



## Modernisation Perspective: A Review of Nigerian Development

Bukar Jamiri

*Department of Sociology, Yobe State University, Damaturu, Yobe State, Nigeria*

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### Abstract

*This article reviewed the tenets of modernisation perspective of development in the Nigerian context. Nigeria is presently bedeviled by developmental challenges, especially in economic aspect. To diagnose the development problem in the country, the article analysed the modernisation perspective to evaluate its strengths and weaknesses in explaining the pattern of development in Nigeria and other developing countries. The paper found that the modernization theory has influenced the Nigerian government and the populace through various attempts by adopt the economic models recommended by the developed countries and other international institutions, including World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). There are various developmental agendas through intervention of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and international development agencies, such as International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Department for International Development (DFID), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and United Kingdom Agency for International Development (UKAID) in Nigeria. Similarly, democracy is embraced as it is deemed an ideal political system. However, such policies as Structural Adjustment Programme have not yielded any positive outcome. Instead, they brought continuous underdevelopment as poverty and unemployment rates have increased and life became unbearable to vast majority of Nigerians due cost of living. The article concluded that despite these interventions, development of Nigeria and other developing nations is possible when the leaders and the nationals are collectively committed towards this achievement. The article therefore enjoined the Nigerian leaders to complement the assistance of the foreign countries with their efforts through developing systematic economic policies, fighting the culture of corruption, embrace technology and industrialisation in order to attain the goal of development.*

**Keywords:** Development, Modernization, Modernization Perspective, Nigeria

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### Introduction

Intense concern about the subject of development around the world is the main

reason why the modernization represents the buzzword of the global agenda from the period immediately following

World War II. The post-World War II was the period in which the Western world began to be confronted with the challenge of rebuilding countries, especially those that had been shattered by war. To successfully face this challenge, international institutions, such as the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, later called World Bank, were established to accomplish the objectives of industrializing backward or less developed and war-stricken countries.

Accompanying the growing concern on the subject of development was the emergence of modernization perspective. That is why the origin of modernization theories is usually traced to the aftermath of the Second World War (Tipps, 1973; Valenzuela, & Valenzuela, 1978; Rapley, 2007), yet Harrison (2005) believed that, the beginning of modernization theory can be traced to antiquity, when the notion of evolution was first used with reference to human society, however, it was not until the eighteenth century that the evolution of societies was studied in a systematic way.

The justification of Harrison's argument here is the dominant themes of perspectives that are foundational to established sociological traditions, such as the evolutionary sociological ideas of Auguste Comte (1798-1857), Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), and Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), as well as the functional-conflict wings informed by Georg Simmel (1858-1918) and Max Weber's (1864-1920, as cited in Ritzer, 2011), analysis of modern society determined by rationality. For the fact that Harrison (2005) showed some level of ambivalence by subsequent admittance that, two decades after the Second World War marked the beginning of application of the modernization perspectives for the benefit of the Third World, this article also adheres to the

major view that modernization perspective is an outcome of the Second World War. In line with this notion, Tipps (1973) also contends that the proximate origin of modernization theory may be traced to the response of American political elites and intellectuals to the international setting of the post-Second World War era.

In particular, the impact of the Cold War and the simultaneous emergence of Third World societies as prominent actors in world politics in the wake of the disintegration of the European colonial empires converged during this period to channel for the first time, really-substantial intellectual interest and resources beyond the borders of American society, and even of Europe, into the study of the societies of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Tipps (1973) observes that even the use of the term 'modernization' in its present connotation is of relatively recent origin, becoming an accepted part of the vocabulary of American, if not international, social science only in the decade of the 1960s. Despite its relatively rapid rise to currency, the popularity of the term does not appear to be matched by any widespread consensus concerning its precise meaning. Gradual and consistent process of social and cultural change considered as differentiation, a movement through defined stages from the simple to the complex, has marked Western social thought throughout and dominated the great eighteenth-century program to establish a science of man and society. Rather, this term is shorthand for a variety of perspectives that were applied by non-Marxists to the Third World in the 1950s and 1960s (Tipps, 1973).

