

ETHICAL RE-DEFINITION OF DEVELOPMENT: CURRICULAR IMPERATIVES FOR CHRISTIAN STUDIES

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Abstract

Sustainable development is the new approach to development that overtook the limited concept of development that was prevalent globally before the 1978 World Commission on Development and Environment. Sustainable development is on the top agenda of the United Nations, which declared the decade running from 2005 to 2014, as the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. Many, including some educators, are not aware of this decade. Sustainable development is intergenerational development that takes into consideration the needs of present and future generations. This new concept of development should be rooted in an ethical framework of environmental protection, the human and moral character of development, the solidarity factor, and indigenous cultural values. This study argues that all these ethical elements have implications for the curriculum of Christian studies.

Introduction

The current decade running from 2005 to 2014, has been declared by the United Nations (2005), as the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. This decade declared by the United Nations is unknown in many quarters. Yet, the reality is that it ought to be fully known especially among educators. The purpose of the decade is to promote and integrate education for sustainable development into educational strategies and plans at all levels of education in all countries. The United Nations has proclaimed that at local levels schools, universities and colleges, cultural and service associations, faith-based groups, youth organizations, cooperatives, the media, business and industry should cooperate to identify local sustainable development challenges, integrate local knowledge and skills into Education for Sustainable Development, and exchange experiences and learn lessons for better practice. What is this sustainable development that the United Nations enunciates? The United Nations defines it as:

Education for Sustainable Development is a visionary approach to education that seeks to help people better understand the world in which they live, and to face the future with hope and confidence, knowing that they can play a role in addressing the complex and interdependent problems that threaten our future such as poverty, wasteful consumption, environmental degradation, urban decay, population growth, gender inequality, health, conflict and the violation of human rights.

Arising from the above comprehensive understanding of sustainable development are the ideas that all education and the entire learning process should be for sustainable development; development should be inter-generational-foster not only the well being of today but also of tomorrow, development should involve eradicating poverty, wasteful consumption patterns, environmental degradation, urban decay, gender inequality, conflicts, and all forms of violation of human rights.

Environmental well being and cultural survival of all peoples are key aspects of sustainable development. Indeed sustainable development arose in response to the limited concept of development and the threat of environmental crisis. The concept of sustainable development became prominent from the 1987 Brundtland Report. It was also used in the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), issued the Brundtland Report; *Our Common Future*, which defines sustainable development as; development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This study does not wish to go into the controversies on sustainable development. That is not the focus of this research. Rather the focus of this study is to critique the limited concept of development that prevailed before the Brundtland Report. This limited concept of development is still prevalent in many quarters and still fills current writings on development, it even goes unchallenged, as some are not aware of the concept of sustainability.

In tackling the just mentioned aim of this study, the research will hereafter move to examine the two visions of development; propose an ethical framework for development; outline some Christian studies curricular imperatives, and make some recommendations.

Development as Linear Unlimited Progress

The limited concept of development that existed especially before the Brundtland Report sees development in a linear manner. Development is seen as unlimited progress. Scholars who view development as unlimited progress very often only speak of development in economic terms. Abdurahman (2004J, is very critical of this conception of development when he writes, like the colonial era economic development strategy before it, the essence of development has been seen as achieving maximum rates of growth with little regards to the issues of inequality, the assumption being that increasing growth will reduce inequality through its trickle down effects.

Thueri (2002), writes that, some use the term development to mean technological development, urbanization, industrialization or even westernization. More often than not, the term development is used in an exclusively economic sense. In his classic work, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, the liberation scholar, Rodney (1972), notes that many often use the term development in an economic sense. In this model of development, no mention is made of economic exploitation, colonialist and neo-colonial ideology that drive much of economic development.

The linear concept of development only sees development as the increase in physical infrastructure like roads, bridges, schools, hospitals, etc. It sees nature only for its utility value to provide raw materials for human growth. The nourishing of non-human life forms is not important and even without necessity they can be sacrificed. Another problem with the linear understanding of development is that it devalues the knowledge of indigenous people. It is rooted in a consumerist and individualistic worldview where profit making is supreme.

The limitations of the above concept of development necessitated the concept of sustainable development, which is now examined further below.

Development as Intergenerational Sustainability

Development should be measured not just in terms of growth in economic figures, but also in terms of practical life expectancy, mass level of literacy, and eradication of poverty, full access to health services, safe water, and proper sanitation. In African culture development was holistic and inclusive. Development was rooted in the moral values of generosity, solidarity, kindness, and hospitality. In restoring the complete notion of development these should be noted. Technological development brings benefits but it also has its demerits. It can make life better but it can also make life harsher for some. Technological and scientific development can produce richer societies but may not necessarily produce happier and just societies.

The understanding of development for a sustainable today and future informs the proposed ethical framework for development outline below. This ethical framework will enable us understand better the meaning of sustainable development.

