

Combating Un-Freedom: A Panacea for the Growth Lull in Africa

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Abstract

The competing claims as to what development should look like has not escaped African thinkers and scholars. There have also been attempts by the global north, in the name of genuine humane concern, to offer support such as aid for Africa hoping that development will automatically occur. There is also a concern that Africa is embroiled in continuous quest for development, yet the expected development is not achieved. This paper attempts to bring to the fore some of the reasons why Africa remains in chains of unfreedom even though it was initially free like any other continent. Starting from the conceptual and definitional difficulties of the terms in development discourses, the paper proposes the importance of the correct perspectives toward the past, the present and peace as the best approaches to unshackle Africa from the growth lull. The paper posits that democracy is overrated since it cannot guarantee that development will be achieved if all the democratic ideals are adhered to strictly. The paper posits that development should be the primary focus by putting a measured or tampered emphasis on democracy. The claim made here is that it is important to ensure that the focus is on peace and as a precursor to development which eventually produces democracy.

1. Introduction

Jean Jacques Rousseau suggested that man is born free but everywhere he is in chains (Rousseau, 1895). If this claim is true today, why then does man remain in chains? In the context of international development, the global south remains relatively underdeveloped despite numerous internal and external efforts to develop. Generally, while man has freedom to development, there are certain factors that constrain them from operating optimally in the growth journey. The paper claims that the growth lull in Africa is caused by a combination of unique challenges that constrain development. These constraints will be referred to as un-freedoms. The argument here is that

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unfreedom arises from an array of factors based on Africa's history, political economy posture, and predilection toward governance. Although these are not the only factors that cause unfreedom, this paper posits that these factors when considered carefully in light of international development theories will reveal that they are self-inflicted constraints. It is therefore imperative that they are interrogated resolutely and confronted mercilessly to unshackle Africa from the growth lull.

The central argument made in this paper is that when the subject of development was introduced in Africa two perspectives arose. One perspective has been that during colonialism, Africans were denied cognitive justice to think through the challenges they faced and propose their own unique a way forward for themselves (Hoppers, 2015). The second perspective has been that development was introduced to Africa as a better alternative to the African way of life while in actual fact no empirical analysis was carried out by the West before arriving at this position (Diamond, 2008). Some of the solutions that have been put forward include African solutions to African problems. Although such contentions have been constantly misapplied, when correctly understood, they pose the most liberating reality for the continent of Africa. The paper proposes that one of the foremost un-freedom that should be combatted is the romanization of the effect of the struggle for independent Africa by asking hard questions as to what exactly must Africa do to attain the status of equals with other continents. The second un-freedom that must be combatted is the prioritization of approaches to democracy and politics in Africa. The third un-freedom is related to conflict and wars which have ravaged most of the post independent African States. Here the paper argues that peace is the foundation for development in Africa. It is conceded that there is abundance of perspectives and literature on peace and international development, this paper will constrain itself to justice as the main pillar for peace and consequently international development in Africa. These are some is the solution to the growth lull in Africa. At the end it hoped that the best approach to combating un-freedom is viewing development in the prism of freedom (Sen, 2000)

2. Definitional Difficulties

Most social science subjects face similar difficulties in finding convincing and mutually acceptable definition to concepts. Consequently, there is no globally

accepted standard of defining international development. Perhaps this is due to its multiple and multidisciplinary dimensions. (Hopkins A. G., 1995) argues that the definition of a problem has a strong, even a determining, influence on the solution proposed is a truism acknowledged by historians more often than it is acted upon. It is therefore important to periodically inspect the substantial historical controversies that have persisted from a generation or more. There are several attempts at defining international development albeit with difficulties. First, development can be considered from its different etymological strands such as growth, conversion, construction, start to exist, evolution, maturity, advancement, among others. Second, one may argue that development is as old as human quest for knowledge and began when man started wondering and experimenting on ideas. Third, and a more pointed view of international development thinking was seen after the age of enlightenment when human progress was tied to the economy by contributions from thinkers such as (1) David Hume who treated economy as a moral science (Rotwein, 1976), (2) Adam Smith on the factors of increasing production based on labor and argued that this happens more in developed nations (Smith, 1976), (3) John Stuart Mill argues that utilitarianism and political economic theories of demand and supply should be viewed and valued as independent units (Mill, 1848).

