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SOCIAL DIMENSION OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

By
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INTRODUCTION

The conceptualisation of the term "development" has over the years frustrated attempts at planning for real development by African governments. This conceptualisation has consistently been presented in terms of economic growth, yet GNP measure and other economic indicators per se do not give an indication of the quality of life and general welfare of people whose level of development we are measuring.

The concept and strategies of development evolving over time have been a reflection of the changes in the international political economy, the theoretical shifts in academic discourse and the changing thrust of development agencies. From modernisation theories to the Basic Needs approach and lately the Structural Adjustment "fashion", growth has consistently taken a leading position in development while social considerations have been secondary, and ad hoc in development planning. However, the inadequacy of per capital GNP as a measure of human development is more than economic growth. The present crises in many countries is providing the opportunity for a re-examination of the concept and strategies of development that have been adopted.

The search for a better measure of development first gave rise to the popular social indicators movement in the 60s. The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) discovered 24 intercorrelated variables which can give an indication of development based on empirical studies of 115 countries. There was no consensus on many of these indicators. Lately the UNDP has blazed the trail in arriving at some consensus measure of Human Development. In its Human Development Report published annually since 1990, the UNDP examines the worldwide progress of people and attempts to provide country-by-country comparisons on a number of social and economic indicators, (UNDP 1995). The resulting Human Development Index is an effort in the direction of finding alternative development paradigms, the other aspects

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of which includes issues such as Sustainable Human Development and people-centred development.

Sustainable Human Development (SHD) regards economic growth as a means and not an end in itself unlike earlier approaches (UNDP 1994). People-centred development encompasses people's empowerment, popular participation, bottom up development from the grassroots, environmental accounting, and the restructuring of the world economic and financial system (Onimode 1995).

The development in the Nigerian economy shows that, although many times the economy experiences economic growth, the growth does not reflect in the welfare of its people. For example during the first years of the implementation of SAP (1987-1992) real GDP grew by about 5% per annum yet this period was noted for the adverse social effects of the programme. All the major social indicators point to the worsening of people's welfare, yet Nigeria has witnessed several decades of development planning involving enormous amounts of money. All the plans assume that a high growth rate will facilitate the achievement of other objectives.

From the First National Development Plan (1962-68) it was clear that the preoccupation of Nigeria's plan was growth. For example, the first plan states that the "principal feature of Nigeria's First National Development Plan is its gearing for growth" and "planning for economic development essentially means an attempt to effect by direct and indirect means, the greatest volume and the best possible allocation of resources for economic growth in order to reach the goals set by the peoples through their government"² (author's emphasis).

In the case of the second plan, it was believed that "progress would be faster if the nation is motivated in its economic activity by a common social purpose".

The third and fourth plans have similar objectives as with the first two plans, and although they all target the improvement in the welfare of Nigeria citizens, the strategy of achieving it was not made clear. It was assumed that the high growth rate generated will, with appropriate policy measures, facilitate the achievement of other objectives (Taiwo 1984) e.g. "Adjustment and egalitarian society".

It is therefore worth taking a look at some of the indicators that point to the actual state of the citizen's well-being with a view to identifying the problems associated with the social dimensions of economic development and the prospects of addressing these issues in policy.

POPULATION:

The population issue is a convenient point from which to start to discuss an overview of the social sector. It has been well established that population growth affects the demand for all other variables-economic, education, health, nutrition etc. It also exerts pressure on land and the environment. The issue of the growth of population has always been a matter of concern.

Since the time of Malthus, anxiety has been over how to ensure availability of natural resources to cope with the increasing population. Economic crisis and rapid population growth are increasing the conditions of hardship and poverty in African economies and also contributing to environmental degradation. This is particularly true of the urban areas whose lack of basic needs and infrastructural facilities is giving rise to the incidence of rural-urban migration. According to the UNCH (1987) report, cited in Mabogunje (1991), the population of developing countries' cities doubled from 0.67 billion in 1970 to 1.36 billion in 1990. While developing countries had only one of three mega cities (with population more than 10 million) in the world, by 1990 they had nine of twelve such cities.