The perspective is now the populous especially in the Western bloc, because they favour the propagation of the Western ideas. While the perspective achieved some substantial success in some areas, the dependency theorists who are

mainly from Latin America and Africa (with few from the Europe and North America, like Immanuel Wallerstein) emerged as the sharp contrast and response to the modernisation project. There are some countries among the Asian Tigers (Singapore and Thailand) that achieved development through application of the modernisation theses, but others achieved the development without necessarily doing away with their customs and traditions. For instance, Malaysia developed while their Islamic religion is still cherished and China did embrace some aspects of modernization side-by-side with their cultural heritage after the Cultural Revolution in 1911.

Consequently, modernisation became a recurring theme in attempt to shape the development policies of many nations. Vast majority of previously socialist states that leaned towards Marxist ideology have turned out to adopt modernisation, which is more or less a capitalism-oriented idea. Nigeria was not an exception The First National Development Plan (FNDP)(1962-68) had, as one of its cardinal objectives, the development of employment opportunity which would be accessible to all citizens. The Second National Development Plan (SNDP) used industrialization as envisaged in the industrial policy to create more employment opportunities (FRN,1970). Even the Third National Development Plan (3NDP) and the Fourth National Development Plan(4NDP) also have as one of their objectives, the reduction in the level of unemployment(Ana & Agu, n.d).

In view of this background, the article is set to review the relevance of modernization perspective in understanding Nigeria's development. The article is divided into five sections, the introductory remark being the first section. Section two discusses the modernization perspective; section three deals with the

critique of the modernization perspective; section four discusses modernization perspective within the context of Nigerian development; and section five concludes the article.

### **Modernization Perspective**

The modernization movement of the 1950s and 1960s is an economic theory that is rooted in capitalism. The concept of modernization incorporates the full spectrum of the transition and drastic transformation that a traditional society has to undergo in order to become modern. Modernization is about Africa following the developmental footsteps of Europe (largely the former colonizer of Africa). According to modernity, policies intended to raise the standard of living of the poor often consist of disseminating knowledge and information about more efficient techniques of production (Matunhu, 2011).

Some development scholars argue that cultural values, attitudes, orientations and opinions are a key variable in determining economic progress. According to this view, the developmental success of Western countries is based on the distinctive cultural institutions of Western civilization, and other countries should emulate these as much as possible. In the 1960s, Gunnar Myrdal (1968) painted a picture of Asia beset by abject poverty and corruption, which can only be rescued through international development assistance and the widespread adoption of the modernization ideals and attitudes. In his account, 'modern man' is defined by a set of attitudes including rationality, efficiency, orderliness, preparedness for change, energetic enterprise, integrity and self-reliance. Myrdal understood these 'modern' attitudes to be Western imports or impositions that would eventually displace the cultural traditions of Asia, albeit against popular resistance (Myrdal, 1968: 61-62 cited in Scheck, 2010).

Like other modernization theorists, he perceived modern attitudes and patterns of social relations as a 'universal social solvent'. Agricultural societies can therefore be regarded as modern when they display specific characteristics. The extent to which these characteristics are exhibited gives an indication of the degree of modernity that has been reached. The characteristics are cited succinctly by Coetzee *et al.* (2007: 31 cited in Matunhu, 2011) as:

- (i) Readiness to accommodate the process of transformation resulting from changes.
- (ii) Continuous broadening of life experiences and receptiveness to new knowledge.
- (iii) Continuous planning, calculability and readiness towards new experiences.
- (iv) Predictability of action and the ability to exercise effective control.
- (v) High premium on technical skills and understanding of the principles of production.
- (vi) Changing attitudes to kinship, family roles, family size and the role of religion.
- (vii) Changing consumer behavior and the acceptance of social stratification.