Fourth, considering the antonym for development (which for the sake of this paper is poverty) can offer some understanding albeit with similar difficulties. In the context of Africa, poverty is one of the concepts that is used to define development albeit in a pejorative sense (Rodney, 1972). This ends up not being a good attempt for several reasons. Some have argued that poverty in Africa was (is) created, not a natural occurrence, as such it remains relative rather than absolute (Rodney, 1972).

Poverty has different levels and dimensions which end up being comparative as well as being created to bring in the notion of wealth as the possession of a certain level of material, political, spiritual, and cultural commodities (Munene, *Historical Reflections on Kenya : Intellectual Adventurism, Politics and International Relations* , 2012). The purpose of those commodities is to provide service that is deemed appropriate to a given people to make them lead what is considered decent lives. It follows then that if people are meeting their material, social, spiritual, political, and cultural needs, then they cannot be said

to be poor. This argument is further supported by the fact that the imposition of colonialism in Africa created famine and political relief mentality based on the “conquerors often created famine” which was a method of control (Waal, 1997). This also find agreement with (Klein, 2007) who argues that there is a rise of disaster capitalism based on manufactured crisis in the global south.

The other approach of interest is the right based approach. Here the emphasis is on human rights. This approach accepts the Amartya Sen definition of development that insist on freedom as the truest measure of development. This explains what David Flynn contends with when he suggests (1) the universality of rights, hierarchy of rights, fusion, and distinction of rights is the major factors that support the call for rethinking human rights and responsibilities and (2) one must look at human rights as discursive and not positive in the same fusion as social work considers both the macro and micro (Flynn, 2005).

Last but not least, evidently, there is no unanimity among historians on the exact time when development thinking commenced perhaps due to the fact that it is difficult to define it. (Diamond, 2008) argues that the appropriate date for investigating the development discourse is 13000 years ago. He suggests that the medieval age is appropriate because it can show that every society at the time was in the same development state. (Weber, 1958) on the other hand, traces the historical development of capitalism and industrialization to the protestant ethics that promoted development in the age of the Renaissance. One must factor the etymological uniqueness of ‘under’- development and ‘un’-development. Here the argument is that Africa and the global south generally was underdeveloped by the hegemonic tendencies of the global north (Tandon, 2016) (Mazrui, 2006) (Omkarnath, 2016).

How to Explain International Development

a) Modernisation Theory

The initial proponent of modernization theory was Max Weber the German Sociologist who argued for rationalization of growth and development. His seminal work considered protestant ethics as the basis for growth of capitalism (Weber, 1958). The theory has since been modified to adapt to new realities and assumes that all states basically follow the same pathway or journey to

industrialization by focusing on primary products such as minerals, agriculture and incrementally learn to invest in new activities that lead to take off which create new individual and a modern society that is democratic (Rustow, 2014), (Moore, 1958) (Schumpeter, 1942) (Lipset S. M., 1959). (Huntington, 1996).

Reaction to Modernization Theory

First, in my view this theory fails to clarify whether the relationship between economic growth and democracy is positive or negative. It has been argued by (Dankwart, 1970) that correlation does not mean causality and that there ought to be focus also on other conditions that lead to economic development beyond democracy. Secondly, the theory fails to consider that modernization process could also lead to political instability and bring about authoritarian regimes. For instance, the fascist regimes in Europe in the 1930s or the bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes in South America in the 1970s are a product of attempt to develop these countries as argued by (Frank, 2014). Third, the theory does not take into account aspects of creative disruptions that introduces dynamic changes to the markets forces and facilitate development through outliers, innovators and capitalist (Dru, 1997), (Gladwell, 2011). Fordism fits into the creative disruption principle and arose when Ford Motor Company introduced methods for large-scale manufacturing of cars and management of an industrial workforce using elaborately engineered manufacturing categorizations characterized by shifting construction positions. A more local example such as mobile technology companies that entered the market in early 2000 unsettled the telecommunication industry in Kenya and revolutionized communication. In addition, mobile money transfer caused the banking sector to adjust to the realities of the emerging economic platforms without necessarily going through the stages of modernization as postulated in this theory. The question is not whether Africans cannot come up creative initiatives, instead it is whether the global north is ready to accept African innovation and embrace it. It is important that we unshackle Africa from the pejorative perspective of history, development aid and deal with conflicts in Africa. This theory does not fully address these three aspects.

