

**MORALITY AS A PANACEA FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA:
THE WAY FORWARD**

Solomon Ochepe Oduma-Aboh, PhD
Department of Christian Religious Studies
Kaduna State University, Kaduna
solomonoduma@gmail.com

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Abstract

The paper examines moral issues viz-a-viz economic development in Nigeria. Morality is one of the prerequisites for attaining the desired level of economic development of any political society, inclusive of Nigeria. A lot has been done in the sphere of moral rejuvenation which badly failed to produce the desired result. The Nigerian society has been bedeviled by a lot of vices ranging from: embezzlement, corruption, nepotism, favouritism, tribalism, sectionalism, and indiscipline, squander mania instincts and a host of others. All these are moral issues which have adversely affected the Nigerian economy over the years; translating into not achieving the desired result of economic development. The paper concludes with ways of revamping and sustaining moral education in Nigeria, as a precondition for revamping and sustaining the economy.

Keywords: Morality, Economic Development, Nigeria,

Introduction

The history of Nigeria from pre-colonial and colonial periods and from the period of independence, like any other earliest recorded history of political societies, has always sought and developed methods and systems of organizing herself to what is befitting to her true nature as a rational society. It is also a social and political organization because it has the tendency to bring men to live as composite of fellow human beings in a close contact group known as the society (Idike, 2001). Man remains always a political animal and can only realize himself fully in a well-organized political society. It is part of human civilization to aim at the ideal, man is to set before himself the model for the best life (Nwoko, 1988). Furthermore, the citizen's judgment of the leadership or based on their happiness, expediency, well-being or whatever else we call it is in the nature of human affairs the best thing (Appadoria, 1975).

In concordance with the above assertion, Omoregbe, a renowned ethicist says a human being is so constituted that it is not all kinds of actions that befit his nature and lead to happiness and self-fulfillment. Certain kinds of actions befit his nature, promote his general well-being and lead him to happiness and self-fulfillment, whereas other actions are antithetical to these. The way to happiness is the moral way of life, that is, the way of life; in compliance with the law of one's own nature (Omoregbe, 2008).

In addition, there is no doubting that Nigeria is a country richly endowed with both natural and human resources, enough to make her great and make life in it comfortable for all her citizens. Unfortunately, Nigeria is described as an immoral and sick society, permeated with corruption, indiscipline, dishonesty, fraud and the likes. These moral problems are the root causes of the social, political and economic challenges. The moral sickness of a society is the moral sickness of the individual members of the society, and the cure has to start from individual members. It is postulated that only a moral regeneration that can cure Nigeria and remove the greatest hurdle toward her economic development and sustenance. Thus, the paper examines the moral standard, attempts earlier made to curb the moral drift, the economic situation in Nigeria, morality as a panacea for economic development in Nigeria and the way forward as well as a conclusion.

Conceptual Clarifications

Morality: It is derived from the Latin word *mos* — singular and *mores*-plural, which refers to customs or habits. It is the critical examination of the standards of good and evil; right and wrong, virtue and vice. It means dispositions or characters as well as manners. It refers to the characters of men or groups of men. It is normative in nature (Chambers, 1959). Morality is practically how human beings ought to live.

Hornby (2001) defines morality as the principles concerning right and wrong or good and bad behavior. It can also be the degree to which something is right or wrong, good or bad and so on, according to moral principles. It is also a system of moral principles followed by a particular group of people. Genovesi (1996) says, morality is the routine that embodies our efforts to become ever more truly and fully human and to live accordingly. In other words, the practice of morality is the expression of our desire to live as full and authentic human beings. The struggle to be moral is thus nothing other than the ongoing pursuit of our true human destiny. The sad paradox is that human beings can live in falsely human ways, in the sense that they contradict the meaning of true humanity. However, we must insist that it is the fostering of our true or authentic humanity that

serves as the reference point trying determine what is right or wrong from the view point of morality.

Economic development: Ramaswamy (2003) says it is growth in per capita income and the fundamental changes in the economy to facilitate and generate that growth leading to material wellbeing. According to Rodney, a fundamental transformation of the society's mode of production so as to bring about qualitative changes in the communities living conditions. This process of transformation brings on the people's collective will and determination to improve their common situation through imaginative and practical application of certain basic skills (Rodney, 1976). Shamija (2006) captures it as:

The collective activities by any human society irrespective of its size directed at reducing the totality of both perceived and actual obstacles to a higher standard of living thereby maximizing the quality of life of the citizens.

What is the Moral Standard?

Morality is the branch of practical philosophy, which studies human conduct to determine what kinds of actions are good and what kinds are bad in relation to the overall purpose of human living. The actions must be somewhat voluntary, but they need not be perfectly so. This means that human actions must be of the kinds that come under the personal control of the moral agent. The person involved needs to know what he is doing and what is its probable result and he must consent in his will to the action(s) or omissions that is under consideration. The question then, is what is the criteria for deciding which actions are right and which are wrong? Let's look at the different yardsticks.