The West desired to change Africa's development course in favor of theirs. The "enlightened" then tasked themselves with the responsibility of developing Africa along a new course. They claimed that Africa's development had to pass through distinct stages. The Rostowian theory identifies the stages as:

1. Primitive society: The stage is characterized by subsistence farming and barter trade.
2. Preparation for take-off: The characteristics of the stage are; specialization, production of surplus goods and trade. Transport infrastructure is developed to support trade. The stage encourages savings and investment

3. Take-off: At this stage industrialization increases and the economy switches from agriculture to manufacturing.

4. Drive to maturity: At this stage the economy diversifies into new areas and there is less reliance on imports.

5. Period of mass consumption: At this stage, the economy gears on mass production and service sector becomes increasingly dominating.

### **Critiques of the Modernization Perspective**

There are a number of criticisms raised against the modernization perspective. Much of the post-war development thinking was strongly *Eurocentric* in that, often inappropriately theories and models were rooted in Western economic history and consequently structured by that unique, although historically important, experience (Hettne, 1995: 21). Rostow's unilinear model (1960, cited in Binns, 2014) is probably the best-known attempt to show how a country's economy and society progress through a series of stages, and is firmly based on the Euro-American experience. It was undoubtedly the most influential modernization theory to emerge in the early 1960s. It is interesting to note that Rostow entitled his book *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-communist Manifesto* and, his perception of the purpose the United States' promotion of economic development in the Third World was governed by a strongly anti-communist stance. Indeed, early in his book Rostow asserts that he is aiming to provide 'an alternative to Karl Marx's theory of modern history. The key element in Rostow's thinking was the process of capital formation, represented by five stages through which all countries pass in the process of economic growth (Binns, 2014).

Another set of criticisms has been directed against the notion that *tradition* and *modernity* represent two mutually

exclusive, functionally interdependent clusters of attributes. This notion may be broken down into two constituent assertions: first, that the attributes of tradition and modernity are mutually exclusive and, second, that the attributes of each are functionally interdependent. Several critics of the first assertion have pointed to the persistence of many 'traditional' values and institutions in supposedly modern industrial societies and to the importance of these institutions in shaping the development of these societies, while others have argued that in both 'modern' and 'modernizing' societies the dynamics of modernization have consisted not in the substitution of one set of attributes for another, i.e., of modernity for tradition, but rather in their mutual interpenetration and transformation. To assert that tradition and modernity are mutually exclusive is to impose, in the words of two critics, 'an imperialism of categories and historical possibilities' by artificially constructing an analytic gap which denies the possibility of innovation, mutual adaptation, and synthesis.

According to Tipps (1973), once these possibilities are acknowledged, modernization can no longer be equated simply with the destruction of tradition, for the latter is not a prerequisite of modernization—since in many instances 'traditional' institutions and values may facilitate rather than impede the social changes usually associated with modernization nor is it in itself a sufficient condition of modernization—since the destruction of tradition as, for example, by colonial domination may lead in directions other than modernity.

Although many attempts had been made to address the theoretical and practical disconnects between the western model of socio-cultural, economic and political changes as explicitly suggested by the modernisation theories, they had

obviously failed to address the inherent weaknesses. Banuri (1987) opines that, accusations of failures could similarly be disregarded as resulting from weaknesses not in the theory but in the application, because of the endurance of backward behavior, values and institutions in the countries concerned, or (at a later stage) from the inefficiency or veniality of politicians and bureaucrats. Thus, the modernisation perspective is not always suitable for developing countries, such as Nigeria where rule of law is only applicable upon the masses and only few of the population seems to benefit from the economic robustness of the countries.

In addition, traditional/modern is understood to be a hierarchical relationship whereby traditional cultural traits are destined to die out, or be 'bred out' of a people through more or less well-meaning policy interventions. Culture, in this view, is bounded and static, like a box handed down from one generation to the next that must be cast aside if it stands in the way of progress. Traditional societies exist outside of history, and any society that resists modernization and clings to tradition will remain underdeveloped. Only societies willing to give up their traditional values, institutions and cultural practices, or which happen to possess cultural traits that are favorable to modernization, will succeed in their quest for development (Schecks, 2014).

