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Review

A Cultural Approach to Postcolonial Development: Social Ethical Perspectives on the Example of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Non-Technical Summary: Because culture is difficult to measure in terms of its importance for development, it is still radically underestimated. It is, however, a key to postcolonial emancipation, ecological sustainability and social integration. Religion has been and continues to be a central dimension in this process, but one that is sometimes highly ambivalent in its impact. Power conflicts, cultural oblivion, ecological ignorance and social exclusion inhibit the overcoming of poverty in many countries of the Global South. Against this background, the following essay sketches pragmatically problem-oriented, i.e., ex negativo perspectives of postcolonial development, taking Nigeria as an example. The focus is on the postulate of integrating indigenous knowledge into development concepts, without which the claim of participatory and holistic development cannot be credibly advocated today.

Technical Summary: The use of the word "postcolonial" in the context of development ideas is a critical indication of the need to rethink the development approaches of recent decades and evaluate them in light of the concrete experiences they have provided. There is a need for a critical revision of the patterns that have guided development relations between the Global North and South. This essay reflects on the achievements, problems, ambivalences, and further possibilities observable in the Global South, particularly in Nigeria, that have given rise to this intercultural dialogue. The chrono-, geo-, and civic-concepts of development that have dominated the last five decades are still operative. In the 21st century, reshaping and revising these concepts with a focus on integral and sustainable development and issues of cultural identity have become inevitable. The following questions arise: what were the goals and perspectives that accompanied the first conceptions of a postcolonial development model? What problems and ambivalences have shaped and reshaped new approaches to the model? Where does the need for reorientation lie, and might there be a need for some form of indigenous approach to development? The article discusses these points not against the backdrop of a failed Nigeria but, following the opinion of well-meaning African scholars, with an eye toward a country and continent where

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efforts are underway to restore political inclusion and the rule of law and to address various conflict situations. The goal is to use “indigenous initiatives and processes” to “address modern challenges”. This approach is promoted by the concept of holistic human development of Catholic social teaching.

Social Media Summary: The paper presents a postcolonial approach to development theory using the example of the integration of indigenous knowledge and experiences of Igbo culture in Nigeria and the concept of integral development of Catholic social teaching.

KEYWORDS: postcolonial development; sustainable development goals; ethics; capability approach; participation; global south; Africa; Catholic social teaching; integral human development

The following essay is the result of a dialogue between Chijioke Francis Nwosu, who is from the Igbo ethnic group in Southern Nigeria and received his PhD in 2023 with a development policy topic, and Markus Vogt, Professor of Christian Social Ethics at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität (LMU) in Munich. It follows up the essay “Development postcolonial: a critical approach to understanding SDGs in the perspective of Christian social ethics” published by Vogt in Global Sustainability in 2022 [1]. The approach of this first paper will be confronted with experiences from Nigeria and beyond some selected countries of the Global South, thus refining it cross-culturally. The goal is a concept of integral human development, grounded in Catholic Social Teaching since the 1960s, but here re-accentuated in relation to the question of cultural identity and specifically indigenous resources for endogenous, autonomous, person-centred development focused on enabling sustainability. At the centre is a threefold antithesis to a chrono-, geo-, and civic-political understanding of development that has dominated the last fifty years and massively limited the space for the unfolding of indigenous potentials through one-sided fixations on progress, dominance, and consumerism.

The methodology is a pragmatist understanding of Christian social ethics as “public theology” [2] bridging theological and secular approaches, theoretical concepts and practical verification, local contexts and global horizons, critical perspectives and practical proposals for a relatively more just and sustainable society. This argument is unfolded in four steps: (1) Concepts of development in recent decades: a critical review; (2) Confronting experiences in the Global South: a Nigerian perspective; (3) Towards a postcolonial development strategy: a Christian social-ethical synthesis; (4) Conclusion: from dependence to capacity.

DEVELOPMENT CONCEPTS OF THE LAST DECADES: A CRITICAL REVIEW

Marginalization in the Shadow of Modernization and Dependency Theories

After decades of exploitation and trade characterised by asymmetrical relations that established forms of feudal relations between countries of the Global North and countries of the Global South, it is time for a fundamental repositioning of international socio-political models. Even the recent agendas of the United Nations and its various organs, with their claims of development governance, have not sufficiently emancipated themselves from the development models of the postwar era despite the integration of ecological aspects [3]. In this respect, the Keynesian influence is noteworthy. Drawing on the contributions of economic thinker John Maynard Keynes, it became a crucial response of the leaders of the Allied forces during World War II, who held a conference at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire (1944), to discuss a possible shape of the world economy in light of the expected end of the war. This conference resulted in the creation of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, which later became the World Bank. Three years later, in 1947, this Keynesian influence and policies were upgraded to an economic development plan known as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) [4]. Key factors in development plans under Keynesian influence were the regulation and stabilisation of tariffs and trade, assistance to "governments with balance of payments difficulties", and the investment of funds in the reconstruction of war-ravaged Europe. Once this task was accomplished, attention turned to "Third World development" [4]—The terms "Third World" and "developing country" are problematic from today's perspective; we use them only in direct and indirect quotations and otherwise prefer the term "Global South".

Other efforts in the field of development theories focused on the ideas of Raul Prebisch and Hans Singer, two economists who, although working independently, reached similar conclusions [4]. In their Prebisch-Singer thesis, as their theory is called, they made an early contribution to development discourse by suggesting that "Third World countries would have to export more of their primary goods over time just to maintain the level of their imports from the First World. If they wanted to increase their imports, they would have to increase their exports even more" [4]—an idea that was later called the falling terms of trade syndrome. These were the first reflections on income, market, and trade inequality and suggestions for how the gaps might be closed, which would subsequently take different twists and forms and produce different effects and outcomes. Consequently, their predictions about the structural impediments leading to gaps in income elasticities, which were based on the argument "that prices rose faster in more technically advanced

economies than in more backward ones" [4], underpinned development theories of poverty in terms of the concept of the First World/Third World relationship at the time. With this line of thought, Prebisch and Singer became known as structuralists.