Lagos, in Nigeria, is expected to have a population of more than 5 million people. A general urban decay is the resultant effect and it is manifested in rising density, congestion, pollution, housing problems and inadequacy of public facilities. A major factor that "pulls" migrants to the cities is the anticipation that economic opportunities abound. If they fail to secure employment, they engage in informal activities and they settle in shanty towns, slums, squatter settlements and "ghettos". Many others including children are street sleepers and street hawkers.

In situations where facilities are inadequate, women and children bear the brunt as they have to search for alternative means of water, fuel, refuse, disposal etc. These are activities which usually involve long treks.

A lot of controversy has surrounded the issue of population and the need to reduce its rate of growth especially in African countries. Some of the issues border on political economy and this has, to large extent, influenced the objectives of family planning programmes. The International Conference on Population and Development 1994 (ICPD) and other International conferences have however accepted that development and population are two sides of the same coin (Awe 1996). The development is for people.

A cursory look at some of the demographic variables of Nigeria will show the style of the population issue in the country. With a total of about 100 million people half of

which are women. Nigeria records a high dependency rate as 48% of the total population are children under the age of 15 male and female. The crude birth rate is 45/1000 and the rate of growth in population is about 3% per annum. Therefore with too many births which are too closely spaced and sometimes to mothers who are too young or too old there is a high mortality rate among women and children. Furthermore, with the given rate of increase in population the economy is faced with a strain to increase its capacity for food, housing, education, health care, jobs and infrastructure.

Ironically the socio-cultural environment does not give women a leeway in making informed choices about their reproductive decisions. Issues of reproductive rights are now coming to the fore of discussions among development agencies and international and national NGOs. The population policy of Nigeria, therefore needs to address the issue of women's reproductive rights through appropriate actions that will improve the status of women in society. Presently total fertility rate is about 6 per woman, while maternal mortality rate is 800 per 100,000. The Nigerian population policy has placed a great deal of the burden of population control on women and has not adequately addressed the responsibility of men in this matter. Yet ours is a patriarchal society where male dominance is the norm.

HEALTH:

Generally speaking, medical assessments have observed that the health of Nigerians is poor and that health services are not easily accessible to people especially to the poor. Yet it has been established that Nigeria has over four times as many doctors per capita than other sub-Saharan countries. Infant and child mortality are high and malnutrition is very pronounced in many parts of Nigeria. While infant mortality rate is 87.2 per 1,000, the under 5 mortality is 192.4 per 1000. 36% of the under 5 children are underweight.

The most common diseases that cause death include Diarrhea, respiratory infections, malaria and malnutrition. The HIV pandemic is now on the increase but people's awareness about it is still low as the period of full manifestation is still a few years away.

It is most unfortunate that the funds allocated to the health sector is poorly used compared to other developing countries with similar GNP. About one in five children born die before the age of five, a rate higher than most other low-income countries. Expectedly, health conditions are worst among the poor, and in rural areas as health services are concentrated in urban areas and almost inaccessible to the poor. Pre-natal, post-natal and obstetric care are not easily available.

It has been observed that far too much of health expenditure is used in paying personnel emoluments (although they are relatively poor) whilst little is left for drugs and other supplies. One therefore wonders what work the personnel are being paid for when they do not have the supplies to work with. Patronage is therefore low in many health institutions despite people's bad state of health.

The Primary Health Care System is expected to reach all citizens through the 598 Local Government areas, but it is wrought with a lot of problems including the lack of staff. Many of the health personnel do not like to stay in the rural areas. Beside this fact, they lack materials to work with and they do not seem to have enough training.