In the Third World context, many critics have argued that the 'scientific' approach to knowledge is not only far from perfect, but that it might lead to problems which were avoided by more 'humanistic' approaches. One of the main criticisms of this view had been with regard to the violent and undemocratic nature of modern scientific ways of understanding the world. This approach has often been used to criticize modern science and technology for not serving the needs of

people (Banuri, 1987). This criticism arises out of the counterpoint against the modernizing approach which is based on the inherent superiority of the scientific method of understanding and manipulating the physical and social environment, these alternative views present a challenge to their legitimacy.

#### **Modernization Perspective: Review of Nigerian Development**

The modernisation theories have contributed immensely in reshaping international developmental policies in which patterns of development of the Third World have been dramatically changed. Using the rubric of these theories, larger global economies of the world became actively involved in assisting many economically less developed countries in the Third world. More international donor organisations, such as United Kingdom's DFID (Department for International Development) and USAID (United States Agency for International Development), have been introduced to render foreign aids to the Third World countries.

Modernization perspective can be used to explain pattern of development in Nigeria. Because, using it, we can understand how foreign interventions through International Food and Agricultural Development (IFAD), Rural Economics and Enterprise Development (REED), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Department for International Development (DFID), United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and other development agencies are helping Nigeria towards achieving economic development through various development projects. These organisations have been deeply involved in interventions pertaining to agricultural development, rural development, reproductive health, gender and development, democratisation,

education, environmental sustainability, and sustainable development.

Policies, such as Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), have been defended by the World Bank in terms of reducing the restrictions that delay business and investments, reduction in interest rates due supply of money which encourage firms to locate in disadvantaged geographic areas. This was done as the old system of approving location has been replaced by income tax concessions and higher depreciation rates (World Bank, 1994). Major policies in this regard related to:

- (a) holding down the level of public sector employment through attrition and freezing of vacant positions except in the cases of critical skills;
- (b) making wages a function of the scarcity values of skills;
- (c) the establishment of DFRRRI for self-employment when in actual fact, the Nigerian economy did not seem to have any intimate capacity to create self-employment jobs (NCEMA, 2004:19).

However, SAP has not yielded any positive outcome to the life of the common man in the country. Instead, they brought continuous underdevelopment as poverty and unemployment rates have increased and life became unbearable to vast majority of Nigerians due cost of living. Incidentally, SAP recognized these problems but expected them to continue. As noted by Walker (2017), policy reform will be slow as efforts to introduce market-oriented reforms and diversify the Nigerian economy away from oil come up against vested interests, ideological opposition and bureaucratic inefficiency. Also, Nigeria's democracy is expected to prove sufficiently robust to survive the instability, but there are small risks that parts of the country become ungovernable or elements of the army attempt a coup.

### Conclusion

The article discussed modernisation as one of the perspectives of development which emerged after the Second World War. In conclusion, the article acknowledged the roles and the commitments of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and international development agencies, such as IFAD, USAID, DFID, UNDP, and UKAID in Nigeria, which are all influenced by these theories. But it is important to note that the perspective is not without many ills to the development of some developing countries, such as Nigeria. For instance, the democratization process copied from the west is not all good. The transition to democracy has made the country virtually ungovernable in many occasions, due to inter-communal clashes, religious conflicts, and the rise of terrorist and militia groups.

Despite the interventions of the developed countries, also, development in Nigeria and other developing nations is possible only if the leaders and the nationals are collectively committed towards the achievement of their nations. Therefore, Nigerian leaders shall complement the assistance of the foreign countries with good governance, and developing systematic economic policies, fighting the culture of corruption, embrace technology and industrialisation in order to attain the goal of development. There is also the need for reducing the over-dependence on foreign assistance, because this syndrome can lead to the country's perpetual underdevelopment.

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