Another relevant development theory is the modernisation theory. As part of a plan to "bring the Third World into the modern and Western world" [4], the modernisation school of thought emerged in the United States, influenced by ideologies related to the behavioural revolutions that began in the 1940s and extended into the 1960s. The emphasis was on observing society as it is and seeking the drivers of developmental control through the study of human behaviour in relation to constitutions and institutions. To this end, modernisation theory sought to identify the conditions that had led to the development in the First World and to specify where and why they were lacking in the Third World [4]. Theorists took different positions: (a) the Third World lacked the savings rate that could support a critical development structure; (b) entrepreneurship was assumed to be a missing cultural value in the Third World and therefore required modernising elites, management, and education. However, the question remained whether the causes were intrinsic or extrinsic, or both; (c) Theorists agreed that underdevelopment should be treated as a stage in the development process. Thus, while some were better able to overcome the stage, others lagged behind.

In this sense, the American economic historian Walt Whitman Rostow, in his five categories through which the economic development of all countries and peoples passes, pointed out the stark differences in overcoming stages of development, namely the traditional society phase, the transition phase, the take-off phase, the phase of development to maturity, and the era of high mass consumption [5]. According to his observations, while most countries and societies in the Global North—Europe and America—went through and passed through these phases much earlier, the situation in the South was much more characterised by stagnation, capitalist repressions, and other forms of socio-political and economic influences. Nevertheless, the methods of modernisation theorists were later criticised as inadequate for interpreting behaviour, values, and society. Sociologist Alex Inkeles, for example, accused the Rostow growth model of ignoring a central factor in development control, namely "people as the central agents of development" [5]. In this way, Inkeles has revived the discussion on the importance of culture and values in development discourse. His concept of expecting "Westernizing elites schooled in first-world secular, bureaucratic, and entrepreneurial values to lead their countries into modernity" [4] was also echoed in other economic, development, and ideological debates. Foremost among these were theories of development and dependency.

Dependency theorists, unlike modernists who expected the First World to take a leadership role in the economic liberation of the Third World,

tended to see the capitalist-dominated influence of the First World as a direct obstacle to a possible Third World escape from poverty [4]. Thus, dependency theory, through the ideas of Indian nationalist Paul Baran, identified a form of betrayal by elite fifth columnists, their ideas, and approaches within Third World development policy. He suggested "that Third World bourgeoisies ruled in alliance with traditional landed elites, spending profits on ostentation rather than on investment that would accelerate growth" [4]. It accused imperialism of resource exploitation and its negative contribution to the ossification of local economies, turning any notion of linear development progress into utopia. This rationale for utopia was further supported by André Gunder Frank's assertion that "By siphoning off the surplus from the Third World, the First World has enriched itself. By keeping the Third World underdeveloped, the ruling bourgeoisies of the First World secured a ready market for their manufactured goods and a cheap supply of raw materials for their factories" [4]. Ottacher and Vogel formulated the core concern of the theory thus:

"The central statements of this school of thought can be outlined as follows: The economic and power-political centers are located without exception in Europe and the United States of America. It is there that money, know-how and power accumulate. The countries on the periphery, on the other hand, as developing countries, sell primarily their raw materials from agriculture and mining. For these goods, they also receive remittances for the import of finished products to the industrialized countries. Since the small revenues from the sale of raw materials are not sufficient, they must additionally borrow from the industrialized countries" [5].

According to dependency theory, this was made possible by an alliance of the (dependent) bourgeoisies of the Third World with their counterparts in the First World. This was the birth of the concept of dependency theory. However, despite the relevance of the dependency theorists' critique of domestic development policies, which culminated in their belief in classical Third World dependency, later changes in structural and industrial developments within the Third World (now the Global South), particularly with respect to China, Brazil, Argentina, etc., would tend to prove that their theory, while contributing, fell short. Even later, dependency theorists still debate the actual background of the emergence of these industries, arguing that much of the creation occurred in search of cheap labour through the "export (of) capital-intensive assembly equipment, but not of its research and development capabilities". Thus, the Third World industry would be based on "second-generation production technology and owned by foreigners who processed imported inputs and created few jobs or linkages with other producers in the economy" [4]. However, this paper argues that in the case of economic inventions, actors' priorities tend to be focused on protecting their core

values and principles while maximising profits. Thus, it is difficult to imagine a carefree relationship between the Global North and South on issues of economics and industrialisation. Rist defended some reservations about dependency theorists by saying that dependency theory "was not primarily aimed at denouncing an imperialist centre symbolised by the transnational corporations. Rather, its main concern was to examine historical phenomena in Latin American countries themselves in order to explain their relationship to the international capitalist system. [...] The concept was born impure in the midst of a concrete struggle" [6]. Nevertheless, the theory contributed to thinking about concrete ambivalences in relation to the general development discourse and process.

