

## PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE ISSUE OF DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

*Phenomenology is a philosophical inquiry into the structure and contents of pure thought and experiences, as it appear to consciousness it stands diametrically opposed to bias, presuppositions and preconceptions in conscious reflection of realities as it were. It advocates descriptive phenomenology and affirms the role of transcendental ego based on inter-subjectivity. This paper, therefore examines the inter-connections between phenomenology as an ontological method and economic development in a political system. It explores the possibility of achieving socio-economic development in the Nigerian state using the matrix of phenomenological approach to issues of development. It adopts phenomenological hermeneutics as a method. It limits its scope to the Nigerian context. It argues, in conclusion, that any meaningful development plan or project must give consideration to the centrality of consciousness vis-a-vis practical experience in the social domain of human existential condition.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Underdevelopment is a syndrome in Nigeria as a Third World Country (TWC) or Less Developed Country (LDC). Underdevelopment makes sense only as a means of comparing levels of development. It is very much tied to the fact that human, social and economic development has been uneven, and from a strict economic view point some human groups have advanced further by producing more and becoming wealthier. The moment one group appears to be wealthier than others, some enquiry is bound to take place as to the reason for the difference in the level of development between societies in the Third World Social formations. Nigeria is plagued with plethora of challenges. It is witnessing misery, decayed basic social infrastructure, wanton looting of the state treasury, building of palatable mansions by politicians and purchase of exotic cars, political intolerance, thuggery, assassination, insecurity of lives and property, high rate of unemployment, religious and ethnic riots, strikes, wars, hunger, disease, illiteracy, dwindling quality education, corruption in high places and in short backwardness or underdevelopment.

Furthermore, a more indispensable component of modern underdevelopment is that it expresses a particular relationship of exploitation namely global capitalism, imperialism, neo-colonialism and globalization.

#### **2.1 Literature Review on Phenomenology**

Many scholars have written responses to phenomenology as an approach within the ambit of philosophical inquiry. In other words, mixed feelings or reactions trail the major assumptions or presuppositions of phenomenology as a philosophical school of thought. It is on the mark of the foregoing that the duo of

Chidozie Okereke and Christopher Illoanya in their text entitled, *Easy Way to Philosophy: Origin and Development of Philosophy (2011)* remark that, “Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology was an ambitious attempt to lay the foundations for an account of the structure of conscious experience in general” (99). The import of the foregoing is that consciousness is central to humanity. Put differently, rationality is an essential attribute of a person as a rational being. Pantaleon Iroegbu in his work: *The Kpim of Philosophy (1995)* comments thus, “the key element of phenomenology is human conscious experience as such” (82). This implies that human conscious experience as it appears to our perspective mode of knowing devoid of preconceptions, presuppositions, prejudices, and biases are fundamental to man’s existential realities.

William Lawhead in his text captioned, *The Voyaged of Discovery: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy (2002)* aptly submits that “... phenomenology (is an) attempt to describe the structure and contents of consciousness in a way that is free of presuppositions” (577). The nature and character of phenomenology is lucidly and vividly captured in the foregoing submission. It paints and depicts a clear picture of the meaning and nature of phenomenology as a philosophical school of thought. Jim Unah and Udoma Udoma in *Selected Themes in Phenomenology and Existentialism (2009)* content that, “the object of philosophical phenomenology is a reflection of realities as they appear to consciousness” (34). The centrality or primacy of human consciousness is emphatically stressed in the above comment. Also, Karo Ogbinaka in his, *A Window into Philosophy (1995)* observed that, “phenomenology deals with an abstract component of human existence... it is too nebulous and idealistic by its very nature” (927). In this way, he brings the abstract and remote quality of phenomenology to the fore, limelight or centre-stage. According to him, it is far remote from practical human existential conditions. He argues that it has very little or no bearing on practical realities in the external world of sensible objects.

## 2.2 Gaps in Literature

There are identified gaps or missing links existing in the above literatures. Firstly, they present a lopsided view of phenomenology without giving an objective and holistic view of the concept. Secondly, it fails to address the problematic of economic backwardness in Nigeria. This essay, therefore, is poised to offer a comprehensive discussion of the nexus between phenomenology and economic development in Nigeria as a post-colonial state.

## PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

### 3.1 The Concept of Phenomenology

Historically, phenomenology is a major current or trend in the history of philosophy. It, therefore, constitutes a key theme in the history of philosophy. Iroegbu provides a historical antecedent to contemporary conception of phenomenology when he sarcastically alludes that, “Rene Descartes is the grand-father of phenomenology while Edmund Husserl is its father” (81). Thus, the evolution of phenomenology as a method and philosophical; movement is traceable to Descartes and Husserl. It is, however, important to note that it is Husserl who systematically popularized it. According to Lawhead:

*Phenomenology (is) the attempt to describe the structure and contents of consciousness in a way that is free of presuppositions and that does not go beyond what appears to consciousness. Versions were set out by Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger (577).*

It therefore follows that phenomenology is a distinct philosophical doctrine that hinges on perceptual experience in relation to consciousness.

Recall that phenomenology is a philosophical school of thought founded by Edmund Husserl. His phenomenological approach was a systematic attempt to set the pace for understanding the operations, structure and workings of conscious experience in general. Strictly speaking:

*An important part of Husserl's phenomenological project was to show that all conscious acts are directed at or about objective content, a feature that Husserl called intentionality (Okereke and Illoanya 99).*

In the first part of his two-volume essay, *Logical Investigations* (1901), he launches an extended attack on psychologism. In the second part, he begins to develop the technique of *descriptive phenomenology*, with the aim of showing how objective judgements are indeed grounded in conscious experience not, however, in the first person experience of particular individuals, but in the properties essential to any experiences of the kind in question.

