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## Theories of Development and their Applicability to Underdeveloped World: Different Propositions, Same Dilemma?

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#### **Abstract**

The pursuit for achievement of development aspirations of people world over has been at the core of both intellectuals, politicians and policymakers alike. The discipline of development studies has grown in its influence and attention from different disciplines after the second world war. This was upon realization that development, being multi-dimensional in nature, cannot be accomplished through the expertise of a singular discipline. That is why theories of development have been propounded by authors from different disciplines including, but not limited to, economics, sociology, philosophy, geography, history, anthropology, etc. The aim of this paper is to discuss a few selected theories of development and how they have helped to explain development trajectories, hitherto. The emphasis is on the application of the selected theories to the underdeveloped countries. At the end, the paper argues that although different theories have differences in conceptualizing development and explaining underdevelopment, there is only one single dilemma negatively impacting on the development of third world countries: lack of coherent development frameworks that emphasize on internal resource mobilization for their dependent-free development.

Keywords: Development, Selected theories, Underdevelopment, Single dilemma

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### 1. Introduction

The search for an appropriate theory, relevant to the development of Africa and other parts of the underdeveloped world, has taken a long—and at times—winding and back and forth route. Whether success has been registered at any point in time is a matter of empirics to address. But one thing that comes to the fore is that the level of success or failure of applicability of the theories ought to differ by region, states and prevailing local economic structure of a particular region. This is despite that the construction of most theories of development has assumed homogeneity in economic conditions between the much studied developed and underdeveloped countries, at the expense of the inherent heterogeneities practically existing within these two blocks. The oversimplification, by grouping states as belonging either to developed or underdeveloped, and attendant conceptualization of theories of development along the same lines as a unit of analysis, with the hope that the

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underdeveloped could be developed by the same set of prescriptions, is, perhaps the very reason why some scholars have described as the very antitheses of the paradigms. Some have even gone further to allege that the development theories have suffered from being mirror images of their proponents' political and philosophical inclinations, over and above, being shaped by the discipline of the proponents: psychology, anthropology, sociology, geography, economics, etc. (Peet and Hartwick, 2015), and more crucially, their geographical origin: whether from the developed or underdeveloped economies.

As will be sporadically hinted in latter stages of the essay, the application of the theories has resulted in positive and intellectually provoking development outcomes in some pockets of the underdeveloped world, while in the main, the theories have done less to bring development to Africa. It is believed that the seemingly little success the theories have exhibited to the development of Africa has led to frustrations amongst some development practitioners, and at worst, the creeping in of 'Afro-pessimism' in their psyche: a coinage to describe the loss of hope on development (Andreasson, 2007). But in any case, Afro-pessimism should be the last of the despairing notions any inhabitant of the underdeveloped state would want to hear, as the world hopes that the debate on development is evolutionary, continuous and dynamic until the right solutions are found and almost everybody is freed from the jaws of poverty.

This paper, therefore, discusses a few selected broad theories of development, including random outcomes arising from applications of the theories over time and space. It further tries to narrow down on the common dilemma, by arguing that when all these theories are put into practice, humanity might practically be skirting around the same dilemma that probably, none of the theories hitherto, has managed to logically navigate past.

## 2. The Theories: Propositions and Criticisms

Prior to delving into the discussion of the central theses of each theory, and conducting a brief analysis thereof, it is imperative to point out at the outset that I find the two theories of modernization and dependency as conceptually defining development, the ultimate measurable outcome of their application, in the neoclassical economics construct. Under this Keynesian and neoliberal definition, development is viewed as being akin to economic growth. Inequality, in conventional thought, is treated as an inevitable consequence of growth, and further that, inequality and wealth accumulation by a few is a motivator and reward for being entrepreneurial and innovative. It is also posited that over time, inequalities get eliminated through the magic wand of trickledown economics. On the other hand, the rest of the theories conceptualize development in a very multi-dimensional manner, touching on economic, social, political and institutional nerves of humanity, albeit with divergent views on how best to deliver it to an underdeveloped state. Economic growth is, thus, within the confines of the latter definition, a necessary, but not sufficient condition for development.