In the postwar period, the above-mentioned important theories became responses to the reconstruction and repositioning of a global scene ravaged by a brutal Second World War. To this end, development discourses began to translate ideologies into concrete actions. Thus, with the help of former U.S. President Harry S. Truman's 1949 regionalisation and geopoliticisation of our entire globe in terms of categories of achievement and under attributions such as developed or underdeveloped, the ideology of promised "help" for the weaker parts was adopted with the expectation of a benefit for the whole [7–9]. Whether the hoped-for benefits materialised or the whole project led to what Sachs calls the "dictatorship of comparison" remains intertwined in a pool of ambivalence [10]. Theories accompanied developmental processes and contexts through their phases. Debates continue to this day, compounded by the inescapable reality of a rapidly growing world population, the quest for an expansive and lucrative market economy, global issues related to migration, immigration, and emigration, and the challenges posed by epidemics, pandemics, and diseases. Evocative voices from the countries of (former) colonial exploitation relentlessly call for justice against the brutality inflicted upon them by colonisation, which still persists in a covert form. It was in this atmosphere that the first postcolonial development concepts emerged, but they still relied heavily on a "donor-recipient" development relationship. However, these need to be further developed in many respects:

The Neglect of Cultural and Ecological Dimensions of Development

Against the background of the permanence or even increase of inequality, slave-like dependency relationships in the late-modern global economy, as well as climate change and ecological degradation, a paradigm shift in development policy has been demanded for some years:

"The development paradigm is being subjected to radical critique in parts of the academic debate: Is the idea of development, which in a gesture of aid divides the world into 'developed' and 'underdeveloped' nations and thus establishes a hierarchy, still politically and morally

defensible at all? Has this concept possibly become a backdoor way of prolonging, in some cases even reinforcing, the old colonial power relations into the 21st century? Is development one of the great utopias of the 20th century that promised freedom and brought division? Is ecological depletion of global resources the inevitable flip side of the spread of the Western model of prosperity under the guise of "development"? Are the SDGs also an ecological cover for the extension of the colonial concept of development into the 21st century? Do they act subcutaneously as vicarious agents of Western imperial powers, or do they represent a genuine paradigm shift?" [1].

Global inequality and environmental degradation are increasingly addressed as major obstacles to the achievement of holistically implemented development goals. As a result, there has been a call to "truly embrace the principles of inclusion and sustainability in all that we do as individuals, civil society groups, businesses, communities, and United Nations Member States" [11]. Although the concept of sustainability claims to involve a paradigm shift in development policy, it often fails to do so in practice, as its interpretation in the authoritative document, the 2030 Agenda, contains heterogeneous elements and is therefore not sufficiently delineated against an interpretation in terms of outdated one-sided models—e.g., ecological growth theories [12]. Using Nigeria as an example, however, it becomes clear that the most important reason for the poor implementation of the promises of a sustainability policy lies in the neglect of the cultural factor: Too little attention is paid to the potentials of the people for a socially and ecologically sustainable (land) economy, for the resolution of political conflicts through traditional forms of understanding, and for the motivation of responsible and solidary behaviour. Although indigenous ideas of the good life are being appreciated in a new way in the context of ecological debates on sufficiency and post-growth, they have hardly been systematically developed and integrated into economic theory (confer, on the controversial debate) [12]. Not least in the context of Pope Francis' encyclical Laudato Si [13], the concept of buen vivir is now being received in a variety of ways as an impetus for a post-colonial and less growth-focused design of sustainability ethics [14]. This debate could be devised analogously in relation to indigenous concepts of ecologically embedded anthropology, creation theology and development theory in African contexts. This is methodologically reflected in the Catholic social teaching under the leading terms "integral development", "human ecology" and "integral ecology" [13,15]. The following remarks aim to provide some suggestions for this using the example of Igbo culture.

Until development discourse entered the era of formulating global goals, the near absolute dependence on technological and economic performance measured by the magic number of GDP characterised the idea of progress as well as the concept of development derived from it [10].

This is statistically acceptable in the field of applied economics. Contemporary postcolonial development thought, however, sees the need to supplement this method with other ethnological realities, as recent decades of dealing with development indices have shown forms of weakness. This weakness lies in the ignorance of "cultural identity and specificity" [1]. The need for integration became one of the distinctive features of the approach embodied in the development goals. It was particularly influenced by Amartya Sen, who argued that a society's mere socioeconomic purchasing power must always be linked to its impact and value on people's lives and well-being [16]. Based on Sen's research, the UN defined income, education (literacy), and access to health care as equally important factors for measuring development progress in the so-called "Human Development Index" (HDI). This was an important step in overcoming the one-sided fixation on GDP. The UN describes the concept as multidimensional and is increasingly seeking to systematically integrate the environmental dimension as well [11]. Furthermore, participation is crucial to a successful concept for overcoming poverty, for which there are very different forms of political and civil society implementation in different cultures [8].

In most countries of the Global South, churches and religious communities are crucial media for an active civil society and integration based on solidarity [17]. More than 80% of people worldwide are essentially shaped by religions in terms of their values and social structures [18]. The decades-long neglect of the religious factor in development policy (taking the German experience as an example) is a major reason why many concepts go over people's heads, and their lasting social, cultural, and societal implementation is highly unsuccessful. It should be noted, however, that the churches are often part of the established structures of power, and in the ethical claim of emancipative development, a consistent critique of power and corruption, as well as a culture of subsidiary encouragement of grassroots structures, are to be intensified within the churches and religious communities [19]. The integration of indigenous cultural elements is a belated learning process for the churches that is only just beginning. Religions are highly "contradictory phenomena, [...] throughout history they have been both advocates of people's rights and sources of grave violations of human rights" [19]. The close connection between mission and colonialism is one of the darkest chapters of Christianity. However, the strong presence of churches in health care as well as in educational work—not infrequently with a focus on the special advancement of girls and women—is a widely underestimated positive factor of development, poverty reduction and emancipation. The model of public theology [2], which demands "bilingualism" in the mediation between theological internal perspective and sociological external perspective, can methodically help to find an

appropriate balance between positive and negative aspects of church development work in the socio-ethical evaluation.

