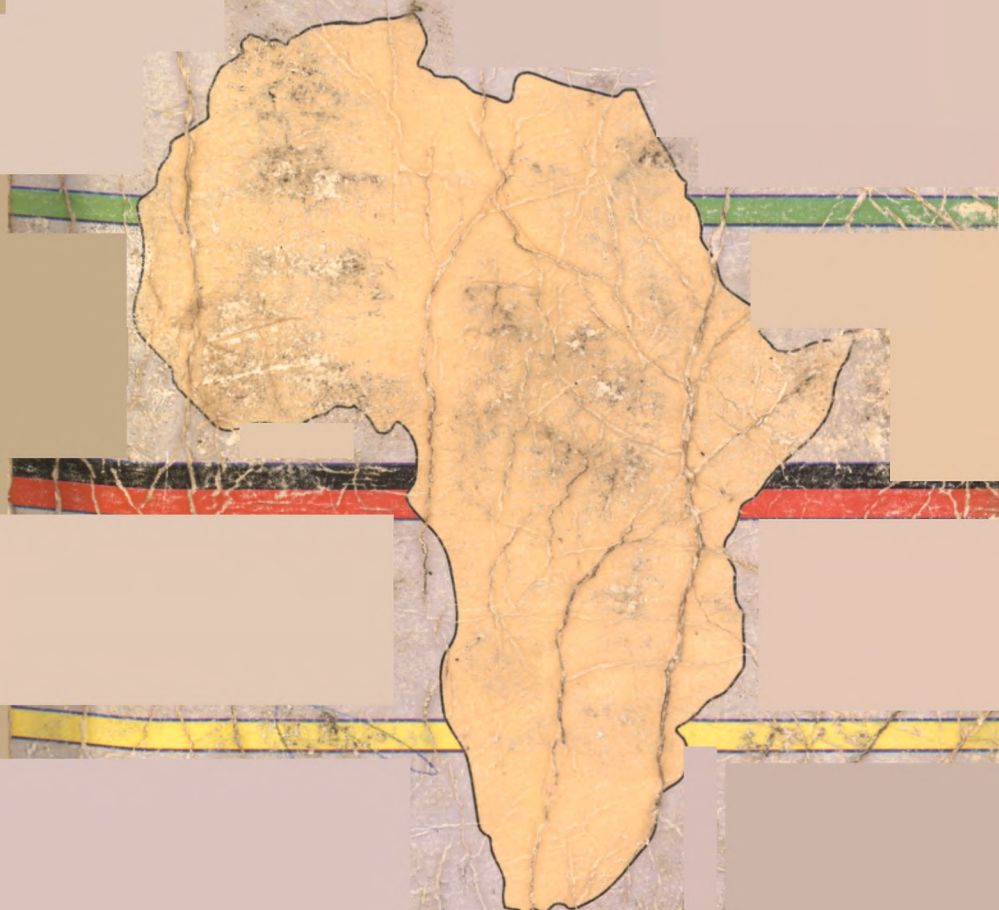


The Human Factor Approach to Development in Africa



Edited by

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and

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Human Factor Decay and Underdevelopment in Africa

E.E. Uwakwe

Introduction

Underdevelopment in most countries of Africa is strongly supported by empirical evidence. Industrial production in Africa for instance, fails to operate at maximum capacity. Agriculture, the economic mainstay of most African countries, is gradually declining from its centre stage. Food is in short supply and is now imported by many African countries to feed their people. Food debts in Africa now constitute a significant proportion of the already huge national debts to foreign creditors. Still, the combined volume of both imported and local food does not seem to be enough to sustain the increasing population of the African continent. Cases of malnutrition are severe. Life expectancy is low. Rates of unemployment are high. Inflationary trends are in excess. Investment rates are down and economies across Africa are under severe stress.

The World Development Report (1990), has classified Nigeria, Cameroon and the Congo People's Republic as 'middle income exporters'. This classification suggests that these economies are relatively sustainable and comfortable. They are 'middle', not low, although, the income per capita of each of these countries is about the lowest in the world. Cameroon's per capita income was given as US\$1 010, Congo's as US\$910 and Nigeria's as US\$890. The life expectancy of Nigeria is 51; Cameroon 56 and Congo 53. The food production per capita index of these 'Middle Income Exporters' are far below the world average. Nigeria's was 92, Cameroon's 102 and Congo's 98. These low indexes imply that African economies generally have to rely on food imports to feed their growing populations and replenish their food granaries depleted by crop failure due to frequent, severe droughts.