Social custom: Many people take social custom as the moral standard. They believe that whatever is approved by social custom is right and vice-versa is wrong. Although history shows that social custom is not always right. Many things were approved by it in the past as morally right but which in fact were wrong. It cannot therefore, solely be the moral standard (Omogbe, 2000).

Law: It is an aid to knowing and distinguishing right actions from wrong ones. Nevertheless, laws are not always right, nor is it always right to obey laws. Laws based on sectionalism, for instance are wrong; any unjust law is morally wrong. Law cannot therefore be taken as the moral standard since some laws do conflict with morality (Omogbe, 2000).

Revelation: Many religious people believe that God himself has made known through revelation what he wants men to consider as morally good or wrong. Different religions

claim different things, have been revealed by God, and some of these are conflicting. Hence, it cannot be taken as the moral standard (Omogbe, 2000).

Right Reason: Philosophers such as the Stoics, St. Thomas and the likes, held that right reason is the moral standard. Actions in accordance with it is morally right and if vice-versa is morally wrong. Right reason is too vague a concept to be taken as the moral standard.

Universalizability: Omogbe says, Kant considers the universalizability of an action as an indication that it is morally right and vice-versa as morally wrong. Universalization is seeing whether it would be desirable if all men in a similar situation as one were to perform a similar action as one intends to perform (2000). The fact that a person wants the maxim of his action become a universal law does not mean that the action in question is morally right.

Pleasure: The Hedonists according to Omogbe (2000), consider pleasure as the moral standard. Pleasure, according to them, is the only value worth seeking for itself. Any action that produces pleasures is morally good and vice-versa is morally wrong. It cannot be the moral standard since all pleasures are not of equal value (2000).

Intuition: The intuitionist school holds that just as we all have a sense of taste which enables us to distinguish naturally and spontaneously, sweet things from bitter things so do we all have a moral sense which also enable us to distinguish naturally and spontaneously good actions from bad actions. It is subjective and cannot be the moral standard (Omogbe, 2000).

Conscience: Many people believe that it is the voice of God and therefore the standard of morality. Conscience is not always right and cannot be the objective standard of morality (Omogbe, 2000). None of this standard can stand on its own. There are three sources of morality of human acts. Object — it is that effect which an action primarily and directly causes. Circumstances — are particulars of the concrete human act which are not necessarily connected with its object and intention — it is the plan of determination of the will to bring about a certain effect. Human act derives its morality from the agreement or disagreement these three.

The paper agrees with Omogbe, that morality is universal as opposed to some scholar's views. Morality is based on human nature, and since human nature is universal, morality is also universal for the moral law is universal; morality is also universal for the moral law is the same for all mankind, irrespective of historical, geographical or cultural differences amongst different peoples. Moral principles are universal but their application is relative to varying situations and cultures. The diversity of moral practices at different times in

different parts of the world is also due to ignorance in some cases. For instance, embezzlement of public funds is against the moral law and standard (Omoregbe, 2000).

The Current Status of Morality in Nigeria's Development

The absence of morality in all spheres of the life of individuals in Nigeria and in our national life has been one of the greatest obstacles to economic development in Nigeria today. The country is blessed with both natural and human resources, yet, millions are going hungry. This is as a result of the mismanagement of state resources by those who find themselves in the corridors of responsibility. Of course the revenues from the sale of crude oil are unprecedented in recent times but the country is facing economic woes ranging from low productivity, low quality of living of her citizens and a host of others. One direct results of this situation is lack of morality manifesting as corruption, dishonesty, fraud, indiscipline and so on. In the light of this "deplorable" moral situation, the country's economy cannot sustain development profile resulting in untold sufferings for Nigerians.

According to Uduigwomen (2001) there are several attempts at moral regeneration, such as; the Shehu Shagari Ethical Revolution, the General Muhammad Buhari regime's War Against Indiscipline, the General Ibrahim Babangida regime's Mass Mobilization for Social and Economic Recovery (MAMSER), the General Sani Abacha regime's War Against Indiscipline and Corruption and the National Rebirth of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. All these attempts have been failures, because those in corridors of powers are most often than not the culprits of these vices enumerated. There has been no leadership by example. There is also the problem of lack of proper enlightenment campaign, lack of clear cut objectives and well defined ideologies, political instability and the wide political and economic gap between leaders and the led.

The Nigeria Economic Situation/Experience

The Nigeria economy is today in shambles, one of the prerequisites of economic development — morality, is lacking in our body polity. Accountability, honesty, discipline and the likes have been thrown into the winds. In its stead, we have vices such as, Corruption, sectionalism, ethnicism, advanced fee fraud and a host of others, affecting productivity and the equitable distribution of wealth.