b) Dependency Theory

Dependency theory is diametrically opposed to modernization theory. This theory was coined by Raul Prebisch a Latin America economist as a rejoinder to the modernization theory (Prebisch, 1950). The central argument of the

dependency theory is that because poor states are underprivileged, the rich States are obligated to develop the poor states with a view to having them integrated into the world system (Wallerstein, 1989). The principal assumption of this theory is that economic and political power are heavily concentrated and centralized in the industrialized countries. Integration of Africa into the world capitalist system works against her development even in the Post World War II era (Lipset S. M., 1959). This is because it promotes an unfair relationship that is sustained by the African bourgeoisies who are the proxies of the global financiers that rely on these oppressive behaviors for their survival. They do so use the ideas such as the unholy trinity principles where policymakers of a country pursue only two out of these three (1) the free movement of capital, (2) an independent monetary policy, and a (3) fixed or pegged exchange rate policy directions, yet development requires all three (Chagn, 2002).. These leads to un-freedom that must be combatted to liberate Africa and ready it for take-off.

Reaction to Dependency Theory

The main concern is why Africa has to keep relying on aid, ideas, and influence from other quarters instead of coming up with unique globally competitive solutions. There are three competing arguments in attempting to answer this question. First, Jeffery Sachs, argues that as part of doing away with aid, the focus should be on capital (human, business, infrastructure, natural, public institution, and knowledge capital) (Sachs, 2015). He suggests that there is clear need to fix the plumbing of international development assistance in order to be effective in the well governing countries. He concedes that aid has produced more debt, corruption, poor governance and has not worked. He concludes that there is no magic bullet since all the previous attempts to use aid as a development vehicle has not worked (Sachs, 2015).

Second, Dambisa Moyo argues that aid has not worked in Africa and is indeed a silent killer for growth (Moyo, 2010). She suggests the Marshall plan worked well in rebuilding Europe as opposed to the building from scratch that is needed in Africa. She argues that since 1940 approximately 1 trillion dollars has been transferred from rich countries to Africa which is nearly USD1000 for every man woman and child in the planet today (Moyo, 2010). She attacks the international development agencies by suggesting that the conditions for the aid do not necessarily produce better economic growth. For instance, the

Brentwood institutions insist on democracy in Africa has not produced better governance structure but created a bureaucracy that is used as a pong for the western elitist. Aid therefore achieves negative development.

Third, William Easterly, argues that Aid cannot achieve the end of poverty and it is only homegrown development based on dynamism of individual firms in free markets can do that (Easterly, 2006). He suggests that aid agencies should allow the staff that work on certain programs to determine what works since they have a better view of what is on the ground that a generalized bureaucratic perspective that these agencies adopt. In other words, he suggests that solution to the problem of aid should come from those who are either on the ground or those in touch with those on the ground.

Fourth, Paul Collier argues that aid contributes to the challenges that bedevil the bottom billion such that to an extent aid does make the conflict trap worse (Collier, 2007). Aid has a direct correlation with several aspects such as natural resource trap, landlocked countries, and it is an incentive to bad governance. Aid is both a contributor to conflict and development because for instance aid significantly reduced capital flight (Collier, 2007).

c) Influence of Actors to Approaches

With the foregoing literature, this paper argues that to unshackle Africa from the growth lull, the actors must be brought on board so that their ideology is sharpened. There are some challenges that will emerge in attempting to do so. First, the actors in international development keep shifting the goal post on what development should look like. Secondly the international development actors often called choice architects are ideally driven by natural laws to consider assisting the plight of those who cannot access basic needs. However, these architects are not very innocent since they can manufacture or invent crisis for sustain their continued existence in poverty-stricken areas (Klein, 2007). Also, (Moyo, 2010) has argued against over-reliance on aid in Africa. Third, one cannot easily confine international development to a definite timetable or singular framework. It is an evolving concept with different strands and meaning. Evolution of international development is therefore a continuous matter that should be studied in the lenses of time, space, ideas, and human agency among others using the several approaches. Here this paper

suggests that there is a need to have a clear approach that would be used in its uniqueness to Africa. The marked based approach is highly westernized and influenced by the modernization and neoliberal thinking. It operates in the framework that supports global trade and industrialization without placing the individual at the center of the discourse. The approach that this paper advocates for is the rights-based approach which places the human person as the ontological unit of analysis. In so doing the discourse becomes how to better the human being and as a consequence development emerges.

