigeria be salvaged from her present predicaments? Can her fortunes be turned around for the better?

## WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

Certain salient steps must be taken urgently to reclaim Nigeria from this path of sacrilegious underdevelopment. Firstly, there is the need, as the National Policy on Education rightly enunciates, for "the inculcation of the right

types of values, attitudes and skills that would enable Nigerians to be useful members of the society” (3). This is embedded in the functional system of education that would engender self-reliance rather than just place emphasis on certificates. There is need for a restructuring of the educational system. It is an incontrovertible truth that education is the bedrock and illiteracy the bane of a country’s development. A well articulated system of education will aim at the inculcation of positive moral and socially desirable values that will serve as the core for scientific, technological, human, economic and political development of Nigeria. African philosophy should be inculcated into the university curriculum and African philosophers should be celebrated like their western counterparts.

In addition, Nigerians need a value re-orientation towards ethnicity. In this vein, Nigerians must use their various ethnic associations to promote development and not to cause inter-communal skirmish. Loyalty and patriotism to the Nigerian state must be placed above ethnic and religious sentiments.

Further, the government of Nigeria should develop, conduct and sustain a social re-engineering programme which will re-circumcise the hearts of Nigerians and reposition Nigerians on a platform of excellence in both private and public engagements. This course should be vigorously pursued with a sense of commitment as a perpetual national agenda so that its steam may not go off as did “WAI”, WAI-C etc.

The political economy of Nigeria should be restructured to target wealth creation and the provision of social safety valves to cushion the impacts of economic downturn and hardship on the less privileged. The mono-economical system of dependence on the oil sector should be de-emphasised and other wealth creating sectors of the economy should be explored and harnessed to reduce the prevalence of economic and material poverty. But the million dollar question arises: how are these to be achieved and sustained, and what indigenous philosophy bequeaths us with this tool? This study proposes Innocent Asouzu’s *Ibuanyidanda* Philosophy.

## AN OVERVIEW OF ASOUZU’S *IBUANYIDANDA* PHILOSOPHY

*Ibuanyidanda* Philosophy also known as Complementary Ontology is a philosophical formulation by Innocent Asouzu as a mechanism used in inquiring about the possibility of mutual co-existence between diverse segments, units, fragments and variables in any given system of reality. This system of inquiry is underscored by the principle of integration which states that “anything that exists serves a missing link of reality”. Its practical variants are the principle of progressive transformation “all human actions are geared towards the joy of being” and the imperative “allow the limitations of being to be the cause of your joy”. These two principles and the imperative form what could be regarded as the fundamental principles of Asouzu’s complementarism.

Asouzu’s *Ibuanyidanda* is coined from a linguistic hybrid of three Igbo words which denotes the English term “complimentarity”. These terms are: *Danda* is the Igbo word for a species of small ants. *Ibu* is the Igbo equivalent of

the English word "Load". While *anyi* has as its English equivalent "not insurmountable" (denoting surmountability). *Ibuanyidanda* then literally means that "no load is insurmountable for this species of ants to carry whenever they compliment and combine their efforts" (Asouzu 252). As it is the case, complimentary ontology encapsulates all known and unknown factors, conditions and actors that enter into such ontology. This means that within the ambience of complimentary ontology "things are considered in the significance of their singularity and not in the exclusiveness of their otherness in view of the joy that gives completion to all missing links of reality" (Asouzu, *Method and Principle...* 39). In essence, every reality serves a missing link. However, according to Asouzu the idea of a missing link does not presuppose the existence of a vacuum, but recognition of differences in a mutual complimentary relationship. According to him:

The missing links are the diverse components or entities of which any existing reality is constituted... if the components that make up a system are viewed in isolation and singly we can say that they are missing in relation to one another in a way. They are missing in the sense that as discrete entities, each can be viewed in isolation to each and in total disregard to each other. When this happens a unit can be unaware of the other and in this moment, the one that is unaware of is missing. To conceptualize them as a system, they have to be brought in relation to each other such that these missing links serve each other towards becoming mutually aware of each other (*Effective Leadership...*58-59).

Thus serving a missing link is the capacity for existent realities to be in mutual complimentary relationship as not to be alone (*ka so mu adina*). It underlies the moment of mutual dependence or relation which exists between diverse modes of self expression of being. With this complimentary framework, "to be" is not to be alone, but the capacity to be in mutual complimentary relationship with all things that exist. It is the ability of the mind to discover itself as part of missing links of reality and endeavours to establish its unity through recourse to other missing links of which it is a part. It is at this level that the mind experiences all missing links as compliments in a moment of transcendent complimentary unity of consciousness. Therefore all things that exist do so insofar as they can be grasped within a framework of mutual free interaction without encapsulation, bifurcation and exclusiveness.

### **IBUANYIDANDA PHILOSOPHY AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

The historical journey of Nigeria from the point of amalgamation in 1914 and over a hundred years after has been an admixture of positive and negative moments and activities. First and foremost, the very act of the conglomeration of over 250 ethnic groups could be best described as an amalgamation without unity. This has been the major clog in the developmental wheels of Nigeria. That

is why some critical thinkers in Nigeria described the act of government at lavishing money on One Hundred years centenary celebration of Nigeria as a mockery of the nation which should be mourning rather than celebrating. The challenges which have plagued Nigeria over the years include negative ethnicity, electoral violence, political violence, unclear leadership strategies, endemic political corruption, security dilemma, lopsided federalism and constitution, nepotism, among many others.