Indeed, the International Food Policy Research Institute in Washington has projected ever increasing volumes of staple food imports into Africa in the future in order to meet basic calorie and protein requirements of African nations. Food imports for Nigeria for 1991 were estimated at 21 million metric tons. The consequences of these food deficits in Africa are that the balance of payments of these countries also decrease. The World Integrated Model (WIM) has projected cumulative balance of \$210 billion in food trade deficit for Nigeria by the year 2001 (Hughes, 1982:188). At the same time, the external public debt for Nigeria continues to increase. Nigeria's 1985 outstanding medium and long-term external public debt was US\$115 billion (excluding converted trade arrears of US\$1,7 billion), which amounted to 25 per cent of the GDP. Most of the debts for Nigeria have had to be rescheduled because of the unreliable world oil market outlook and Nigeria's unfavourable repayment profile.

African economies are indeed, generally underdeveloped and distressed. The continent's land mass is twice traversed by large unproductive deserts, the Sahara and the Kgalagadi. The continent's equatorial and tropical positioning sometimes produce geographical conditions that frequently militate against optimum development of Africa's resources and capabilities. The slave trade and colonialism have also deterred the development of the African HF and the productive capacity of the African people themselves. Multinational corporations continue to negate attempts by African people to be in full control of their own development. However, the continent still has great potential to sustain its own development. For example, Nigeria's 923 773 square kilometre land mass and soil types are suitable for the production of primary crops such as cocoa, palm produce, cotton, groundnuts and rubber. But these are usually exported in order to reduce Nigeria's huge import bill. In spite of the weakened oil markets, high production continues to raise significant export revenue for Nigeria. Tin, coal, diamonds, silver, lead, and columbite are additional revenue resources for Nigeria.

Nigeria is also blessed with one of the world's largest populations of over 100 million. By the World Population Profile estimates, out of a then population of 84 732 000 in 1980, 48 933 000 (48 per cent) were below the age of 20 years (World Population Profile, 1984: 34). This is by far a much relatively larger reservoir of potential productive labour than that of the United Kingdom which was 28 per cent and of the United States which was 32 per cent. The remaining 52 per cent constitutes an already large active labour force. This force excludes retired persons, post secondary students, and non-participating members of the female population. This means that the 52 per cent active labour translates to a productive population of about 60 million people. This figure is larger than the United Kingdom's 56 million people and that of France which is 55,6 million. Nigeria's active and productive population is seven times that of Sweden which is 8,3 million.

In the face of such relatively rich natural and human endowments, therefore, the question to ask is: Why do most African countries remain underdeveloped? In addition, great amounts of expertise, technological aid and cash have been poured into various countries in Africa by industrialized countries. Different African countries periodically put into place development plans, strategies and policies aimed at national development. But no significant development seems to take place. It is important to refer to the role of structural variables to explain the 'social facts' related to underdevelopment in Africa.

The social environment in which the African HF finds itself invariably produces the mentality of underdevelopment on the personality of the African. An HF with the mentality of underdevelopment will consequently impact on his/her environment to reproduce the culture of underdevelopment and an underdeveloped economy. What is needed, therefore, to break this self-reproducing vicious cycle of the mentality of underdevelopment in our people, is an education which will instill in our people what Adjoboloso calls:

the spectrum of personality characteristics and other dimensions of human performance that enable social, economic, and political institutions to function and remain functional over time (1995:4).

Evidently, the state of the HF in Africa at present is unwholesome and decayed. The observation of colonial governments in Africa that the 'African worker' exhibited an 'absence of conscious need and was content with little' (Tali, 1956:35) may be applied to Africa's contemporary and post-colonial HF, so is the African Labour Survey of 1958 which observed that:

it is a fact that by tradition and background, the African is singularly ill-adapted for assimilation as an effective element in wage economy on modern pattern... His reactions differ widely from those of the European worker whose background and aims are different. It has also emerged that the African work performance is at present unsatisfactory in many respects by European standards; that in quantity and quality it is often inferior; that the African sometimes lacks pride in his work; that he is often unstable and restless and prone to absent himself apparently without valid reasons (1958: 169).

Observations in this quote are marred by a number of shortcomings. In the first instance, the traditional image of the African worker's personality is based on studies which were limited to the period before 1940 and confined to two regions — the then Union of South Africa and the then Central African Federation. Secondly, the observations are limited to forced labour on plantations and mines in those two countries. The conclusions about the 'African worker' are, therefore, overgeneralized. But thirdly and more importantly, these views of Africans in general are based on the preconceived European racist anthropological attitudes about the black race (Kilby, 1961:275). Yet, as an extrapolation for our purposes of understanding how colonialism and its social and economic institutions underdeveloped the African HF, and now, by inheriting the institutions which Europeans continue to control, independent African states also continue to perpetuate the re-production of a decayed African HF incapable of bringing about development. Peter Kilby arrived at the following conclusions in his study of Nigerian Ports Authority workers and those of one privately owned soap factory and a rubber-processing firm:

- a) They excel only in simple repetitive operations perhaps because of their natural dispositions towards rhythm.
- b) They perform badly in complex work that requires co-ordination.
- c) They perform badly in work that requires specific technical training.
- d) They are poor supervisors. This is partly explained by past patterns of forced dependence on the European and poor training (Kilby, 1961: 279-80).