Perspectives on the Past, Present and Peace

Scholars such as (Tandon, 2016) (Mazrui, 2006) began the debate that suggest that one should not focus on the economic argument as the only discourse on international development. This part of the paper considers the appropriate responses to the growth lull in Africa. Perspective is everything without it no one would offer any solution to the world's problems. Here the paper suggests three perspectives that are critical in unshackling Africa from the growth lull. First, the perspective of the past in terms of history has been one that makes Africans to be in bondage. There is a perspective that views the historical injustice brought about by slavery, colonialism, and post colonialism as being fatal flaws toward Africa's development (Munene, *Historical Reflections on Kenya : Intellectual Adventurism, Politics and International Relations* , 2012). Here it is critical to distinguish between under-development and un-development. In the context of Africa, the former applies while for Europe the latter applies. Second, the perspective about the present is also critical to decisions made now that have an impact on the future. Here it is proposed that democracy does not precede development in fact it is the converse. In other words, Africa will only develop when overemphasis on democracy is toned down slightly. The argument is not to chock democracy completely but reduce the hyperbolic significance placed on it in Africa. Third, the premise of peace in Africa is always mired the epistemological disputations on how to critically define peace. Peace is a purely subjective term and as such the African thinking should define its own framework of peace. The argument made here is that the cost of development in Africa must always consider that peace precedes development.

Historical Roots of Development in Africa

First, the main unfreedom that must be combatted is the perspective with which Africa looks at its history. Although African historians do not provide

a direct answer to this question, Gaddis offers images that demonstrate that the person telling history is influenced by his context, structures, and process (Gaddis, 2002). He argues that if time and space would provide the field in which history happens, then context, structure and process would provide the mechanism. He argues that those telling history such as (Carr, 1961) avoid some details with a view to 'sell' a certain narrative to the audience. An illustration is made where Carr admitted privately that he omitted and bypassed the horrors, persecution and brutality in narrating history (Gaddis, 2002). The utilitarian approach of history is not a useful tool to telling the whole story of Africa. (Aseka, 1993) argues that the whole story of Africa's underdevelopment in the context of environmental degradation has not been properly explored historically. The suggestion here is that in the face of the increased underdevelopment and the historical dimensions of environmental degradation the question of imperialist misuse and technological abuse of the environment occupies a significant amount of influence in the politics of policy formulation.

Romanticizing Colonialism

There is a clear need to liberate Africans from the shackles of colonialism in its various facets. The regular issue that is missed in the quest for this liberty is understanding the right perspective to consider colonialism. Colonialism and all its ills have been documented with suggestions of the misery that was visited upon Africans. For instance, the Mau-Mau struggle is a proper illustration of the true struggle that befell Africans and it shows that indeed crimes were committed in the quest for domination (Anderson, 2005).

Theoretical foundations of significant historic polemics require regular scrutiny, especially if they have been operating beyond one generation. But the wider issues that ought to summon wide attention is the problem of the long-run economic under-development of Africa by considering a set of the broader international context, one that encompasses European imperialism in the late nineteenth century (Hopkins A. G., 1995). Although this argument is very compelling, it must be combatted since it seems to suggest that Africans have to be treated as a special category due to the historical injustices visited on them by the West through slavery, colonialism and systemic discrimination. These response presents two attitudes; on the one hand some would argue that Africa should not be given an olive branch and compensated

for the atrocities the other argument is that the atrocities occasioned by colonialism produced under development.

