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Modernization and Development in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects.

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Abstract

The paper is centered on the relationship between modernization and national development. The concepts of modernization and national development were exhaustively discussed. The paper strictly sees modernization as the process of total transformation of all the structures and institutions of any nation whether economic, social, cultural, educational, political, legal or even religious from traditional status to modern status. The theory of modernization and its major critiques were examined. The paper concludes that the concepts and principles of modernization and national development are closely knit. Recommendations on how to advance the course of modernization and national development were made.

Keywords: *Modernization, Development and National Development*

Introduction

Human environment and all her characteristic institutions have not remained as they used to be from creation. They constantly metamorphosed from one stage to another usually from a simple stage to a more complex stage manifesting in change of content, characteristics and functions. The transformation constantly exhibited by man and his



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entire surrounding and the existing institutions both educational, social, family/marriage, political, religious, legal, health have remained in compliance with the popular saying that “change is the only constant and permanent thing in life”. The most significant thing about this change has been a regular single directional change, which has always been from traditional to industrial or modern. Whenever change exists within these institutions, it usually stimulates better performance and creates positive impact. Therefore growth, development, modernization and social change have remained characteristics of better performance in quality and in content in every human environment whether developed, developing or under – developed.

Conceptualizing modernization

The concept of modernization has largely gained attention from all fields of human endeavour. This is primarily because no idea, issue, principle, theory, methodology, etc have ever remained as they were but rather have transitioned from one form or state to another in response to the demand of the ever changing human environment. As societies advance, there is the need for the modernization of its structures for an optimum performance. There have been a catalogue of definitions of the concept arising from the attention the word has attracted from different authors. Onyesom (2005) asserts that modernization is subject to different interpretations. He defined modernization as the process of cross checking present day needs or use, that is, bringing up-to-date issues, ideas or things. Hornby (2000) defines modernization as the process of making a system, a thing, a structure, an idea more modern.

Modernization according to Peerenboom (2008) originally referred to the contrast and transition between a ‘traditional’ agrarian society and the kind of ‘modern’ society that is based on trade and industry. Modern societies are based upon growth and the expectation of growth, indeed the cohesion of modernizing societies require more or less continuous



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growth. This is why it is impossible to stop modernization at a particular favoured point. If growth stops, then the nature of society reverts towards a traditional form. Growth in modern societies includes economic growth which involves increasing output and productivity, but also entails 'cognitive growth' which means an increase in knowledge and capability across a wide range of activities such as science, technology and political administration. Traditional societies exhibit division of labour and cognitive specialization, but their complexity is constrained by the hierarchical structure into three main categories of peasants, warriors and priests. Warriors and priests constitute the ruling class who are concerned mainly with maintaining social cohesion by means of physical coercion and ideological propaganda. Peasants whose role is agricultural production constitute the vast majority of the population of traditional societies (Kendall, 2007).

More comprehensively, Iwegbu & Ukadike (2010), sees modernization as the process of total transformation of all the structures and institutions of a nation whether economic, social, cultural, educational, political, legal or even religious from traditional status to modern status and often times drifting towards what sociologists call post-modern society.

The Modernization Theories

Modernization theory according to Bernstein in wikipedia (2009) is used to explain the process of modernization within societies. Modernization refers to a model of a progressive transition from a 'pre-modern' or 'traditional' to a 'modern' society. The theory looks at the internal factors of a country while assuming that, with assistance, "traditional" countries can be brought to development in the same manner more developed countries have. Modernisation theory attempts to identify the social variables that contribute to social progress and development of societies, and seeks to explain the process of social



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evolution. Modernization theory is subject to criticism originating among socialist and free-market ideologists, world-systems theorists, globalization theorists and dependency theorists among others. Modernization theory not only stresses the process of change, but also the responses to that change. It also looks at internal dynamics while referring to social and cultural structures and the adaptation of new technologies.

Peerenboom (2008) maintains that traditional societies will develop as they adopt more modern practices. Proponents of modernisation theory claim that modern states are wealthier and more powerful, and that their citizens are freer to enjoy a higher standard of living. Developments such as new data technology and the need to update traditional methods in transport, communication and production, it is argued, make modernisation necessary or at least preferable to the status quo. This view makes critique of modernisation difficult, since it implies that such developments control the limits of human interaction, and not vice versa. It also implies that human agency controls the speed and severity of modernisation. Supposedly, instead of being dominated by tradition, societies undergoing the process of modernisation typically arrive at forms of governance dictated by abstract principles. Historians link modernisation to the processes of urbanization and industrialization, as well as to the spread of education. As Kendall (2007) notes, "Urbanization accompanied modernization and the rapid process of industrialization.