## 2.1. Modernization Theory

According to Kutor (2014), modernization theory of development views endogenous factors in the underdeveloped countries, including illiteracy, traditional attitudes, agrarian structure, and lack of division of labor, population growth; among others, as being responsible for the state of underdevelopment. Modernization promises a reversal of all these 'unwanteds' over time as they get replaced with increased levels of education, mass media, developed political institutions, increased mobility and division of labor and falling populations, etc., among the other modern 'goodies'. As such, and for development to occur, there is need for social and cultural reforms (Shareia, 2015), not in any haphazard fashion, but modeled on the developed societies of the West and other like-minded states, it is argued.

As discussed by Shareia (2015), the theory further views development as a phased process of which if it so to happen; societal characteristics ought to be modernized as the levels progress. The theory posits that with the shift in modern technology in favor of industrial production, societies ought to change in resonance with this shift: societal norms, culture and belief systems must be modernized as well. Proponents of the theory have built on the work of Rostow's five stages of development namely: the traditional society, preconditions for takeoff, the takeoff, drive to maturity, and the age of high mass consumption. Worth noting also is the proposition that at drive to maturity stage, an economy is developing new sectors to drive the growth agenda as the older and somewhat traditional economic sectors get replaced and obsolete. It is at the latter two stages, the last of which is associated with the mass production of durable goods and even the extension of tentacles of power to international stage that a country needs support from foreign sources (a point of interest to my 'dilemma' conclusion), and foreign sources will grant that support in exchange with some political ideologies, predominantly, democratization and human rights (Guilhot, 2005).

The barrage of criticisms against the modernization movement has mainly emanated from scholars from the underdeveloped world itself, most probably validating Peet and Hartwick (2015)'s claim that perspectives on development were developed with biased lenses, emanating from, among others, geography of the proponents. Goorha (2010), Reyes (2001) and Abuiyada (2018) are some of the scholars who have endeavored to condense some of the veiled attacks on the modernization thesis, but literature presents many. Goorha (2010) aptly summarized the critique of modernization theory's shortcomings based on its 'western bias, capitalist ideological underpinnings, and overall social Darwinism in its logic". Kutor (2014) specifically abhors its unidirectional and ethnocentric view of the development process, including its inclinations on democracy as the best form of governance to deliver development, yet other countries like Taiwan and South Korea, he argued, have developed under authoritarian regimes, albeit with an effective developmental state. Further, the theory portrays economies as attaining convergence, possibly at the stage of high mass consumption, and operate at the same wavelength, thereafter. But Goorha (2010) argues that with the availability of data, evidence shows that the convergence can never happen. If anything, countries form distinct clubs: a club of higher income countries and another of lower income countries. He argues that a club of middle income countries is dynamic and would always disappear as the economy approaches a stead state. Here, I observe that Goorha's critique of the classical modernization theory is mild, though it might sound scathing at first instance. His objective is not to discard the theory in its entirety, but to 'perfect' it in his own liking as he still sniffed relevance in the theory's underlying thought process and applicability; to explain development trajectories.

As such, Goorha (2010) advocates for the resurgence of the modernization theory, not entirely in its classical formulation or following the other variants of the neoclassicalists, but through the introduction of two distinct phraseologies he called 'weightless economy' and 'credible polity'. He defined a credible polity as "...a government that creates institutions that incredibly protect property rights and are also transparent in their functioning to all members of its society" (Goorha, 2010). The opposite of this ideal is the incredible polity. On the other hand, a weightless economy is defined as a collection of knowledge products that are devoid of weight, including software, internet, and electronic databases. He argues that the share of this weightless economy to total output needs to be deliberately increased in order to accelerate development. In his conceptualization, he is clever by not prescribing the system of government that fits the bill of a credible polity. But with all the descriptions, it is closest to reality to discern his affinity for a democratic state. But I must observe that his lack of prescription is a stark departure from the classical modernization thought as he gives leeway to the underdeveloped societies to choose the type of government, whether dictatorial or democratic, as long as it provides an enabling environment for the property rights to its inhabitants. He argues that the polity should protect ownership of knowledge and ensure that the incomes from that knowledge accrue to the generator.