The following problems in Kilby's conclusions need to be cleared first in order to understand correctly the actual limitations of the HF in Africa. The decadence of the African HF cannot be explained by reference to an innate tendency. Firstly such an approach is unscientific and blatantly racist. Secondly, it leads to the preconceived conclusion that Africans are by nature incapable of developing themselves and that they, therefore, need the help of the European to develop them. Such conclusions serve to perpetuate the continued domination, enslavement and exploitation of the African by the European.

To understand the limitations of the African HF which Kilby tries to explain, we need to remove the racist speculations in them and recast them more circumspectively as follows and say that:

- a) there is the tendency in Africa to target labour towards achieving immediate ends,
- b) division of labour tends to follow the paradigms of age and gender, was limited to the factors of age and sex,
- c) the organization of work also tends to respond to the rhythms of the seasons.
- d) Africans tend to stress the individual's sense of collective responsibility in carrying out their duties and improving their performance and efficiency, rather than depend on fear of the authority of their supervisors as Kilby tries to imply above.

The idea of work for individual reward introduced by the colonial types of business administration, therefore, clashed with African modes of economic production and perception of individual commitment to general material welfare of his/her society. The colonial economic mode was coercive while the African mode depended on self-commitment. It is, therefore, the alien mode of economic production that produced an unwholesome HF in Africa through its system of forced labour and individual, rather than collective advancement. This philosophy of individual advancement in its broadest sense, applies and contributes to the idea of conflict and competition for advancement between ethnic groups in African nation states, national conflicts between countries in African regional groupings and between regional groupings on the African continent as a whole. As a result, holistic development in Africa becomes impossible without an HF with a sense of collective responsibility and committed to the development of the African continent as a whole.

Ethnicity and HF decay

Ethnic groups are social formations distinguished by the communal character of their boundaries. The major communal factors which separate one ethnic group from another are usually language, culture and religion. In Africa, language is clearly the most significant HF. As social formations, however, ethnic groups are not necessarily homogenous entities, even linguistically and culturally. Minor linguistic and cultural differences do often exist within the same groups but these are superseded by the overall sense of common belonging, identity, oneness and separateness from other groupings.

The trait which predisposes members of a group to orient parochially to their in-group is called ethnocentrism. This is often the force of ethnic pride and, where conflict exists between groups in the same nation state, ethnic hatred. Wars of genocide between ethnic groups in Rwanda, Burundi, Ethiopia and Somalia are among the worst examples of HF decay contributing to the economic underdevelopment of the African continent (See Chapter Twenty in this volume).

Development requires a collective collaborative approach, not conflict, war and genocide. Co-operation is the basis upon which organizations such as the European

Union and the Organization of American States build their development thrust. On the other hand, ethnicity forges a subjective, inward-looking, parochial HF. It limits itself to the interests of the in-group. Its HF becomes domesticated and confined to the interests of the in-group. In-group and out-group boundaries emerge. One group separates from the other. Each becomes threatened and jealousy ensues. Social relations become strained. Nepotism in politics and ethnic discrimination in jobs, housing, educational institutions, marriages, business transactions and distribution of social welfare services become rife. Intellectuals, political leaders and businessmen and the whole social moral fabric become corrupt and decayed. Merit is sacrificed on the altar of chauvinism, competition and fear of being confined to the bottom of the national inter-ethnic economic ladder.

We shall refer to Nigeria to illustrate. The Nigerian population consists of a large number of ethnic groups each ranging in size from a few thousand to millions. As a result, there are over two hundred and fifty languages. The Hausas, Igbos and the Yorubas, are considered the major groups. The minority groups include the Edo, Nupe, Ijaw and Tiv. The three major groups mentioned, however, easily dominate Nigeria politically, culturally, socially and economically. Conflict for power has always revolved around these three groups. Their squabbles and competition for control of the country's resources are perennial. The Hausa Fulani ethnic group that has the stranglehold on the political leadership the country and is reluctant to relinquish it to any other ethnic group. The Yorubas control Nigeria's industries most of which are in the Ibadan-Lagos Yoruba zone. Nearly 75 per cent of Nigeria's total circulation of the naira is confined to this zone. Yorubas also share the control of bureaucratic power with the Igbos who were in control of the sphere before the civil war in the late 1960s.