This second argument creates an impression that the reason for Africa's underdevelopment is because of colonialism and Africans have nothing to do with the current growth lull. This has caused unfreedoms from the past and it must be combatted. (Ekanem, 2006) argues that the documentation of the historical development of the world, Africa has been tacitly ignored. He suggests that majority of Western historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and scholars, Africa has no history, no philosophy and as such, the Africans do not possess the cognitive power to engage in the rigorous exercise of philosophizing. This is one of the main untruths that must be combatted because it is convoluted by some westernized African scholars, who have relegated Africa to the backbench of world development and history. Here the argument is that if one is bothered enough to look keenly at the history of world development will see Africa as the cradle of world civilization and development. This becomes more conspicuous and introductory when we view development, not only from the traditional theoretical agenda of economics, but from the standpoint of multi-dimensional concept. In all the facets of development, Africans have made tremendous contributions. Africans, through their philosophical approaches to culture, environment and nature have helped to add significance to alterations, progress and advances of African societies and the world at large (Ekanem, 2006).

But the wider issues that ought to command wide attention go to the heart of the problem of the long-run economic underdevelopment of Africa. These includes broader, international context, that encompasses European imperialism in the late nineteenth century (Rempel, 2008). (Odhiambo, 2003) argues that development perspective that is informed by the realities of Africa today are essential to the views of current institutional framework of global challenges. The views of African human agency and philosophers on development underscore the need to go back to construction on the ethnic origins of African civilization as a way forward.

Politics, Democracy and Development

The second unfreedom that must be addressed is the thinking that democracy without doubt produces development. The question is whether states are

developed because they are democratic or whether states are democratic because they are developed? There are at least three possible responses in an attempt to resolve this issue. First states are not democratic because they are developed. Second, modernization theory anticipates democracy as its byproduct but does not sufficiently consider the historical terrain of underdeveloped countries. And third, while it is true that dependency theory responds to underdeveloped countries realities, it also fails to unshackle the global South from chains of poverty. These responses can be addressed as follows; First, States are democratic because they are developed. For instance, America endured rule by one in order to arrive at the idea of rule by many. At the time of rule by one, protectionist policies were used to ensure internal growth and global domination is achieved. However, while adopting the definition of development as freedom as suggested by (Sen, 2000), it is clear that to arrive at the status of development states must undergo certain processes before they become free. It has been argued and correctly in my view that there are stages (beginning traditional society, precondition for take-off, take-off, dive to maturity and age of high consumption) that states have to go through in their journey toward development (Rustow, 2014).

The journey to democracy that produces development is not always smooth or straightforward but often times odious with push and pull which have occasioned the growth lull in Africa. It contains several variables and dynamics such as culture, politics, and history among others that must be accounted for in determining why states fail to develop or remain underdeveloped. On the one hand (Daron Acemoglu, 2012) argues that cultural differences do not matter in the process of development since states like China, North and South Korea and East Asia generally developed in spite of the cultural constraints. On the other hand, it is my contention that States in Africa were modelled for extraction by the Colonialist since the Berlin conference in 1884. For instance, the rich Democratic Republic of Congo is always exploited by choice architects who seek to benefit from its resources to the detriment of her development. This argument is supported by (Rodney, 1972) (Chagn, 2002) who argue that one must take account of the history of a state before passing a verdict as to why it is or remains underdeveloped.

This paper suggests that when states become developed democracy is a byproduct. The other challenge with these arguments is that democracy is a flawed concept borrowed from the west and may not be effective in Africa. It

contains certain milestones that are not reachable in the context of Africa. This expounded more by (Schumpeter, 1942), (Hantington, 1996), (Moore, 1958), and democracy calls for reimagination especially on the questions of who represents which part of the Africans. The more realistic approach is having a good balance between social factors and political/democratic factors. To confront empire as suggested by (Roy, 2008), there is a serious need to ensure balance between the competing political and economic expectations. (Tandon, 2016) presents a creative formula that suggests Social factors (free from exploitation) + Democratic factors (participation of the people) – imperial factor (liberation from imperial colonial domination) = development. He argues that there is a need to break away from the structures of domination structures by resistance and not revolution and going back to barter trades and move away from economic policies. He suggests that this path is what Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) went through in order to develop. This thinking finds support from (Ting, 2016). In sum, here the suggestion is that it is easier to get development first before focusing on democracy. Politics should be conjured toward development and then democracy becomes a byproduct.