The need to eliminate traditional values is criticized for it is assumed that underdeveloped countries' traditional values are homogenously development-inhibiting, when, in actual fact, they are heterogeneous even when viewed from within. Related to this is the mutual exclusivity in the treatment of traditional societies and development; yet evidence shows that countries like China have maintained their tradition while developing, simultaneously. Again, Japan is advanced in technology but it cannot be authoritatively claimed that she has discarded her traditional foundations. As development is assumed to be an imitative process within this school, with the developed countries as benchmarks of progress, Burkley (1993) argues in Abuiyada, (2018) that growth without development that was exhibited after its application, questioned, not only the foundation of modernization, but other classical theories.

#### 2.2. Dependency Theory

As outlined by Reyes (2001), dependency theory gathered momentum in the 1950s, fueled by the findings of research work by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and Caribbean, one of whose principal authors was Raul Plebisch. It is viewed as an amalgam of the neo-Marxist perspective and the Keynesian liberal economic thinking prevalent in the 1950s, whose application gathered currency in dealing with the great depression years of the 1920s. The Keynesian liberal economics is coming in from the following four principles, according to Reyes (2001): First, the prominence on the need to create effective demand in an economy, secondly, the recognition of the crucial role of the industrial sector in the development process. Thirdly, the notion of achieving an increase in aggregate demand via increases in workers' incomes and fourthly, the role of the state in enforcing development conditions and improving the living standards of its people.

To Sanchez (2003), dependency theory is more of an approach for understanding underdevelopment than a theory; it is more of a framework for informing the development of theories. The core argument in the dependency movement, from many of its key proponents including Andre Gunder Frank, Theotonio Dos Santos, Raul Plebisch and Enrique Cardozo, is that the world stage is configured in a manner that underdeveloped nations would remain as such because of how they relate with the 'core' or the 'center'. These 'peripheries' have no escape valves for poverty because of their position, among others, in the international economic order structured in a format whereby the periphery supplies cheap raw materials for the core to produce finished products to be sold to the periphery at a very high price. Reliance in exporting primary commodities, it is argued, exposes the underdeveloped countries to fluctuating prices in the short term, and indeed, failing prices in the long haul, a claim which was empirically investigated by Hans Singer, using a Latin American case study. Further explanation of the reasons for the observed trend was then provided by Raul Plebisch, building momentum for the birth of the dependency school. Tellingly convinced, Latin American countries were pioneering converts in adopting and implementing import substitution industrialization based on the Plebisch-Singer theoretical construct (Abuiyada, 2018), among whose strategies included the erection of tariff walls to ensure that foreign imports were deterred.

Dependency theory, too, has suffered criticisms emanating from its methodological, theoretical, empirical and stylistic underpinnings. Notable criticisms include its overemphasis on the role of the international 'big brother' in dictating development pathways in the periphery, while ignoring role of the internal policies and structures in facilitating or hindering the developing process (Sanchez, 2003), its creation of the falsified impression that core countries are economically autonomous while the periphery are dependent, when in truth, the core are also depended on the periphery for raw materials. Further, Bratton (1982) accused the dependency theory of "theoretical holism" by which the whole global economic superstructure is treated as a unit of analysis and portraying underdevelopment as a creature of this one single relationship in the global economy. For Reyes (2015) and Sanchez (2003), dependency theory does not provide much empirical evidence to support its propositions, nor does it pass the test of scientific testability and falsifiability as a theory.