One observable feature which has characterized successive governments in Nigeria is their proclivity to place priority on things that contribute little or nothing to the development aspirations of the country" (Ucheaga 264). This tendency is the bane of Nigeria if examined in the context of the present development challenges in the country. The government of any country is ultimately responsible to set the pace for integral development. Successive governments in Nigeria no doubt have tried in this area by evolving development plans aimed at attaining development in Nigeria, but what has been the situation in terms of approach and implementation presents a sad story. There is therefore need for a new approach that will be founded on Complementarism. Nigeria has remained underdeveloped due to the failure of the government to address issues of marginalization, injustices, lopsidedness in terms of appointment, policy making, infrastructural absence/decay, creation of equal job opportunities etc. This situation is consequent upon a bifurcatory and divisive mindset whereby "the components that make up a system or reality is forgotten or made to function at variance and in a disintegrated manner occasioned by marginalization and injustice which creates an avenue for conflict, violence and insecurity" (Ogabo 12).

Asouzu through his idea of missing link of realities is of the opinion that Nigeria would be a better place if the bifurcatory, polarized and exclusivist mindset which people operate with is harmonized. He believes that human conditions present themselves in ambivalences and due to the activities of the instinct of self-preservation man seeks to elevate himself to an absolute instance whereby his advantage would be met regardless of what happens to what he regards as 'the opposite other'. This is the attitude we experience in politics, education, religion, economy, employment, sport and indeed in practically all matters that have to do with human interpersonal relationship. In Asouzu's words, "we have a situation where those who think that they are highly endowed and privileged endeavour to lord it over others" (164-165). When this happens the resulting effect is always a violence response from the others considered as inferior and inconsequential who always feel cheated. According to Asouzu, the instinct of self-preservation and what he terms the phenomenon of concealment makes man to see himself as significant and strong and the other as insignificant and weak. All negative tendencies like war, violence, killings, kidnappings and all other form of abuses which undermine the development of the country are therefore reactions against this divisive mindset which characterizes successive government in Nigeria. When government does not



create jobs for its teeming youths, when government is insensitive to the plight of the masses, when a section of the country is marginalized in terms of development etc it always lead to revolution which comes with destruction of lives and the few existing property.

To address this menace of underdevelopment in Nigeria, therefore, there is need to embrace the new ontological horizon provided by *Ibuanyidanda* Philosophy where each Nigerian becomes conscious of the need for complementation from others, hence, the assertion that “anything that exists serves a missing link of reality”. Such consciousness would help the government to bracket all forms of corrupt, exclusivist, divisive, polarizing and bifurcating ontological mindsets, thus creating a conducive environment where all parts of the country would enjoy equal distribution and sharing of resources; where government would be able to make policies that would unite all parts of the country and make life meaningful for the citizens especially in the area of job creation, appointments and other opportunities. It should be noted that within the ambience of *Ibuanyidanda* ontology Asouzu believes that “all realities are windows to other realities; both, present and future, the significant and insignificant, the strong and weak, the known and unknown, spiritual and material...” (257-258). Extrapolating from Asouzu’s philosophy, if Nigeria is to overcome its developmental challenges, then special re-orientation ought to be made with a view to awakening the consciousness among Nigerians, especially those at the helm of affairs, “the other person is as essential as you are, the other’s idea is as important as yours, the other person has the same rights as you have; and most importantly the other person is not an opposite other but an extension of the self” (Bisong 5).

This is the idea Asouzu portrays in his notion of ‘missing links of reality’. It is indeed necessary for the government and people of this country to among other measures and as a matter of priority have a change of attitude by desisting from looking down on others or any part of the country as inconsequential but a missing part of the self (reality) without which there can be no existence. Thus as Asouzu highlights, “it is within the context of missing links that all human experiences of the world get their full meaning and can be expressed positively” (269). The developmental stride that Nigeria seeks can only become a reality when there is adequate consideration of all constitutive units of the body polity. In another interpretation, development can only be brought to bear in Nigeria when each individual and group makes meaningful contribution towards the entire Nigerian development project. Just as together, no load is insurmountable to the *danda*, so also the task of developing Nigeria becomes easier with the contribution and cooperation of every Nigerian.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has resonated the reality that Nigeria has been bedeviled by underdevelopment over the years. Rather, she has been characterized by anti-

developmental tendencies including domination, discrimination, individualism, self interest, ethnicity, division, subjugation, terrorism, crime and criminality, etc. These attitudes which are a product of a bifurcatory ontological mindset are counterproductive in the quest for development. This paper submits with Asouzu that the tendency to act based on ethnocentric commitment (the tendency of the human mind to promote self interest) is the major cause of underdevelopment in Nigeria. To what extent do we intend to make progress if we continue to work alone and seek personal interest rather than common good? If we want to nip this ethnocentric commitment in the bud and save Nigeria from her gross developmental challenges then we must resort to the principles of Asouzu's *ibuanyidanda* philosophy.

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