

The Human Factor Approach to Development in Africa



Edited by

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The Human Factor Perspective and Development Education

Benjamin Ofori-Amoah

Introduction

The relatively slow pace of the economic development process in Africa, compared to other developing regions of the world has generated immense interest in diagnosing causes from different perspectives and ideological studies. These could be classified into three broad groups, namely the conservative, liberal and radical (Ofori-Amoah, 1995).

A new perspective has emerged in the past few years. This is called the Human Factor (HF) perspective (see Adjibolosoo 1993, 1994, 1995a, 1995b 1996). The HF perspective argues that the primary reason for the failure of economic development processes in most African countries is lack of appropriate HF, where HF is defined as the 'spectrum of personality characteristics and other human dimensions which allow political, economic and social institutions to function effectively and continue to do so over time' (Adjibolosoo 1994:26).

The HF perspective asserts that no economic development programme can succeed in Africa unless Africa gives top priority to the development of the appropriate HF. Typical of development perspectives before it, the HF perspective claims to have the right diagnosis of the problems and their solutions.

This is not the first time a new development theory, concept or perspective has presented itself as the solution to Africa's problems of economic development. During post-independence years, modernization theories of a liberal nature made similar claims, but the results were far from satisfactory. Again in the 1970s, the dependency school of thought promised a new and radical path towards development. It too, proved disappointing. A recent liberal comeback staged through the World Bank's structural adjustment programmes has similarly failed. Given the poor historical record of the failure of new development theories in Africa, it is important to subject this new perspective to critical examination in order to see the validity of its claims.

Adjibolosoo (1995b), argues that lack of appropriate HF in Africa is manifested by the absence of accountability and responsibility in the African leadership which, in turn, is largely due to ignorance and/or apathy on the part of the general populace. The development of appropriate HF in our people will go a long way in removing these obstacles. To achieve this, a new kind of development education is needed. This education must go beyond teaching people to merely read and write in European or other languages such as English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Arabic, or equipping the people with tools that make them dependent on government institutions or society. What is required is an education that instills in the individuals a sense of self-

development, responsibility, accountability and dedication to building their community and nation.

The lack of these qualities of accountability and responsibility in individuals accounts for their lack of commitment to the task of development in Africa.

Assessing the validity of new development perspectives: A framework for analysis

Assessing the validity of a new development perspective is a complex task that can be done in different ways. The simplest and, perhaps, easiest is the comparative test. In this test, the central assertions of a new development perspective are examined both theoretically and empirically, against those of existing or previous perspectives within the context of the problem being addressed. If the new perspective turns out to be the most convincing of all the competing perspectives, it will be then reasonable to accept it as the most valid.

This method has some merits in that the examiner can compare two or more different perspectives and clearly point to the one that works better. However, it does not offer sufficient proof that the new development perspective is necessarily going to accomplish what it claims. For one thing, new development ideas have the tendency to thrive on the weaknesses or failures of their predecessors. Consequently, the theoretical arguments they put forward to justify their own acceptance can be a far cry from what they are capable of delivering. It is important, therefore, to go beyond the comparative test to a diagnostic one.

In this regard, all new development perspectives can either be true or false starts. A true start should lead to a true finish, which is the achievement and reward of development goals, effort spent and resources utilized. A false development start will lead to an incomplete finish without achieving the projected development goals. It amounts to a waste of effort and resources, frustration and disappointment. A framework for assessing a new development perspective must therefore be able to determine whether the perspective bears false start symptoms or not.

A new development perspective is a false start; (1) if it is based on a false premise; (2) if it has doubtful applicability and, (3) if it has the saturation hypothesis syndrome. Ofori-Amoah (1996) writes:

To be successful, new development directions must have a true life premise or rationale. This premise provides the hope, motivation and conviction that direction will achieve something better than the previous one. It also makes the new direction a venture worth following. However, if the premise itself is in error, then all the hopes and expectations will not only enslave a people, but will also de-stabilize the very foundation of the existing development program.... Equally relevant is the question of feasibility or applicability. In order for new development directions to work, they must be amenable to practical translation and implementation in terms of the locale's economic, social, political, and technological contexts at both national and global levels.... In the final analysis, the problems of false premise and doubtful applicability are closely derived from the saturation hypothesis syndrome. The saturation hypothesis syndrome

is the syndrome that causes development researchers to conceive development problems of Africa in terms of what is currently considered to be most important development issues in developed countries.... The real impact of the saturation hypothesis syndrome then is that it causes development research to focus on problems which are relatively peripheral to what really needs to be addressed within the African context (Ofori-Amoah, 1996b: 3-4; 1995b: 33)

The validity of the HF perspective must be examined together with the comparative and diagnostic tests. To provide the necessary background for this, it is necessary to survey in broad outlines all the major economic development perspectives on Africa and what they see as the main causes and solutions to Africa's economic development problems.