Furthermore, he attempts to identify the essential properties of any act of meaning. He develops the method further in *Ideas* (1913) as transcendental phenomenology, proposing to ground actual experience, and thus all fields of human knowledge, in the structure of consciousness of an ideal, or transcendental ego. Afterwards, he attempts to reconcile his transcendental standpoint with an acknowledgement of the inter-subjective life-world in which real individual subjects interact. Interestingly, Husserl treats phenomenology mainly in abstract methodological terms while Heidegger conceives it as ontology dealing specifically with the perennial problem of being.

### 3.1 The Meaning of Development

The concept of development is, no doubt, a multidimensional and multifaceted phenomenon. It has nuances of meaning, conceptualizations and interpretations. For Walter Rodney, "development implies increasing skill and capacity to do things, greater freedom, self-confidence, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being" (1). This underscores the fact that it is indeed an all-encompassing phenomenon. Daniel Offiong sees development as:

*...one that is people oriented, involves the people at all stages of the planning and execution process and is committed to bringing about significant qualitative changes in the lives of all the people (3).*

Development also implies the presence of modern amenities, such as industries, roads, schools, hospitals, portable water, electricity, etc. in this regard, development becomes synonymous with modernization. This however, is a narrower conception of development. To be sure, modern amenities may be there, but in equitably distributed or only small proportion are capable of producing, thereby, creating room for social inequality and dependence to creep in.

Importantly, development is a complex phenomenon comprising many dimensions, namely political, administrative, etc. this is indicative of the fact that development is a holistic phenomenon. To a very large extent, development must involve the improvement of all facets of human endeavour. The politics, the economy, the culture, and social life of the society must improve before development can be comfortably said to have taken place, it entails reduction or total elimination of poverty, inequality and unemployment within the context of a growing economy. Beyond the narrow economic criterion, development must be conceived of in a multidimensional perspective involving major changes in social structure, popular attitude towards governance and institutional agencies with respect to acceleration of economic growth, reduction of inequality and eradication of abject poverty.

Attempting to present a more comprehensive and broad conceptualization of development, Obiajulu Obikeze and Obi Anthony aver that:

*Development is the sustained evaluation of an entire society and social system towards a better human life. It is a comprehensive change or transformation in cultural, educational, economic,*

*social and political fields to enhance the living condition of the greater majority. It means improving existing ways of doing things to make the process more efficient and more productive than before (167).*

Moreover, development has to do with creating opportunities through people's abilities and talents. Development becomes meaningful when it serves to increase the access of people to basic necessities of life, allow people to participate in defining their priority needs, proffer solutions to their problems and make tangible investments in the democratic process.

### **3.3 Implications of the Phenomenological Approach of Development in Nigeria**

As has been pointed out earlier, development is meaningful to the extent that it enhances or promotes the welfare of social conditions of members of the society. No wonder it is said to be a human phenomenon. Hence, people-oriented. Thus, development in all societies must have the following objectives:

1. It must focus on the people, be man-centred and for his overall advancement.
2. To increase the availability and widen the distribution of basic life sustaining goods such as food, shelter, health and protection.
3. To raise the level of living and in addition to higher incomes, the provisions of more employment opportunities, better education and better attention to cultural and humanistic values all of which will serve not only to enhance material well-being but also generate individual freedom and participation in the decision of issues affecting his society.
4. To expand the range of economic and social choices to individuals and states by freeing or liberation them from servitude and dependence, not only in consideration to other people and nation-states but also to the forces of ignorance and human misery (cited in Obikeze and Anthony 167).

The logical implication of the phenomenological approach for issues of development in Nigeria is that the peculiarities of individual groups, and institutions should be taken into cognizance in course of development planning and administration in Nigeria.

In all, development is basically concerned with improving the living standards of greater number of people in the society. To be sure, Nigeria would be on the fast tract of socio-economic growth and development if and only if its economic planning process is based on the foundation of the phenomenological approach which accord primacy to consciousness, intentionality and inter-subjectivity in human existential conditions. It is indeed a variant of folk psychology or social ontology.

## **EVALUATION, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

### **4.1 Critical Evaluation**

Practical realities and events unfolding in the Nigerian society are suggestive of the fact that public opinion, aspirations or political institutions have been blatantly relegated to the background. All these values are predicated on the phenomenological foundation of experiences as they appear to human consciousness. Particular attention and consideration are not being paid to the indispensability of human feelings or emotions. It is important to note, however, that one of the essential criterion or parameters for measuring good governance or responsive government is the extent to which it promotes individual happiness. Thus, development cannot take place when issues of self-consciousness are not being addressed.

It is also worthy of note to stress that phenomenology seems to be far removed from practical realities. Hence, phenomenon logical approach may not be quite suitable as a reliable model or paradigm of national development in Nigeria.

#### **4.2 Summary**

This paper attempts to offer prolegomenon to the supposed interplay between phenomenology as a method, on the one hand, and issues of development in Nigeria, on the other hand. It surveys the conceptual meaning of phenomenology, national development, underdevelopment as an economic phenomenon, etc.

#### **4.3 Conclusion**

Development is basically a state of maturity as opposed to backwardness, degeneration, stagnation, over dependence, and poverty. Thus, sustainable development means increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), national per capita income, standard of living, foreign exchange earnings, etc.

Phenomenological approach stresses the primary of experience and consciousness in the scheme of things. It emphasizes the roles of conscious planning in achieving sustainable development in Nigeria. It is, therefore, a headway to attaining meaningful socio-economic growth and development in the Nigerian State.

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