For quite some time, this kind of comparison and growth measurement described above has repeatedly led to socio-psychic complexes in the public life and mindset of the Global South, especially in Africa. The measure of competence and aptitude has been reduced to exogenous forms and models of "Western technical know-how", which has become an offshoot of cultural encounters designed and bequeathed by colonial educational systems. In the Nigerian state, for example, one of the decisive criteria for admission to institutions of higher learning long became disdain for the local language and professionalisation of the colonial language; a measure of civility became synonymous with living in the city and obtaining white-collar jobs; family social status became politicised through the dichotomy of city and village life; social stratification was balkanised by the imposed ideology of "who-is-who", which was based on the false ideology of "foreign-educated" (positively valued) and "native" (negatively valued); native development ideas were seen as primitive ways of doing things; identities were lost and gave way to the tendency to settle for internationally standardised patterns of behaviour. Social and ethnophilosophers today wonder why cultural encounters in Africa, and in our context, Nigeria, have stubbornly refused to integrate indigenous potentials adequately. This article sees a missing link in the sustenance of development if intercultural encounters do not aim at assimilation, dialogue and mutual enrichment.

Not everything about economic and civil development during the period of colonialism in Africa was wrong. What was and is regrettable, however, is the consistent devaluation of indigenous identities and capabilities. To this day, both indigenous Africa and systems of international relations are in search of overcoming this cultural obliviousness and complementarity between indigenous and modern scientific forms of knowledge. An example of a very successful synthesis in the field of ecology from the United States is Robin Wall Kimmerer's book, "Braided Sweetgrass", in which the author, who is an Indigenous botany professor, combines biological knowledge and Indigenous spirituality of closeness to nature [20]. Something comparable does not yet exist for Nigeria.

The above-mentioned ideology, supported by large statistical gaps in the GDP indicator regarding cultural, social and environmental factors between the Global North and South, creates a never-ending tension, as endogenous development potentials in the South are not even perceived. Within the GDP paradigm, it seems that they have to wait for exogenous development aid vectors as liberators and catalysts. Most people on the continent fall under the statistical contrast policy of "living on less than $1.90 per day" [11]. Nigerian characteristics, added to decades of sustained population growth, are expected to likely result in significant negative

deviations. Such contrast politics is often the catalyst for the international policy approach of designing forms of palliative intervention as responses to a kind of geopolitical designation that Hazbun, citing Said, describes as marking "other people as irredeemably 'other'" [21]. According to the economic method discussed here, this situation may also not be insignificant. The GDP, as the only indicator without correlated socioeconomic and sociocultural processes, does not convey a sense of the efforts of indigenous families and economies that integrate and apply their local industries to feed their families and market their surpluses. While they may be insignificant within trans- and international standards, they are often critical to local people's survival and social culture.

As a negative consequence, especially of the Nigerian experience, decades of extreme GDP policies have destroyed confidence in the local and indigenous socio-economic culture. This situation has fostered addiction to flight and emigration to the so-called better economies, lucrative countries or, as it is often said in Nigeria today, the land of opportunity. This article acknowledges that most countries in the North with the above attributions have had a track record of development struggles, which, as the history of development shows, they have managed both indigenously and ethnically and have been able to achieve a measure of stability. Why is sustainable development added to poverty eradication still utopian and illusory in Nigeria and many other countries in Africa? Our thesis is that neglect of the cultural, demographic and environmental dimensions is a skin reason for these deficits. Nor will it be possible to limit population growth, which is too strong from an ecological and developmental perspective, without taking greater account of cultural and religious mentalities [12].

Moreover, decades of access to the vectors of development aid have created mentalities and structures of dependency that often hinder rather than promote the unfolding of inherent sociopolitical and economic potential. The ideologies behind such development packages are often accepted and lead to the marginalisation of local traditions of exchange and sufficiency economies. The Nigerian experience exemplifies that once the aid packages delivered are no longer available (often poorly administered and mismanaged), the aid recipient very easily falls back into his old position and merely looks for another donor. This raises the question: Why has the "donor-recipient development policy" so far not helped to bridge the gap between inequality and poverty? A critical look at the fundamental theses underlying the original development ideas and their impact antitheses suggests that the original concepts were and are never multidimensional enough to adequately integrate issues of culture, identities, values and worldviews.

Constitutive Elements of the Original Concept of Global Development: Three Theses

In the following, we formulate three theses to present the constitutive ideas behind the first concepts of the global development approach that has dominated the last decades:

Thesis one: there is a belief in an expected linear progress in the development of our world based on technical and economic developments

This chronopolitical character of early postcolonial development thought envisions "a linear time in which all peoples of the earth move forward with the goal of somehow comparable and measurable progress" [10]. This idea is inspired by the thought process of Christian eschatology, which assumes that there would be an end to our present age, human history, or the world itself and that the expectation of either liberation or damnation would mark such an end. Applied politically, this means that the global development approach of recent decades believed in an imagined time that is linear, moving forward, and concretised in the idea of technological and economic progress [10]. Our thesis is that the secularisation of Christian faith in salvation in the techno-economic development policy model becomes ideology precisely when the ambivalences of progress, which are always present, are lost from view [3]. In other words, a sufficiently realistic theory of development that focuses not on an abstract idea but on human beings with their ambivalences and on culture with its uniqueness of non-comparable experiences of meaning and identity is "post-utopian" and not chronopolitical.

Thesis two: the development ideology of the donor-recipient dichotomy led to a deficient idea of how gaps between poverty and inequality could be overcome

The development policy approach of recent decades has been geopolitically conceived on the basis of the proposition that development aid policy or donor-recipient strategy would help alleviate or end poverty and suffering in recipient countries. In doing so, it should always and systematically work to reduce inequalities in economic and market relations. This policy of aid thrives on rhetorical categorisation, i.e., the hierarchical classification of the world's population with geopolitical titles such as developed, developing, or underdeveloped, or even more politely with the term "emerging economies", which is gradually being "defined as an additional category". Within such attributions, a politics of compassion is invoked as a reason why developed countries should sell their development ideologies to emerging countries or those who aspire to become so. As Sachs notes, the diverse realities of people around the globe have been subjugated to the hierarchical categories of rich and poor nations [10]. In the shadow of this hierarchy, the Global North has secured

positions of power that secure its economic benefits many times over from what has been and continues to be provided as “development assistance”. In African countries, too, emancipation from the feeling of inferiority is needed, and an appropriate education policy could be a catalyst.