Peace and Development

The claim made in this part is that when focus is placed on development and not democracy then we certainly will have peace. First, peace will become a product of the right perspective to development. Here we adopt the definition of peace given by Macharia Munene as being generic and a product of interaction within social structures (Munene, *Generic Peace and The peace: A discourse*, 2009). The greatest injustice is to insist on democracy at the expense of peace and development. It is obvious that there can be no development when the guns, boots and armies are in use in any State. Immanuel Kant argued that there will come a time when standing armies are abolished, national debt shall not be contracted without external friction, and there will be no interference with other governments. (Kant, 1903). This will be brought about by focusing on development and not merely democracy. The reality is that it is nearly impossible to develop in an atmosphere where conflict is ripe. Here we adopt the definition of conflict by (Esteban, 2017) which includes demonstration, strikes, coups, detaining of political prisoners and growth of economic crimes. The interpretation of conflict here is that it comes at an opportunity cost where poor countries do not engage true efforts for development and weak institution

hamper development. In the context of peace, there are certain causes of conflict including conflict trap, natural resource curse, landlocked neighbors, and bad governments.

Second, democracy is overrated. Countries such as United States were not constructed by placing democracy as the most important pillar (Chagn, 2002). Instead, the idea was to ensure that development is achieved first before democracy. Indeed, democracy does not always produce what it promises (Ngugi, 2005). Democracy promises equality and equity but, in the end, produces inequality and injustice due to the majoritarian ideal that it espouses (Dahl A. R., 1998). The trouble of placing democracy at the fore front of State building is that it has no guarantee of fulfilling developmental ideals of any society. Democratization is a process that is hard to achieve and greatly value laden and context specific containing many variables (Hantington, 1996) (Lipset S. M., 1959) (Moore, 1958) (Schumpeter, 1942) (Lipset S. M., 1960) (Dahl A. R., 1998) (Dahl R. A., 1964) (Lipset S. M., 1959). What is however clear is that it does not follow a certain prescription in any given context. For avoidance of doubt, the argument here is not that democracy should be choked and ignored or taken to the back seat. This would be very unfortunate since it would entrench domination and dictatorship. However, Countries like Rwanda, Botswana, Singapore, Nordic countries cannot be credited as being the best democracies, yet they have managed to develop in terms of how they approach issue of the social welfare of their people and infrastructure. Therefore, the argument made here is that peace should be viewed as the precursor to development and the producer of democracy.

Conclusion

From the foregoing it is then clear why there are several approaches to international development that have not worked in unshackling Africans from the unfreedoms. Some approaches place emphasis on the economic aspects of a nation which is commonly referred to as Market Based Approach (MBA). This approach insists that a working society capable of producing goods for internal consumption and external markets can be classified as developed. This brings to mind the distinction between States that focus on production for export and those that focus on production for consumption. The latter is likely to be considered developed. This concentration by States produces different types of development. What we have seen is that this approach may not work

on itself since it does not guarantee freedom from historical injustice. Therefore, it would mean that adopting this approach will not unshackle the past. Instead, the suggestion made is that to unshackle Africa some introspection should be had by avoiding the romanticization of the historical injustices occasioned by slavery, colonialism, and post colonialism. The focus should then be on considering valuable lessons on how to chart a path that produces unique history. This paper wholly adopts (Roy, 2008) suggestions on confronting empire.

What this paper has suggested is that when comparing the historical posture of other continents, it is apparent that development has not followed the Rostow's suggestion on stages of growth. The idea therefore is not to be bogged down by history that leads to a focus on democracy. The paper posits that democracy is overrated since it cannot guarantee that development will be achieved if all the democratic ideals are adhered to strictly. The paper posits that development should be the primary focus by putting a measured or tampered emphasis on development. The imperialist would have that Africa remains chained to the historical injustices and narrow their focus on democracy as the most important ideal and producer of development. This must be combatted by rejecting such narrative and insisting on a framework that supports the primacy of development approaches that are unique to each situation. The focus should be on home grown solutions to the unique challenges of each Country in Africa. The focus should be on an all-rounded approach to development. What however remains abundantly clear is that we must unshackle Africa from the unfreedoms that have been identified as the past, present and peace.

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