Economic development perspectives on Africa

There are four main economic development perspectives on Africa. These are the conservative, the liberal, the radical and the HF perspectives. The conservative perspective is the oldest perspective on Africa's economic development problems and is sometimes referred to as the sociobiological. This perspective sees the stagnation of the economic development process in Africa as due to some form of racial inferiority of Africans. This inferiority diminishes the ability of Africans to take care of themselves (Davidson, 1982; Rushton, 1988a, 1988b; Herrnstein and Murray, 1994). The economic development problems of Africa are, according to the conservative perspective, a natural order of things. As a result, the conservative perspective has no other solution but to maintain the status quo of things and keep Africans as 'hewers of wood and carriers of water.' Indeed, such thinking has been used to justify the need to keep Africa and people of African descent underdeveloped, and to use them as European slaves like in the former apartheid South Africa.

The liberal perspective on the causes of Africa's development problems, focuses on the existence of certain factors or structures that are considered to be detrimental to African development and lack of essential factors that are needed to enhance development (Ofori-Amoah, 1995a). These factors include lack of entrepreneurial skills, inadequate financial resources, market distortions, rapid population growth, political instability, poverty, low per capita income, low productivity, failure to implement development plans, existence of archaic social structures, poor land tenure system and inadequate transportation systems (World Bank, 1981; 1983; 1984). As a result, liberals emphasize the replacement or modernization of existing internal structures as a prerequisite for economic development. This involves various packages of development programmes such as modernization, indigenization, structural adjustment, and trade liberalization and establishment of institutional structures associated with such programmes.

Radicals attribute the causes of Africa's development problems to contradictions within the underlying structures of the global economy. In its main form, these contradictions reveal themselves in the articulation of African economies into the world capitalist system (Amin, 1972, 1974, 1976, 1977; Emmanuel, 1972; Wallerstein, 1974; Rodney, 1974; Onimode, 1988). This system is characterized by a core which grows and develops at the expense of the resources and development of the periphery. This

unequal and dependency relationship originated from colonialism but is currently being perpetuated by such institutions as international trade, multinational corporations, and foreign aid. On a more local scale, this form of dialectical and historical analysis has been employed by some feminist scholars who argue that Africa's development problems are due to the neglect of women in the development process (Boserup, 1970; Curtrufelli, 1983; Lewis, 1988; Henn, 1983). For radicals then, the only way out is to break the ties with the source of exploitation through a radical revolution.

The HF perspective on the causes and solutions of Africa's development problems begins with a definition of the HF. The leading exponent of this perspective, Adjibolosoo (*op.cit.*, 1994), defines the HF as 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.' This perspective sees people as the most important resource of any country or society. However, without appropriate HF characteristics, such resources cannot achieve any meaningful development. It acknowledges the role of natural resources, capital, technology and institutions as important to the development process. However, these by themselves cannot bring about change without people with the appropriate personality characteristics to operate them (Adjibolosoo, 1995b; Ofori-Amoah, 1996a). The HF in this case is more than just human capital obtained through schooling. It includes spiritual, moral and aesthetic capital, as well as human abilities and potential (Adjibolosoo, 1995b). Economic development in Africa will falter unless topmost priority is given to the development of the appropriate HF. The validity of these claims of the HF perspective needs to be assessed in relation to the other perspectives.

Assessing the validity of the HF perspective: The comparative test

As already pointed out, the conservative perspective on Africa's economic development is based on myopic Eurocentric views. This was meant to condemn Africa into a perpetual state of underdevelopment and to justify the continuous exploitation of her people for the benefit of Europe. The result is that the conservative perspective is not borne by historical evidence and is, therefore, false, erroneous and misleading.