The exclusive sharing of national power and economic resources between the three major groups has invoked the discontent of Nigeria's minority groups. In spite of efforts by the government, controlled by the three major groups, to give individuals from the minority groups important positions in the civil service, police and judiciary, there is still general discontent from the rest of the minority groups. The discontent often translates into open political activism. The yearning for the creation of more states is one example. The states were meant to safeguard the political, economic and cultural interests of the minority groups who would be in control of these states. The delay in the creation of new states sparked country-wide riots by the minority groups of Nigeria. The Tiv riots of 1964 were one of the most notable examples of ethnic unrest in Nigeria.

In an effort to contain these ethnic conflicts, the Nigerian government has formulated, the principle of 'federal character.' By this principle, school admissions, entry into the civil service ministerial and ambassadorial posts and selections for government scholarships, for instance, must all reflect the ethnic character of the federation. This means, in practice, that merit and proficiency of the Nigerian HF which are crucial to development are relegated to second place. Ethnic strife in Nigeria only serves as an example of ethnic conflicts throughout the African continent which have led to HF decay and underdevelopment of African societies.

Socialization and HF decay

In a similar role as ethnicity, socialization contributes to produce in Africans an HF component that throttles national development. Socialization is the sum total of the processes through which individuals acquire the characteristics which give the groups to which they belong their identities and social roles. Examples of these characteristics are the history, culture, beliefs and values of their social groups. Individuals internalize these and make them become part of their psyche as individuals and also as a group.

There is formal socialization and informal socialization. Formal socialization is direct, structured and institutionalized as in schools, colleges, universities, the military and various other kinds of organizations. Informal socialization is indirect, and unstructured, as what happens in the process of growing up and acquiring the values and characteristics of one's family. Both processes of socialization influence the individual and produce in him/her the spectrum of characteristics the sum total of which we call the HF.

In contemporary Africa, the values that contribute to the confusion of the African human factor, especially in the youths, are disseminated by mass media organizations such radio and television which are dominated by the west and its cultural image. This diversity of cultures in the minds of our youths gives rise to a corresponding diversity of mutually conflicting cultures in the young generation. The result is the loss of common purpose and collective vision for Africa. A consumerist culture and mentality whose focus is enjoyment of the present and gratification of basic animal instincts has, therefore, become the ruling philosophy of our African youths and the African leadership who allow themselves to be used by the west to perpetuate such decadent values in African institutions.

For instance, most educational systems in Africa are still colonial and train African youths out of their social values and culture. From kindergarten to elementary school and university, Africans are trained to prefer foreign culture. They are taught basic knowledge and skills which only enable them to get employment and work for Europeans for a wage. Such training cannot be said to impart in our youth the essential HF characteristics that enable them to be creative, innovative and engage in Africa's self development. An HF which depends mainly on wage labour for individual survival is hardly the kind of HF Africa can rely upon for the development of the continent as a whole and the black race as one united entity. Paulo Freire has described such kind of training as a 'banking' system in which the only scope allowed the students is the process of merely receiving, filing and reproducing information deposited in them by their omniscient teachers. In this type of oppressive pedagogy, the recipients are emasculated and domesticated. They are not allowed to engage in critical thinking and creative self-development.

Normative conflict and HF decay

Traditional forms of social organization still exist in Africa. They enjoy strong roots in spite of industrialization and urbanization. African culture is collectivist while western culture is individualistic. African culture emphasises group survival. European culture concerns itself with the survival of the fittest. African culture is altruistic

while western culture is egoistic. Africans are norm-conforming while Europeans are non-conforming.

There is, therefore, the situation of normative conflict between the two cultures in Africa today. European culture gains currency through schools and western-style institutions, while African culture suffers neglect and serious attenuation. The supportive functions of the African family are similarly being eroded. Most important, the sense of group survival and a collective welfare is constantly being displaced by western values of individual freedom, individual achievement, individual success, individual happiness and individual recognition.

The resultant paradox is that individual ambitions and aspirations grow at the expense of collective development. At the same time, opportunities to realize those individual ambitions constantly diminish because there is no HF that is in a position to create them for others and the nation as a whole. In a system where there is ethnic conflict and power struggle, as in Nigeria, the few existing opportunities are blocked and made unavailable to other ethnic groups that happen to be in the minority. (Merton, 1972: 99-105).

The dissonance between individual aspirations and institutionally available and controlled opportunities leads the frustrated individuals to turn to armed robbery, fraud and corruption. Set goals are impossible to attain because the means are blocked (Merton, 1972: 99-105).

Crime and other forms of deviance which characterizes Africa's HF today are products of such normative conflicts between African and European cultures and gaps between aspirations aroused by European cultures and the impossibility of their attainment in actual reality.

Conclusion

The importance of socio-structural variables in understanding ethnic strife and HF decay in Africa is worth stressing. These, however, should be complemented by taking into account the role played by the various institutions which socialize African people and instil in them the capacity to be self-reliant and innovative in order to bring about Africa's own development and ameliorate the decay of her own HF.

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