Thesis 3: instead of maximising goods and consumption, sustainable development needs participation, integration and ecological vision

The fall of the great political frontier of the so-called Iron Curtain in 1989 meant the removal of the roughly 7000-kilometer-long physical barrier of fences, walls, minefields and watchtowers that divided Europe into two halves in the postwar era and separated the East from the West. The end of the Iron Curtain paved the way for postcolonial approaches to development, conceived as a response to the rapid globalisation of markets. Against this backdrop, a strong wave of economic civilisation took centre stage, empowering transnational corporations to drive consumerist development. Consequently, the measure of growth and development was based on “gross domestic product (GDP), making economic output and consumption levels authoritative benchmarks” [22]. This was to become a form of socioeconomic civilisation.

It was expected that the production economy would prevail in the Global North and a consumption market economy in most countries of the Global South. China (and perhaps Brazil), long classified as one of the countries of the Global South, experienced a process of balancing production and consumption, especially since the turn of the millennium. Moreover, according to the third thesis, this development strategy fostered a culture of economic civilisation that exerted strong exogenous influences from the North to the South, bringing lifestyles closer together worldwide. Our current example is smart technologies. The globalisation movement also became integral to progress focused on consumption and technology. However, this has led to the creation of new dependencies and the further marginalisation of traditional forms of economy and culture. The civilisation of consumption, often spread through aggressive advertising, is by no means value-neutral. It has significant ecological and cultural downsides. However, these cannot be overcome by prohibitionist policies, neither in African societies nor in the liberal societies of the West [3]. An acceptable containment of consumption is one of the fundamental challenges of ecological transformation, in which the countries of the Global North can also learn a great deal from those of the South.

Contemporary Concepts of Development: From the MDGs to SDGs

At the beginning of the 21st century, it was necessary to address development ideologies, imbalances, problems, and ambivalences, especially the fact that inequalities, suffering, and poverty persist despite scientific and technological breakthroughs and the promises of globalisation. The widening economic gap between North and South,

particularly with respect to significant parts of Africa, is indicative of a profound failure of previous theories of development. For this reason, a global change of approach has become inevitable. It is argued that a holistic understanding of the case of inequality, suffering, and poverty helped shape the priorities and strategies of subsequent formulations and approaches in post-utopian development policy [23]. Inequality, suffering, and poverty could not be overcome in the late 20th century and provide warning signs of the need to revise the concept of development and global interdependencies. To this end, the United Nations adopted a resolution by its General Assembly within the framework of the Millennium Declaration [24].

The reformed postcolonial character of this initiative is reflected in its articulated values and a critical awareness of problems: (1) an emphasis on collective responsibility for the protection of human dignity, equality, and justice; (2) an awareness of the rapid interconnectedness and interdependence of people; (3) the equality of all states and an awareness of respect for independent states and territorial integrities; (4) sober awareness of the persistence of vestiges of colonial rule and occupation (neocolonialism); (5) a critical awareness of the shortcomings of the globalisation model and its unequally distributed benefits and costs; and (6) emphasis on reforming the participation status of so-called developing and emerging countries in global development policies and actions [24]. The various points were a common attempt to overcome the Euro- or North-centric dominance of development thinking.

Moreover, the concerns already expressed and the awareness created were to be followed by concrete efforts, resulting in an 8-point agenda, which were designated as goals for the first phase of the implementation of the resolutions: (a) eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; (b) achieve universal primary education; (c) promote gender equality and empower women; (d) reduce child mortality; (e) improve maternal health; (f) combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; (g) ensure environmental sustainability; and (h) global partnership for development. The goals should be supported by “measurable and time-bound targets [...] to promote global awareness, political accountability, improved metrics, social feedback, and public pressure” [25]. Of note is the special mention of the continent of Africa and the resolutions to allow it to participate in the “mainstream of the world economy” as well as to ensure the continent’s sustainable development through “improved market access, increased official development assistance, and increased foreign direct investment (and) technology transfers” [24].

The 15-year initial implementation phase was not a complete failure. Nevertheless, it was a period of intense struggle to free development strategies from the negative influences of a modern capitalist economy and the contradictory attempts to free development relations and transform them from a helping ideology to a partnership ideology. The

negative influences continued to promote inequality, suffering, and poverty. Statistical mapping of the places where their effects were most evident led to the contemporary geopolitical nomenclature, namely the term “Global South”. This denotes “a deterritorialised geography of the externalities of capitalism and the means of accounting for oppressed peoples within the borders of wealthier countries, so that there is an economic South in the geographic North and a North in the geographic South” [26]. These efforts to reposition the approach to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and to develop new strategies to address the challenges encountered in their implementation eventually led to the upgrading in 2015 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the 2030 Agenda (Programme of Action to 2030).

Interestingly, across all the ideologies driving the various transitions, the need to be more responsive to the general approach to development and to give development ideologies a more inclusive character has been the most important determinant of policy making. The 2030 Agenda is no exception, as it expands the goals and makes them 17. Many development scholars agree that this expansion is not only aimed at developing countries. It also focuses on transforming the rich countries of the North. This is to “integrate the so-called triple bottom line approach to human well-being [...], (with) almost all societies in the world recognising that they seek a combination of economic development, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion” [25]. Moreover, the 2030 Agenda was intended to decentralise the development and governance of the goals, making them national and country responsibilities, allowing each country to create its own framework for achieving the SDGs [27]. The forms of incentives to improve performance have persisted alongside the progress recorded. The quality of the results achieved and the ambivalences associated with them remain controversial. Therefore, this article argues that the observable ambivalences, particularly in development policy in Africa, have produced some counterproductive effects that challenge the core of the original postcolonial development theses and significantly block the implementation of the SDGs.