Both liberals and radicals have criticized each other on what each side misses out. The liberal perspective has been criticized for ignoring external sources of the problem and assuming that the problem is wholly internally generated. Radicals have been criticized for ignoring internal sources of the problem and singling out external sources. While each side claims to be right, both seem to have missed the most important point. Liberals assume that the right kind of people needed to operate within the context of the structures and institutions they recommend are already there. However, as has been pointed out over and over again, institutions do not run themselves. It is people who make them function (Adjibolosoo, 1995; Ofori-Amoah, 1996b). The problem, therefore, does not lie in lack of structures, facilities and institutions but, rather, on whether the right kind of attitude, dedication, responsibility and accountability needed to make existing institutions operable are in place. In general, there are two main explanations why institutional structures and arrangements will fail to perform their functions. It is

either the resources needed to operate them are not available or the institutions are themselves faulty. Without looking at both alternatives, liberals jump to the conclusion that if the institutions are not working, they are faulty.

There is much sympathy from radicals for what liberals say. But as the Akan adage says, 'your enemy will never get you unless he gets a collaborator from your own house.' The implications here are that the articulation of the economy into the world capitalist system occurred because Africans were lured into accepting the deceptive designs of European colonialism. Moreover, the continued exploitation of Africa through multinational activities and trade and other contractual agreements, continue because some African negotiators, instead of looking after the well being of Africa's own national interests, prefer taking 10 per cent of the deal into their personal accounts. The problem is, therefore, not merely the exploitative practices of whites but the African people themselves, who allow to be used as channels of exploitation.

What about severing the links? There are two reasons why that will not work. First, the global economy is such that no country can develop in isolation. Besides, Asian countries have shown us that there is always room to manoeuvre if a nation has the right people in place at the right time (Ofori-Amoah, 1996a). One then may ask: To what extent is this theoretical argument justified in reality? We refer to the history of Africa's development efforts to answer this question.

At the empirical level, the conservative perspective does not stand the test of history. Voluminous evidence shows that Africa preceded present day western countries in development. Besides, the use of the conservative perspective to chart a development course for Africa failed. Thus, the success of Africans in performing this task proves the conservative view false. From nothing, Africa became the leading producer of cocoa, palm products and a whole range of various minerals. The problem is that after independence from colonialism, Africa was lured into reacting to the conservative perspective, to prove that it could take care of itself and embraced the liberal perspective. Modernization of traditional institutions became the development cry as new structures were erected to replace old ones. Africa began to build economies based on European-style industrialization in place of the former traditional economies seen as backward by European perspectives. Education programmes aimed at improving literacy flourished, but with little domestic and indigenous content. In the end, the modernization programme ended up conjuring up things that were of no use to Africa's needs. The rapid pace of these events and the relatively few results had, by the end of the 1960s, made the claims of the liberal perspective as panacea for African development, suspect (Ofori-Amoah, 1995a).

In the wake of confusion and disappointment with the modernization projects of liberals, the radical perspective seized the opportunity to come in and advance its own agenda of theories of dependency and socialist revolutions. Popularizing the idea that African societies were essentially socialistic, student leaders, young military officers and government officials convinced Africa that it would find solutions to its economic development problems in socialism. Young army officers became Marxists overnight and one by one, weak African governments were replaced by socialist revolutionary councils. As the struggle for turf between the conservative-liberal coalition with its

external supporters and the radicals with their own supporters continued, Africa became caught up in the policies of Cold War by the world's superpowers. African countries that had jumped on the bandwagon of socialist revolutionary development, suddenly saw the Soviet model come crashing down in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Ofori-Amoah, 1995a).

The foregoing shows that all three perspectives have been experimented with in Africa and failed. This alone does not necessarily justify the HF perspective as the true and valid development alternative for Africa's development. To establish the HF perspective as the true development start, we have to examine it in the light of the three questions outlined for the diagnostic test. Does the HF perspective rest on a false premise? Does the HF perspective have a doubtful applicability? Does the HF perspective have the saturation hypothesis syndrome?