Developing an Ethical Framework for Development

Environmental Protection: There is growing and overwhelming consensus that development should take into serious consideration the issue of the environment. Economic development without ethical limits causes environmental degradation. Economic growth should foster cosmic survival and planetary nourishing. Economic development is limited. It cannot solve the problem of environmental pollution presently. This is why it needs to be redefined. One problem with simply defining development in economic terms is that it produces injustice in the world.

The issue of environmental protection will include not only economic and political decisions, but also social and moral or ethical questions, such as populations of the various African countries, the allocation and use of land, conservation of fauna and flora, mining rights, consumer protection regulations, education, and so on. These are ethical issues at the core because the best hope for the survival of the environment, of the cosmos, lies first of all in decent human behaviour that minimizes greed and maximizes equity. It will not serve Africa and Africans well merely to breathlessly try to catch up with the North irrespective of the damages this may cause to both people and nature. (Magesa, 2002, p. 26-27)

The point is that development and all its consequences are an ethical issue. This is why it cannot escape being judged through the lens of religious ethics. And this is why also religious studies cannot but pay attention to it in the curricula. In defining development then, the ethical dimension especially in reference to environmental ethics should be highlighted.

The *Human and Moral Character of development*: What the U.S. Catholic bishops (1986), proclaimed should be applicable everywhere and should be a vital principle in determining true development. What they taught is in line with consistent catholic social teaching. They affirmed: Every economic decision and institution must be judged in the light of whether it protects or undermines the dignity of the human person. ...We believe the human person is sacred, -the clearest reflection of God among us. Human dignity comes from God, not from nationality, race, sex, economic status, or any human accomplishment. We judge any economic system by what it does for or to people and by how it permits all to participate in it. The economy should serve people, not the other way round, (p. 574).

All development has a moral character. Take for instance; even when development is conceived in economic terms, it is humans who will control the factors of production, etc. Humans are moral beings. If in a particular factory the managers are dishonest, it will impede the productivity of the factory. That in turn will eventually impede corporate development. Recently in the United States, some big companies crashed due to the dishonesty of those in charge. It was not simply a technical issue; it was a problem of human greed and profiteering. There should be a place for ethical training and counseling of workers in the market place.

One problem that almost every developing country is facing is that of deep rooted corruption. In 2004, Transparency International rated Nigeria as the third most corrupt country in the world, after Haiti and Bangladesh. The report says that, with corruption, national development and social security are vitiated, and the country becomes more wretched. Corruption threatens socio-economic and political development. The Nigerian government refuted the report that we are not as corrupt to be the third corrupt country in the world. Here, is not the place to enter into a debate on this issue. It suffices to note that corruption limits development.

The point is that issues like corruption and other social ills that affect development are moral issues. This is why we cannot discuss the issue of development and neglect its ethical dimension. Okoosi-Simbine (2006), opines that

one of the ways to curb corruption is to saddle the National Orientation Agency with aggressive enlightenment and value re-orientation on the sanctions for corrupt acts as well as the costs and consequences of corruption for the nation. Speaking of value-orientation we are already entering the ethical dimensions. In speaking of value orientation we cannot but speak of the spiritual character of the human person.

The Solidarity Factor: Development should be rooted in the exercise of solidarity. In solidarity members of society recognize themselves as human persons created with dignity and rights. Human persons are not treated as properties, kind of instrument, or things. Those who have a greater share of economic resources share with the weak and poor. The weak on the other hands should not be passive but do everything they can to make society better. In a global scale, world development should be built on solidarity not simply on interdependence. Pope John Paul II (1987) says: interdependence must be transformed into solidarity, based upon the principle that the goods of creation are meant for all. That which human industry produces through the processing of raw materials, with the contribution of work, must serve equally for the good of all. Solidarity is a moral responsibility. "The economically weaker countries, or those still at a subsistence level, must be enabled, with the assistance of other peoples and of the international community, to make a contribution of their own to the common good with the treasures of humanity and culture, which otherwise would be lost forever."

Indigenous Cultural Values: All forms of development in Nigeria should respect our indigenous positive cultural values. Dorr (1992), critiques application of western mode of development to non-western cultures. He writes that, the ecological cost will be too much and the resources of the earth cannot sustain it. Western development is rooted in the under-development of other countries that provide low-cost primary products-. Every society has its values and these values should be respected. African values are essentially religious values. Development should be rooted in authentic human values, grounded in the moral values of kindness, justice, and promotion of the common good. Hirsch, Howitt, and Council (1996), say development should be in line with the aspirations and values of people in their communities. They write further that, a more just and holistic concept of development has emerged from the spiritualities and ethics of indigenous peoples. This form of development emphasizes ecological practice, environmental quality, sustainability, equity, cultural diversity rather than profit and power.

Recognizing the values in indigenous ethics and spiritualities is not a total endorsement of indigenous ways of being. There are issues in indigenous ways of being like patriarchy, etc that needs to be critiqued.

Having examined thus far, the meaning of development, the two visions of development, and the ethical foundation or framework for development; this study now turns look at the curricular imperatives of all the above for Christian studies.