CONFRONTING EXPERIENCES IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH: AN AFRO-NIGERIAN PERSPECTIVE

Neocolonial Dependencies

The UN concept of sustainable development is of key importance to Africa, as the continent is particularly hard hit by poverty and climate change. The African Union Group includes 54 member states representing the African continent through their representatives. The reformed idea of decentralising SDG governance and empowering countries and leaders to develop strategies and approaches, helps ensure that the global goals can be implemented across cultures. Decentralisation is in line with the socio-ethical principle of subsidiarity and very much favours the possibility of

contextualising development concepts in a culturally sensitive way [28]. Despite the need for transformation of global relations, Nigeria itself also bears its share of responsibility for institutionalising sustainable development. However, the various forms of lack of consideration of cultural, social, and environmental contexts within socio-political, socio-cultural, and socio-economic concepts of development are still an obstacle to overcoming poverty, hunger, and social exclusion. A particular challenge is posed by negative attitudes stemming from the colonial past, which strongly influence the behaviour of people in Nigeria and other selected countries in Africa and can be described as inhibiting social and emotional structures.

In the Nigerian state, and beyond that in some other selected countries in Africa and the Global South, social attitudes and behavioural conventions lead to a kind of identity confusion that contributes to many people's persistent sense of being enslaved, colonised, dehumanised, or socioculturally deformed. The general balkanisation of a people by colonial ideology disrupted the flow of transmission of indigenous culture, paralysed development through corruption, violence, and social uprooting, and consequently led to extensive dependencies on exogenous aid. Moreover, globalisation as an open market ideology has led to rentier capitalism in the socio-political and socio-economic relations of Nigeria and many other countries in the Global South, giving the "master" unlimited access to the natural resources of the South, but with persistently unfair exchange conditions in the world market. At the same time, suppliers of raw materials to the industrialised world are systematically becoming consumers of the final products, as they are conditioned by advertising to crave the consumer products of the rich West. Thus, most policies of so-called development aid began to translate the forced dependence of the Global South on external political and economic powers into the business of exporting the used products of developed economies as aids to the so-called pitiful worlds of developing, underdeveloped (or even stagnant) economies. Nigeria became one of the largest markets for this form of market relationship, aided by the uncontrolled spread of its human resources to all corners of the world in search of economic opportunities that would help offset the leadership weakness and economic failure of their homeland.

A concrete example from Nigeria is the battle that textile industries face against imported second-hand textile materials. First, this is due to the economic migration of Nigerian citizens themselves, and second, it is due to an oversupply of such foreign commodities, the liquidity of which neutralises all policies to stabilise any meaningful indigenous manufacturing efforts. According to Nigeria's media report, while Nigeria's share in the importation is not the biggest in Africa (when compared to Kenya), it leads sub-Saharan Africa, regarded as the world's largest market for such transactions, with an estimated annual

importation size of over 100,000 metric tonnes, mt (t). Ivory Coast and Ghana share 13,066 and 79,963 mt (t) respectively [29]. With adaptation from Lamido's report, these findings are represented in Figure 1 below:

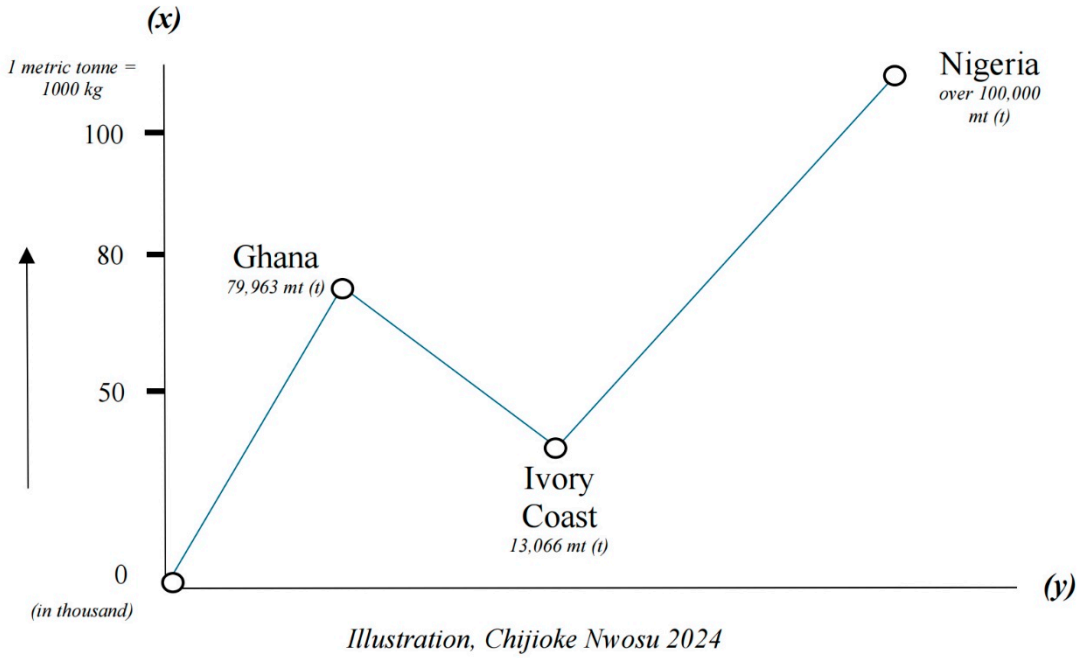

Figure 1. Estimated used clothing imports (tonnes/year) in three Sub-Saharan African Countries.