The diagnostic test

As already stated, the basic premise of the HF perspective is that development begins and ends with people. More importantly, it is not the presence or quantity of people that matters but the quality they possess in terms of their personality characteristics essential for making their respective societies function and remain functional over time. This seems to be a valid and solid foundation on which to base Africa's development. Indeed, so crucial are people in the economic development process that perspectives that do not have direct focus on people and their role in the development process are bound to fail. Such was the case with the three perspectives that came before the HF. They failed because they had assumed that the appropriate human resources needed to carry out their programmes were already in place. They did not bring in the HF into the equation. For that reason, they faltered. The implications of this are that by emphasizing HF perspective it authenticates itself.

Does the HF perspective have a doubtful applicability? Doubts regarding applicability of a new development idea come from its incompatibility with financial, social, political and physical resources, as well as environment of country or region in which the perspective is to be implemented. For instance, the perspective may be expensive to implement. It may also involve some fundamental changes in the social structure that would be difficult to obtain or accept.

The HF perspective does not seem to have any of these obstacles. It recognizes development as a gradual process that can be undertaken within the context of the existing resources of a country. Convinced that institutions are inanimate, the HF perspective stays away from advocating for the establishment of new institutions, which in themselves imply more financial resources. It also stays away from programmes that involve high capital outlay such as massive industrial and agricultural projects typical of the western modernization programmes. It does not prescribe austerity and other measures that bring hardships to bear on the people as in the case of structural adjustment programmes and socialist revolutions advocated by the liberal and radical perspectives respectively. It does not call for the replacement of present political and social systems with new and radical ones. Neither does it talk about issues that are foreign to Africa.

equipping him/her with values that will enable them to make institutions and programmes work and perform effectively, and continue to do so. These values are rooted in traditional African systems and are, therefore, not alien.

As to the question of implementing this idea, the HF perspective seeks to use the existing institutional channels. It seeks to use both the existing leadership structures and formal and informal education systems, but with content that will impart the appropriate HF characteristics into the individual. These are ideals that should be welcome by any African country which seeks to improve the welfare of the African people as a whole.

This does not mean that there can be no obstacles in the implementation of the HF agenda. It means that it will not be as financially and socially incompatible as the modernization project or create such upheavals and uncertainties as the socialist revolution.

Does the HF perspective have the saturation hypothesis syndrome? As already stated, the saturation hypothesis syndrome is the tendency for development practitioners to conceive development problems of developing countries such as in Africa, and solutions to them in terms of what is currently considered to be the most important and pressing needs of developed countries. The root cause of this syndrome lies in the way development theories evolve. Thus, all development theories are evolved to primarily solve a particular problem in the society of origin. The fact that the theory or idea will be recommended or offered to other societies is all part of the grand plan to solve that problem. The end result of the saturation hypothesis syndrome, then, is to lure a people or a nation into focussing on issues that are peripheral to their well-being, instead of focussing on issues that are relevant and crucial to them at a particular point in time. By so doing, the saturation hypothesis syndrome has clear signs of a false development start. For the HF perspective to be free from the saturation hypothesis syndrome, it must grow out of Africa's economic development needs rather than outside interests. It must focus attention on relevant solutions to Africa's economic development impasse. It is necessary, therefore, to look at the roots from which the HF perspective evolved.

According to Adjibolosoo (1994), the HF perspective evolved from a careful examination of conventional development theories, that had been developed for Africa, and the results from implementing those theories. It was realized that all those development theories had failed to address the roots of Africa's development problems. In particular, it was realized that conventional development theories had emphasized factors or issues that advanced the well being of outside interests. The HF perspective, therefore, derives from the need to address the weaknesses of previous development perspectives. It is different from previous perspectives in that it is not meant to address the needs of societies outside Africa as the three preceding perspectives do (Ofori-Amoah (1995a). It addresses crucial elements in the development process of Africa, namely Africa's human resources. Unlike other perspectives that recommend programmes that directly or indirectly make African nations subservient to outside interests, the HF perspective tries to find a break-point in this cycle by emphasizing the development of the individual's character without which development programmes cannot succeed. The starting point for the implementation of the HF perspective is,

therefore, the identification of the development problems that must be addressed and their root causes.