Curricular Imperatives for Christian Studies

Though this study relies on viewpoints from the social sciences, it is written from a Christian and religious studies (education) perspectives. The focus here then is on the curriculum of Christian and religious studies. What we write of this can equally be applied to other disciplines. It will be the work of scholars in other disciplines to draw those implications.

Christian and religious studies ought to be done in a critical manner. It is a historical fact that in the past the Christian texts and other religious texts have been used to support models of development that are hostile to human dignity and rights. Religious texts were used in the advancement of exploitative systems.

Here in Africa religion was used (o calm down the oppressed and exploited masses-religion was used lo console the poor and make them content with their pathetic condition thus safeguarding the capitalists' wealth and discouraging the poor from genuine struggle for wealth and freedom. In its essence religion has been misused-or rather has become the vessel in which a few rich people sail across Africa to accumulate wealth....In Rwanda and Burundi, some churches took sides and participated in massacres of the people they were supposed to evangelize, (Thueri, 2002, p. 196)

The fact need be made that Christian and religious studies need to be a vehicle for authentic human liberation and development.

Christianity should no longer be seen as an over-coat for corrupted and spoilt systems that disregard the dignity of the human person, freedom of conscience, and the right to life and protection. Christianity must strive to bring about authentic development based on the gospel values, the values of justice, truth, and respect for the individual. These are all within the gospel principles and Christ ministry. (Thueri, 2002, p. 197).

A holistic concept of development has serious implications for the teaching of Christian studies and other disciplines. Among some current courses taught at the NCE level at the College of Education, Warri in Christian Studies department are: Introduction to the Study of Religion, Sociology of Religion, Introduction to the Bible, the Life and Teaching of Christ, Introduction to Christian Ethics, and the Prophets of Israel. Now one of the steps in designing a curriculum that is relevant to the needs of society is situational analysis or needs assessment. The National Policy on Education (2004), acknowledges that among the national educational goals which derive from the Nigerian philosophy of education are the training of the mind in understanding the world around, and equipment of the individual to live in and contribute to the development of society. The policy also emphasizes that the quality of instruction at all levels has to be orientated towards inculcating the following values, among which are moral and spiritual principle in inter-personal and human relations. What is affirmed in the policy applies to all and every subject and discipline taught at all educational levels, including Christian studies. Teachers of Christian studies have a right to apply all their studies to the issues of society. They also have a right to examine the issues of

society, issues like development, democracy, women rights, etc in the light of moral and spiritual principles.

It is in the light of the above, (hat this study argues that Christian studies curricula should speak to the issues of society. Curriculum, according to Mkpa (1987), implies all planned learning experiences and all the intended learning outcomes given in a school context for the growth of the learner. Soltis and Walker (1997), say it also include the purposes, content, activities and organization of the educational program. This study notes that curriculum should both conserves and act for liberation. It should conserve the noble values of human civilization and act for humanity's freedom from evil.

Christian studies curriculum should conserve the noble values and virtues of humanity. It should critique whatever limits humanity's new possibilities and planetary well being. It is in this light that religious ethics can help to define what true development is. The classroom space is an important place to discuss issues of development. In the course outline for Introduction to Religion are topics like religion and culture, and religion and politics. These are topics under which issues of what constitute authentic development and the role that religion can play in these can be highlighted. Development is a central issue both in politics and culture. In the course outline for Sociology of Religion, one of the topics is the function of religion on the individual and society. Issues of development should be discussed in the classroom of religion. Religion has ethical content. Another very important course in the programme is Introduction to Christian Ethics. The course mentions the use of social ethics, the identification of family problems, societal and political problems. The course treats issues of hunger, wealth, work, poverty, etc. This is an auspicious moment to link religion with the development. Religion can teach values like brotherhood and sisterhood, compassion, sharing, hospitality, dignity of human work, love, peace, and solidarity.

It is in the light of the deep implications that religion holds for social development that this study makes the following recommendations and concludes.

Recommendations

The recommendations are as follows:

1. The teacher of religion should draw insights from the various topics in the Christian studies syllabus and apply them to the issues of society.
2. In classes like sociology of religion, students can be encouraged to come to class with clippings and cuttings from newspapers of current events. The issues in the newspapers should be discussed in the light of the ethical values of religion.
3. Religion in general can act as a key contributor in helping students cultivating moral and spiritual virtues in their inter-personal relationships. In the light of this the teaching of religion should be encouraged at all levels.
4. Seminars, lectures, symposia, workshops, and teachings sessions should be organized at all levels to encourage debate on the ethic of development.
5. Let all schools create more awareness on the United Nations Decade for Educating for Sustainable Development by organizing conferences on it. Schools also should take serious the call of the United Nations to implement educational strategies that encourage sustainable living and development.
6. All agencies in society should follow a green policy of preserving and protecting the environment.

Conclusion

In all, sustainable development is a task and a responsibility. The educational curriculum should be used to foster it. Education ought to be responsive to the needs of society, if not it becomes irrelevant. It is highly hoped that the recommendations and implications in this paper will be implemented. If we can do this future generations will be grateful that we were people of compassion who did not deplete the resources of the planet in our own time.

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