It is interesting to note that male patronage at some community health centres is rather low. The males have assumed that the health centres are maternity centres only for women and their children. This is because communities have not been reached with the appropriate information on the PHC. This is a role the traditional leaders are expected to play in collaboration with the local government forces. The situation however reveals that the line of authority at the level contradicts some traditional rights and in practice there is always a clash of interest when assigning responsibilities between local government chairmen and traditional leaders. There is a need to address this issues for the purpose of transmitting development messages generally within communities. Indeed to utilise our traditional local resources should go beyond this; our indigenous traditional knowledge of herbs, our medical practice especially traditional birth attendants must be encouraged.

The National Health Policy and Strategy to achieve Health for All Nigerians is commendable. Its main goal is to help all Nigerians lead socially and economically productive lives. It further declares that PHC is the way to achieve this objective. It is therefore imperative that the implementation of the PHC should be strengthened such that people can be reached by its services including the referral options. Women's role in family nursing makes it important to step up Information, Education and Communication activities with relation to health and women's health issues need to be strategically addressed in view of their pivotal role within households and the society at large.

Education:

The gross enrollment rates in Nigeria have increased over the years. Currently the rates are almost 80% of school age children for primary and just over 20% of secondary against 30% and 5% respectively about 25 years ago. Although tertiary education has

more than doubled over the past 10 years and female participation increased, a lot of gender gaps still exist. Female proportion of graduates from Nigerian universities increased from 18.2% in 1980/81 to only 27.1% in 1987/88. This trend has serious implications for gender and manpower development and policy in Nigeria, because the level and nature of women's education affects their access to work and their ability to take part in the decision-making processes of the country. (Awe and Taiwo 1996).

Furthermore the nature of discipline for which women enrol in higher institutions still support the stereotype beliefs about the role of women in society. Generally speaking, 50% of the total population and 60% of the female population are still illiterates. The intergenerational implications of this are not far fetched especially among women who are expected to be informal educators of children.

Public financing for education has been fluctuating with oil prices but the inefficient use of resources has affected adversely the quality of education in Nigeria. The level of demoralization of staff and students is pointing to an impending doom in the society.

The National Policy on Education in line with the rationale of major development agencies realises the link between human resource development and economic and other social programmes. The policy covers all programmes including those for the handicapped and gifted children. However, the implementation leaves much to be desired and poses risk on all sectors of the economy including the productive sector that are expected to generate the popular "growth". With the mounting economic out of school to opt for business in the informal sector.

OTHER SOCIAL ISSUES AND CONCLUDING REMARKS:

The economic crisis currently being experienced by Nigerians has manifested in a downturn of major indicators. While the rate of unemployment continues to plummet as government pegs public service employment in accordance with SAP, the informal sector is expected to absorb those laid off as well as the ever increasing stock of the unemployed school leavers. Yet the planners are not strategically pursuing facilitating people to explore alternative opportunities.

A majority of women are also affected by unemployment as they lack access to the production resources such as land, credit and skills. The resultant effect of the situation is the incidence of deviant behaviours such as drug abuse, armed robbery, frustration among children leading to sexuality, teenage pregnancies and abortions. Prostitution is on the increase even among university graduates.

The social problems associated with economic development are all interrelated and need a multisectoral approach. The situation calls for urgent action and "planning with facts" "about people and people in mind".

Development must put people first and must embrace all segments of the population and pay particular attention to the most vulnerable members of that population, i.e the children and the women. Their plight within our own society is not peculiar. It is indeed the concern of the whole world, as demonstrated by international efforts, to ameliorate their condition. The convention on: The Rights of the Child speaks for itself; within the last two years we have international conferences on the plight of women-Mexico, Nairobi, Copenhagen, Beijing; as well as conference on Human Rights etc. which have all focused attention on the need for development to be gender sensitive. In our own particular situation, even though we have been signatories to the various platforms and plans of action after these conferences, and to CEDAW, the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, the battle is still one of convincing our population that the recommendations are desirable. Our customs and traditions constitute a stumbling block in mobilising and exploiting the resources of 5 per cent of our population to the full. But we cannot have effective and sustainable development, if we do not address the problems. There must be more acute awareness of its social dimensions than has hitherto been demonstrated in our planning and execution.

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