Also, in holding that core countries are antagonistic to the development process of the peripheral, while deliberately watering down the role of technology and knowledge transfer which has contributed to the development of the periphery, dependency theorists are accused of showing a grave and unmerited bias against the contributions of the developed world to global development (Reyes, 2015). Further, the perspective is faulted for failing to explain how some countries, that were in the third world, hence the periphery at some point, have managed to develop, the case of South East Asia and China.

#### 2.3. Neoliberalism

This model is backed by the Washington Consensus. It was basically conceived as an improvement to put patches on the downside of liberalism. In his seminal conceptualization, Adam Smith posited that freedom of exchange through the market is the only viable alternative to the zero-sum market arrangements and would result in both parties engaged in an exchange emerging winners. The argument is that where an individual is exchanging in a market, the product goes at a price that brings satisfaction to both the buyer and seller. Further, freedom of exchange also paves way for specialization of labor. His assumption was that human beings serve their self-interests.

Coming from the polar background of the structuralists who trusted the role of the state to centrally plan for the economy and act in public interest on one side of the development theorizing debate, and the public choice theorists who saw the state as self-serving bureaucrats who always strike cords with the private sector through their rent seeking behavior, neoliberalists advocated for banishing the state from the market. By liberalizing the economy and privatizing state business, the core argument of neoliberalism is that the economy would be opened to more competition, and resultantly, efficient allocation of resources would be achieved (Onis, 1995). Again, the rent-seeking behavior of some powerful interest groups within the private sector would be curtailed, as the role of the state bureaucrat in accommodating the rent-seeking behavior is short-circuited. In other words, under neoliberalism, the market manages to eliminate two self-serving interest groups, whose combined interventions in the market, leads to achievement of sub-optimal market outcomes. This does not imply an economy operating without a state, either. The neoliberal perspective, just in the spirit of the public choice theory, limits the role of the state to the provisioning of secure property rights, as this is viewed as a strong antecedent to entrepreneurship and participation of private actors in the economy. In addition, the state's role

involves provision of public goods and services (those that cannot be profitably provided by the public sector) including public infrastructure, health, education etc.

There is a bulk of literature criticizing the neoliberal theory of development, especially from developing countries as it relates to the ills brought about by liberalization of markets, and structural adjustment programs in general, both of whose policies stood on the two legs of neoliberalism. Among other scholars, Chirwa (1999), Zattler (1989) and Abalu (1996) enumerated some undesirable outcomes, including reduced economic growth in Malawi (from an average of 3.5% pre-adjustment to 2.7% during adjustment period), more than doubling of average inflation rate (22% during adjustment against 8.2% pre-adjustment) and reduction in per capita income growth (5.2% pre-adjustment against -0.7% during the adjustment period). Other undesirable outcomes registered elsewhere include higher urban poverty headcount and increased inequality in income distribution, declining terms of trade due to premature opening up of fragile economies and the widening of government deficits. So, as can be seen, even in its narrow definition of development as being equated to economic growth, neoliberal policies failed even to signal a promising head start.

Onis (1995) used case studies of some group of developing states, whose development history took pathways that ran counter to the neoliberal thinking. He analyses the role of the developmental state in the development trajectories of the East Asian, New Industrialized Countries of Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong. He demonstrated that these countries achieved enviable development while maintaining, on a mild scale, inward-looking, protectionist and interventionist, import substitution approach that proved a failure in Latin America on one hand, and the neoliberal ideals on the other. The state played a big role in the market by providing incentives to some industrial sectors that were growth oriented, and directing industrial policy in general. The major thrust of his argument is that the East Asian Model demonstrated successful growth and development, powered by state intervention. From this, Onis (1995) concluded that contrary to the liberalist view that state intervention is bad; bureaucrats in these countries were able to take a longer term view and serve the interests of their societies. He therefore concluded that 'status-maximization' (his construct), substituted 'self-maximization' (neoliberal construct against the role of the state) in explaining this outcome. The role of the developmental state was, thus, critical to the East Asian Model's success. In addition to the state, Onis highlights the role of cooperation and consensus between the state and the private sector as another critical success factor, ignored by neoliberalism.