The authors contend that the crux of the issue does not lie in the feasibility of transactions or importations involving second-hand commodities, as such exchanges are commonplace amongst nations. Instead, the core challenge resides in Nigeria's significantly debilitated domestic textile industry. Within the purview of economic principles, this infirmity engenders an imbalance in Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) and fosters a unilateral market dependence rather than a bilateral market relationship. Owing to the principle of profit maximisation, a direct remedy within the international market to mitigate the oversupply might prove elusive. Instead, the approach must be postcolonial enough so as to strike an economic balance between the positive and negative effects of such practice since "Importing second-hand clothing has the potential to meet individual clothing needs while also putting food on the vendor tables in impoverished countries [...]. (The effect) is complex and multifaceted (in Nigeria), with both positive and negative consequences. (In a positive sense), used clothes are significantly cheaper [...] (in vendor markets), it creates jobs in transportation, sorting, cleaning, repair and retail. (In a negative sense), the influx of cheap used clothing can stifle the growth of the domestic textile garment industry [...]. Over-reliance on imported used clothing can discourage self-sufficiency and hinder the development of a sustainable clothing industry in the long term" [29]. The resulting ambivalence and dilemma operate against the backdrop of a

people whose economic aspirations have been distorted and "diasporised" as local and national efforts and capabilities have failed to find adequate structures and institutions. Most attempts to return home run up against corrupt systems of governance that have kept people in bondage for decades and created one of the worst systems of brain drain the African continent has ever seen. To this day, the identity crisis hangs on a development utopia that comes from the outside, embedded in the practice of a masked globalisation policy that pretends to promote justice while developing strategies and new ideologies that further exploitation and enslavement. In other words, the gradual and strategic dependency of the Global South continues to lead to failures and loss of identity within the selected regions. It also leads today to massive social, political, economic, and perhaps most devastatingly, ecological manipulation and exploitation.

The road to overcoming (neo)colonial dependencies is long. A postcolonial assessment of development indices, applicable to some selected parts of the Global South and embedded in the Nigerian context, remains predominantly inconsistent with the number of natural resources it contributes to the global economy. Here is predominantly a case of indigenous leadership failures and the weakest political will to deal with the cancer of corruption. The recent political polls in the Nigerian experience, Election 2023, painted again the image of a new political nightmare hued out of corruption and the desperation to grab power by all violent and manipulative means. The overt consequence is that no individual or group of individuals bent on stealing power may be determined to translate it for the common good. To this end, the road to end some of the deadly anti-social, anti-economic and anti-development ills like terrorism, banditry, eco-violence, etc., would be far from realisable in the Nigerian case. Despite the visible facilitation of growth opportunities through liberalisation movements and policies, several African nations, including Nigeria, have yet to undergo a profound structural transformation as social and political entities to meet the postcolonial aspirations for sustainable development. The threat of poverty continues to be felt by the majority of people, with the greatest number of victims in sub-Saharan zones. In this case, Nigeria, as the most populous country in this zone, has the lion's share. In most African countries, by extension, the employment capacity of the formal sector remains inadequate, and investment in agriculture and mechanisation is also too weak [30]. To date, a culture of passivity in the midst of international competition has deprived most African nations of the necessary initiatives and institutions that drive development. Ultimately, a postcolonial discourse on the opportunities for development in the Global South always revolves around the need for innovative political will, transformative leadership, indigenous policies and their implementation, and a determination to purify attitudes and decolonise mindsets. To this

end, this article proposes that a reconstruction of the following impact antitheses on the basic constitutive concepts of development strategy would help guide policymaking toward more results-oriented syntheses for integral and sustainable development—The concept of integral development is central to Catholic social teaching. Founded in the encyclical Populorum Progressio, 1967, it shapes how environmental issues are dealt with and how they are embedded in social issues in the encyclical Laudato Si, 2015. According to Masini, the Catholic concept of integral development strongly influenced the emergence of the concept of sustainable development in the context of the UN [22].

Elements of Postcolonial Development Strategy

The dynamics of ups and downs instead of linear progress

The representative status of United Nations member states may have been participatory enough, at least nominally, but it does not yet provide sufficient multidimensional evidence that the interests of the broader population are actually being adequately addressed. This is true in sub-Saharan Africa, and particularly in Nigeria in the face of persistent hunger, poverty and suffering. Mainstream development policies enshrined in United Nations resolutions to improve market access, increase official development assistance, and increase the flow of foreign direct investment and exchange technologies [24] fail to take into account essential conditions for truly sustainable and inclusive development and risk actually widening inequality gaps. A truncated chronopolitical concept of progress based on exploitation and forms of extreme capitalism that do not allow for broad participation of the population but lead to the unilateral enrichment of a few actors misses the mark of sustainability and creates social divisions.

International politics faces the challenge of addressing the core and perhaps imposed socio-political, economic, environmental, and cultural imbalances that trigger unrest and violence. Sporadic suppression of belligerents by peacekeeping military power does not necessarily mean *peace*. It might just mean silence. Moreover, even the firm policy of asking developed countries to invest 0.7% of their GDP in development aid remains ambivalent and contentious about what such an exogenous investment should mean for Africa without lapsing back into aid ideology or emergency intervention. The situation described above in the case of Africa and in the Nigerian context represents an antithesis to any hope for authentic, sustainable, and inclusive progress. Instead of ignoring the downsides by focusing on a very limited, one-sided set of indicators in measuring supposed progress, it would be more important to soberly and honestly take stock of the upsides and downsides of development.

Incomparable Peculiarity instead of geopolitical hierarchies

Terms such as aid, assistance, help, etc., are part of the social order that emerges on the background of cultural processes of differentiation. However, applying the terms themselves and the ideologies accompanying their use define and determine the goals and achievements they seek to achieve. The relational pattern of donor-recipient politics has been instrumentalised in maintaining the geopolitical underdevelopment status of Nigeria and other selected African countries as a condition of unilateral power relations. The donor-recipient ideology, which rhetorically obscures unfair trade relations and promotes mentalities of dependency, proves to be antithetical to the international community's goal of bridging inequality gaps in relation to the geopolitical South. We refer to the critique of this as geopolitical antithesis.