Productivity has since 1982, continuously declined. Per capita Gross National Product (GNP) which has risen from US \$220 in 1971 to a peak of US \$1120 in 1981 and 1982 had by 1995 declined to less than US \$300 (and since then, it has continuously been declining) Thus Nigeria, which in the early 1980s was regarded as a

middle-income country ranked the twenty-first poorest nation in 2000 and today the nation has gone down the ladder. The available income is also unevenly distributed. For 80% of the population own some 51% of this income, with the lowest population quintile having at its disposal some 51.1% and the topmost decile 34.2% of this income (Okonjo, 2000).

Furthermore, in 1993, the individual consumption of those classed as belonging to the richest 10% of the population was about 13.4 times of those belonging to the poorest 20%, this has worsen since then. We can also use the human development Index (HDI), the life expectancy at birth and the adult literacy rate to compare the quality of life in Nigeria with those of the two major developing nations, China and India. While by 1982 both had GNP per capita roughly around a quarter of that of Nigeria, by 1990 they had both caught up with and slightly surpassed Nigeria; their GNP per capita being then respectively US \$370 and US \$360, while Nigeria's was US \$340. Yet by 1990 their HDI was 0.566 and 0.309 respectively as against 0.246 in Nigeria.

Moreover, while the life expectancy at birth and the adult literacy rates were 70. 1 years and 73.3% in China and 59.1 years and 48.2% in India, they stood in1990 at 51.5years (but today 49 years) and 50.7%-which has been dropping (Okonjo, 2000).

In addition, the decline in productivity and the resulting lagging output have had negative effects on prosperity and the quality of life. With Nigeria's exports and imports declining, the country's share of growing world trade has been declining. There is a lesser presence of Nigeria in the international market place; there is lack of mass participation of the Nigerian population in the equitable consumption of the output resulting from their hard work.

Morality as a Panacea for Economic Development in Nigeria

The morality problem has been one of the greatest hurdles of economic development in Nigeria. From independence till date, the country has lost several hundreds of billions of naira to vices like corruption, embezzlement, dishonesty, fraud - inclusive of 419 - which has driven away genuine investors from Nigeria. Personalities or leaders entrusted with managing these resources and distribution of such resources ought to imbibe honesty accountability, probity, discipline and a host of others.

Earlier attempts at moral regeneration failed. Here we are arguing for a revisit. Arguably the type of moral regeneration is one that, spans from childhood to adulthood. The citizens should be encouraged to contribute to economic growth and development and the equitable distribution of the common goods of the country. They should ensure higher

material standard of living and a better quality of life for Nigerians. When there is equity nourished by sound moral education, wasteful life styles and loss of funds for economic development through vices such as corruption will be eliminated. The type of moral regeneration to be embarked upon by the government would be one premised on sound moral education and the internalisation of it. Despite the fact the vices have become virtues in Nigeria; we all know that it is an aberration or a negation of the authentic purpose of coming together as a country. The elimination to the barest minimum of vices in our societies will then lead to general increase in infrastructure, level of earnings, savings and investments in productive enterprises, goods and services and their equitable distribution.

Morality premised on its universal application in the Nigerian context should be the watchword for every Nigerian. Moral rejuvenation that is internalized becomes a panacea or cure for our economic stagnation. Morality entrenched in our body polity will revamp and sustain the economy and lead to authentic economic growth and development.

Way Forward

Some of the things we must be seen doing in Nigeria in order to revamp and sustain the economy and reposition her for real growth and development are as follow:

1. The primacy of intellectual capital, as well as the need for ensuring the mass participation of our enlightened people in making and taking the decisions which affect their lives should be entrenched.
2. Moral education in our primary, secondary and tertiary institution should not be examination-oriented. Assessment of students should be through the actual living of moral lives through internalization of moral doctrines.
3. Workers in both public and private sectors of the economy should be given promotion through hard-work; and most importantly through exhibiting basic virtues such as accountability, probity and discipline.
4. In order to guarantee her wealth and prosperity, at least to put her back income wise in her 1981 position and ensures that she does not increasingly become irrelevant, Nigeria would have to attain productivity levels and achieve rates of economic growth, which would enable her to quadruple her present per capita output.
5. Giving increasing equity in the distribution of goods and services produced and greater diversity in social relations nourished by moral considerations, we would

be building an affluent pluralistic society, in which the forces of argument and not the argument of force would prevail.

Conclusion

By and large, we have seen why persons come together to live in society. The survival of any political society, Nigeria inclusive is depended on the economy as the engine of growth and development — which have eluded Nigeria because of lack of morality in our body polity. Morality was then employed to give practical guide out of vices such as corruption, fraud and so on.

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