## 2.4. Human Development Perspective

Bred by the Washington Consensus and rooted in Sen's 'Development as Freedom' notion, the human development perspective was a response to the backfiring of the neoliberalist-backed structural adjustment programs advocated by the same Washington Consensus. As Sandbrook (2000) argues, the advancement of the human development school by the World Bank was, essentially, a means of justifying its existence! In this new thinking, it is acknowledged that economic growth is a means to an end (development), but hardly an end in itself. The approach rejects the top-down and externally-driven development thinking in favor of its converse. The framework features a complex set of indicators and variables that include political, social, and generally, the whole strata that represents quality of life, over and above the conventional macroeconomic ones. It is viewed as a pragmatic brand of neoliberalism. In support of the building blocks of this school of thought, Sandbrook (2000) posits that for creation of preconditions for 'harmonious and reasoned progress towards a more prosperous, just society' (Sandbrook, 2000), developing countries ought to limit the role of the state, adopt free markets, promote and strengthen liberal democratic institutions, and provide basic social services for humanity that includes education, healthcare, defense, policing, environmental protection and social protection to the most vulnerable of society. It is a development thinking thriving on participation and partnerships between development players; including donors and developing countries. But even within this context, Sen (2000) brings another dimension to argue that state provisioning of social services like healthcare and education should be subjected to means-testing; on account that same services can also be provided by the market, as such, only those who pass the means test should enjoy the said services from the state. The HD school advocates for state attention towards the provision of universal education, research and development, including technical skills training. In addition, and living up to its neoliberal billing, the perspective argues for the protection of property rights for the markets to operate freely and to promote innovation.

Owing to its neoliberal underpinnings in its formulation, the HD perspective is accused of legitimatizing—through the free operation of markets—individualistic, self-interest agenda at the expense of social, community

or cultural interests which become pivotal in some analyses. Further, the overemphasis of the paradigm on popular participation and consultations, democratic processes in decision making, are more ideal than practical. Implicitly, it is assumed that the citizenry is always understanding and rational, for instance, to allow their governments pursue austere that would lead them suffering in the short term, in order for them to develop and enjoy freedom in the long haul. To buttress this reasoning, Sandbrook (2000) gives instances of voters from Latin America and Africa who would prefer populist policies that favor 'redistribution and regulations' which, in a way, run counter to the ideals of the touted freedom and long run inclusive development.

## 2.5. Post-Development Theory

Post development theory questions the dominant modes that shape political and economic thinking on development, including the philosophical, moral and cultural basis upon which such thinking is founded, arguing that it is not compatible to the conditions of the underdeveloped world (Andreasson, 2007). Postdevelopment theorists illuminate the down side of development through industrialization, which has been advocated for long, by arguing that it is unsustainable. Just like the dependency theorists, they see development as not being a positive sum game: not in the core-periphery, win-lose sense, but with regard to sustainability of the development process. They argue that development, via economic growth, cannot be sustained as natural resources powering the kind of growth, present a limitation occasioned by eventual depletion. The implication of the foregoing assertion is that there is a limit to which underdeveloped countries can go developing. Further, they contest the conceptualization of development which, in the main, is defined by modernization, destruction of tradition, including indigenous cultures. In their view, that might not constitute development in the local sense. On this backdrop, post development theory posits that development ought to be pursued within the prevailing cultural, traditional and economic set up, utilizing indigenous knowledge already existing. What defines development should be what is acceptable by the indigenous/concerned developing states, so they argue. They advocate that scientific knowledge to accelerate development should be generated locally, for it to be effective in providing local solutions. Some authors have used the Asian Tigers development trajectory as the basis for grounding development on the social and cultural legacy, different from that of the west.