The causes of Africa's HF decay

According to Adjibolosoo (1995b), the causes of Africa's HF decay are both external and internal. All the external factors generate from colonialism. The colonial process produced, among Africans, the lack of trust in administrators. The colonial education process aimed at preparing Africans to serve as artisans, clerks and agricultural technicians, rather than preparing them for high-level skilled manpower. Colonial education also created in Africans a warped view about the actual goal and purpose for receiving that formal education and training. In particular, it created a hatred for manual work in educated Africans and love for white collar jobs. The use of Africans as beasts of burden drained Africans mentally and psychologically of their self-confidence and humanness. The provision of colonial handouts depressed African ingenuity, initiative and creative urge. Lack of Africanization policies and programmes deprived Africans of the skills they needed to man effective institutions. Finally, education and curricula training were limited to the three Rs of reading, writing and arithmetic with a strong European content.

Adjibolosoo (1995b) identifies over-emphasis on personal wealth and excessive abuse of existing welfare systems as the main internal causes of Africa's HF decay. Both external and internal factors have combined to produce social vices such as *Kalabule*, 'palm greasing,' ghost workers and the culture of silence (Adjibolosoo, 1995b: 58-72). Lack of accountability and responsibility are the kingpins of HF decay and ineffective functioning of Africa's economic, social and political institutions. These are caused in turn by ignorance and apathy on the part of the general populace. People in leadership positions are not held accountable for their actions. There is, therefore, no obligation, incentive or motivation to perform and make sure that the political, social and economic institutions function and remain doing so over time. The root causes of Africa's HF decay can be solved by introducing an appropriate education for the revival of confidence and commitment to Africa's development in our people.

Development education: A suggested solution to Africa's HF decay

Development education refers to education that inculcates knowledge, values, abilities and skills that will make individuals effective agents of positive change of the living conditions of their people in their countries and societies. Development education goes beyond mere learning to read and write about things in foreign and African languages. Its ultimate goal is to groom the individual into possessing the appropriate HF characteristics that will allow political and social institutions to function appropriately and remain so over time. The three aims of development education are: (1) to provide the individual with the appropriate knowledge base relevant to the identification of development problems and solutions in society; (2) to alert the individual to the values that are required and allow such knowledge base to be used effectively for the benefit of the individual and society as a whole and (3) to equip the

individual with the human abilities and skills required to transform information from that knowledge base into solving individual and societal development problems.

Oquaye (1996) has argued that special emphasis must be placed on the second and third elements because without them knowledge by itself will not be useful. To this end, development education should have special focus on a) the meaning, the rights and responsibilities of citizenship; b) the roles and responsibilities of leaders and their subjects; c) the value and need for positive change; d) the importance of self-help and community development; e) the willingness to learn and change; f) hard work and virtues of no-free lunches; g) the short and long-term dimensions of the development process; h) problem identification and problem-solving skills and i) an overwhelming optimism to succeed.

Conclusion

The validity test shows that the HF perspective has more validity than the three earlier perspectives. It confirms that it is a true development start. Investigation into the root causes of the decay of HF characteristics has indicated that among other factors, the continuous decline in HF characteristics is due to lack of accountability and responsibility which, in turn, is caused by ignorance and apathy in the populace. There is need to institute development education to deal with these problems and systematic research to strengthen the elements and mechanisms of development education.

It is important for Africa to realize that the weakest link in their development resources is not capital, technology or markets and structural programmes. Neither is it the articulation of the African economy into the global capitalist economy. The weakest link in Africa's development resources is its HF base. Africa's economic development efforts must, therefore, be directed at developing its HF base through the introduction of development education programmes.

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The message contained in this book, *The Human Factor Approach to Development in Africa*, is simply that no organization, society, nation or country can sustain its development activities without people who are patriotic, reliable, committed and disciplined.

The book challenges the error-prone view that Africa's development problems are largely due to the lack of material resources, shortage of skilled manpower and sophisticated technology.

What Africa needs are not just people and their skills and high qualifications but people who, in addition to these skills and qualifications, believe strongly in the ideals of their societies and affirm them.

The book is a contribution to existing literature of the search for development approaches which produce significant improvement on the well-being of the majority of people in Africa.

The book's readership is deliberately diverse. The intention is to make the book of special appeal to students as a companion text and to academics engaged in intellectual work and research in human development. The book is also an invaluable handbook for policy makers in the public and private sector, development planners and educationists.

ABOUT THE EDITORS

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