Globalization and Modernisation

Globalization can be defined as the integration of economic, political and social cultures. With the many apparent positive attributes of globalization there are also negative consequences. The dominant, neo-liberal model of globalisation often increases disparities between a society's rich and its poor. In major cities of developing countries, there



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exist pockets where technologies of the modernised world like computers, cell phones and satellite television exist alongside stark poverty. Globalists are globalization modernisation theorists and argue that globalization is positive for everyone, as its benefits must eventually extend to all members of society, including vulnerable groups such as women and children (Ronald and Christian,2009).

Development and modernization theory

Development, like modernisation according to Kendall (2007), has become the orienting principle of our time. Countries that are seen as modern are also seen as developed, and that means that they are generally more respected by institutions such as the United Nations and even as possible trade partners for other countries. The extent to which a country has modernised or developed dictates its power and importance on the international level.

Modernisation of the health sector of developing nations recognizes that the transition from 'traditional' to 'modern' is not merely the advancement in technology and the introduction of Western practices; implementing modern healthcare requires the reorganization of political agenda, and in turn, an increase in funding by feeders and resources towards public health. However, rather than replicating the stages of developed nations, whose roots of modernisation are found with the context of industrialisation or colonialism, underdeveloped nations should apply proximal interventions to target rural communities and focus on prevention strategies rather than curative solutions. This has been successfully exhibited by the Christian Medical Commission and in China through 'barefoot doctors'.

Modernisation theorists often see traditions as obstacles to economic growth. Furthermore, while modernisation might deliver violent, radical change for traditional societies it was generally believed to



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be worth the price. Critics insist that traditional societies were often destroyed without ever gaining promised advantages if, among other things, the economic gap between advanced societies and such societies actually increased. The net effect of modernisation for some societies was therefore the replacement of traditional poverty by a more modern form of misery, according to these critics. Others point to improvements in living standards, physical infrastructure, education and economic opportunity to refute such criticisms (Kendall,2007).

Criticism

Modernization theory has been criticized, mainly because it confused modernization with Westernization. In this model, the modernization of a society required the destruction of the indigenous culture and its replacement by a more Westernized one. By one definition modern simply refers to the present, and any society still in existence is therefore modern. Proponents of modernization typically view only Western society as being truly modern arguing that others are primitive or unevolved by comparison. This view sees unmodernized societies as inferior even if they have the same standard of living as western societies. Opponents of this view argue that modernity is independent of culture and can be adapted to any society. Japan is cited as an example by both sides. Some see it as proof that a thoroughly modern way of life can exist in a non-western society. Others argue that Japan has become distinctly more western as a result of its modernization.

National Development in Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and Prospects

Development according to Lawal & Oluwatoyin (2011) is critical and essential to the sustenance and growth of any nation. A country is classified as developed when it is able to provide qualitative life for her citizenry. Nigeria in the last fifty years has been battling with the problems of development in spite of her huge human, material and



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natural resources in her possession without any sign of improvement. The situation has remained hopeless and ridiculous now more than ever in the country as the leaders seems to have lost every sense of commitment to national development.

The pride of any government according to Lawal & Oluwatoyin (2011) is the attainment of higher value in the level of development in such a way that its citizens would derive natural attachment to governance. However, for a nation to be in a phase of development there must be some prerequisites, which include socio-political and economic stability. The gap between the developed and the developing countries is not static or narrow but is continually widening. A large majority of the world's population in developing world lives in a state of poverty. The problem of urban population, rural stagnation, unemployment and growing inequalities continue to face less developed countries, like Nigeria. Hope of accelerated development is difficult to realize. This gloomy situation is of great concern to stakeholders and the concerned citizenry. Nigeria has not been able to engender meaningful development stride inspite of her huge human and material resources endowment. This has greatly affected her quest to improved quality of life of her citizens. Poverty, unemployment and starvation still pervade the nook and cranny of the country. To enhance meaningful development Lawal and Oluwatoyin (2011) asserts that effective strategies must be evolved.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion therefore, it has remained a known critical fact that the concepts and principles of modernization and national development are closely knitted. The two concepts have remained highly inseparable as a result of the fact that both concepts deal with the total advancement and transformation of a society from traditional or peasant status to a modern and industrial status.



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Functional and effective modernization and national development process is enviable in every nation of the world but the process can only be tangible and sustainable if the education structures and institutions, science and technology, socio-cultural, moral and the entire value system of the people of the nations is strengthened.

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