Andreasson (2007) presents some of the documented critiques of post-development school which include its praise on traditional systems while ignoring their own social shortfalls as well, including insensitivities to gender issues, and some inherent autocratic practices. Further, in the process of pointing out the ills, the paradigm does not provide solutions, for instance, on the shortfall of the industrialization route, a country could modify sustainable technologies to suit developing country needs. The post-modernists are also charged of themselves being privileged in their societies, as such, they do not stand on a solid ground to know the best solutions for people, whom they are not part of.

#### 3. The Dilemma

As one navigates away from the earliest, and tellingly, neo-Marxist conflict-motivated theories of development to the newest, including the sustainable development, human development and post-development thoughts, discernible patterns transcending the thought processes start to emerge. Conceptually, dualism appears to be a dominant theme and at the center of theory development in all the theories. First, dualism is viewed in the modernity concept itself, whereby developed nations are seen as more modern and that they proffer a correct social dictionary meaning of progress (modernization). Secondly, dualism is dominant in the dependency relationships through market relations: at international trade level (dependency), between bureaucrats and rent-seeking private sector profit and self-maximizing individuals (neoliberalism and public choice theorists), between cultures and traditions of developed and underdeveloped states and their capability to anchor development ideals (post-development), etc.

Throughout also, there is a drop in the intensity of the perceived conflict and blame game between the developed and underdeveloped world, although it has refused, to this day, to die down completely. Running through a continuum of blame, if it were to be ordinally put on a scale, the dependency school squarely lays it on the developed core for its underdevelopment. But recent perspectives have moved towards 'cooperation and engagement' between the developed and underdeveloped, with the former's concession for the latter to input into the development processes and aspirations (bottom-up approach) of their states, at least in theory.

The third, and probably the central argument of the dilemma, is the observable pattern in increased dependency of the underdeveloped on the developed. Though newer theories proclaim to correct the simplicities

and inherent value systems of the proponents of the dependency theory, my view is that they have only managed to illuminate and magnify the central thesis of the dependency school. When Latin American states religiously attempted to implement the import substitution industrialization, they observed severe balance of payment deficits, wages failing to rise, the economies not being able to support internal trade, failure to meet financial requirements to import technology, petroleum products and general foreign exchange issues (Abuiyada, 2018). Consequently, they eventually came to terms with the spread of the tentacles of dependency and how it manages to trap deviants and bring them back to the prevailing economic order. By further stretching, and rightly so, the meaning of development to include all components of social, political, institutional and economic connotations of a human being, the latter perspectives (including neoliberalism, human development, and sustainable development, post-development) have magnified the glaring resource gap needed to achieve development. As development now combines economic growth agenda and multiple roles of the state to provide social services, security, safety nets etc., the burden of the developing country remains even more pronounced, yet the resource envelop remains constrained. How then does it get out of the dilemma, other than subjecting itself to the whims of the developed state for financial support to implement the agenda?

#### 4. Conclusion

To wrap up, the latter theories of development, in my view, have succeeded in the following dimensions: broadening the concept of development beyond the operation of the market and economic aggregate indicators (to include issues of inequality, income distribution, freedoms etc.), introducing metrics for quantifying social progress, bringing sobriety of thought in the theories by apportioning the blame on underdevelopment between developed countries and various actors and interest groups within a developing country. However, the theories have not managed to discredited the notion of dependency, as originally propagated by its early proponents. This is despite literature presenting a stinging attack on the theory and its lack of explanatory and predictive power. Dependency still hangs alive, in form of reliance on bilateral and multilateral development support and loans from the developed world. Probably, it is high time new theories of development emphasized on models of mobilizing domestic revenues, either within a country or within a block of almost homogeneous countries, to finance their development aspirations. It is acknowledged that there has been a growing embracement of regional integration mechanisms amongst underdeveloped countries, but not a coherent theory of development, that does not only look at how to deliver broad-based development, but logically explain how underdeveloped countries can mobilize resources to deliver such development. Could the absence of such a unifying framework be explained by the dependency itself; waiting for the core to develop one?

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