The consequences derived from empirical psychological research are emotional crises of self-insecurity and, in extreme cases, loss of identity. Otte considers this emotional area the most critical since the real question cannot be whether one is poor or disadvantaged, or developed or underdeveloped. The delimiting factor concerns all kinds of ideologies that instigate and propagate the feeling of being poor, disadvantaged, or underdeveloped [31]. This article argues that the effect of this ideology is dysfunctional. It is an ambivalence of evaluating African states based on external conditions while at the same time assuming that anything described as a standard or ideal may not be seen as coming from within but, in most cases, stems from other forms of preconditioned exogenous measures. This essay, however, does not argue that Africa or Nigeria should view international relations as reprehensible. The contemporary world has become increasingly interdependent. It is postulated here that the development approach should place more emphasis on indigenous people, culture, and thought patterns.

In the above context, it is observed that decades of development approaches by donors and recipients in the context of and in some of their struggling states like Nigeria are yet to respond to the holistic development agenda, let alone close the inequality gaps. This is because implicit inequality is built into the development approach as a driver of the overall ideology. Otte further concluded that the strength of such influential conditions, such as built-in inequality or geopolitical attributions and division of societies and races, leads to the constant struggle for dominance and (self-)consolidation of one society or social group against the other. The result, according to Otte and given the concrete experiences in parts of Africa, is the loss of motivation in the emotionally conditioned and traumatised societies, leading to social factors such as crime, drug abuse, disease and suffering, lack of prospects, etc. [31]. The above externalities are among the problems associated with some contemporary African states, Nigeria being an example. Mere monopolised or capitalist-driven systemic intervention that creates partitions and blocs of

geopolitical states can be more divisive than intervening. There should be grounds for deeper understanding and dealing with “interpersonal and personal dimensions such as worldviews, values, and motivations” [32].

Civil diversity instead of uniform consumer culture

One of the potential dangers of cultural encounters in the history of mankind is the tendency of one of the partner cultures to impose itself on the other, thus forcing adaptation or assimilation instead of enabling cooperation at eye level. The transnational liberal ideology that culminated in the concept of globalisation became merely an extension of further political and economic interests, but this time with principles embedded in market ideologies and international relations. Far from being value-neutral, however, the strong market orientation has led to a creeping displacement of indigenous values because their structural nature prevents them from holding their own in markets. The effect—the antithesis—is the devaluation of African consciousness and identity and the forced orientation toward everything that comes from outside as the only reality that is considered better, more valuable and desirable. The devaluation of African products and social forms within the framework of a market-oriented consumer culture does not just occur through direct coercion but predominantly insidiously, covertly, and effectively.

The above-mentioned bourgeois political influences exert strong pressure on the psychosocial behaviour of many people in Africa and lead to the devaluation of traditional skills and institutions. For example, social status is often measured by the ability to afford and wear foreign textiles; homemade shoes are castigated, while Italian shoes, for example, are considered a sign of prosperity. The natural hair of African women is devalued and a preference for other forms of hair decoration, popularly known as “Brazilian hair”, has been enforced. Local economies were squeezed to the point that local efforts became a sign of backwardness, while white-collar jobs or the ability to leave Africa or Nigeria were described as “status gains”. Local agricultural products began to suffer from excessive preference for imported products, and there are no fair exchange markets for the efforts invested in local products. Many of the economic products from Africa are simply considered inferior in international markets. Almost all of the well-known enterprises and factories that existed during the colonial presence have died out—competence, know-how and management have been poorly inherited. This negative effect is easily verifiable by looking at the increasing number of citizens from today’s Nigeria and other selected parts of Africa who daily cross the channels to reach the so-called lands of opportunity—the foreign civilisations. Significant civic, cultural, and educational efforts are needed to effectively counter the creeping undermining of indigenous self-awareness by orientation to the standardised consumer products of

international markets. We call this civic antithesis. It is a crucial dimension in escaping the trap of hidden neocolonial dependency.

TOWARD A POSTCOLONIAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY: A CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ETHICAL SYNTHESIS

The attempt to create a synthesis here is to establish a mediation between the development theories and the impact antitheses. Development models are generally highly layered and complex theories that are not static or infallible. The very notion of development presupposes implicit conditions or expectations for upward or downward movements that might represent progress or regress. It also has a normative component [19]. Despite all criticism of Eurocentric and (neo)colonial theories of development, we consider the idea of development in terms of overcoming suffering, poverty, hunger, disease, dependency, and abuse of power to be universal and ethically justified [19]. Cultures usually also have a dynamic component and strive for more development. However, the ideas of what this means in concrete terms are unquestionably plural. They elude clear measurability and the patterns of linear accumulation and are consequently only partially comparable. This leads to the postulate of recognising cultural self-determination as an indispensable dimension of development and quality of life.

Against this backdrop, this article argues that the multiple ambivalences and problems associated with the development policies of the past decades call for profound conceptual reforms. Having done so from an Afro-Nigerian perspective, this article argues that Africa awaits a paradigm shift in development reflections that emanates ad intra, i.e., from African leaders, attitudes, sentiments, and choices. What is needed is a revolution that takes place in the feelings, mindsets and behaviours of Africans themselves. A revolution combined with a reappraisal of traditional culture and which also develops it in light of the challenges of late-modern societies. The term development is understood intransitively in the sense of capacity building [16] as the activation of inherent potentials: “One does not develop someone, but oneself. Development cannot be exported. Help consists in improving the conditions under which others can develop and realise their potential” [1]. This is consistent with the principle of subsidiarity in Catholic social teaching [33]. Subsidiarity implies an understanding of development as cultural empowerment and economic capacity building. In terms of justice theory, the understanding of development on which this is based can be conceptualised as enabling justice [34].

The following socio-ethical synthesis is, therefore, intended to contribute some normative principles on which the proposed concept of culturally sensitive development could be based. The ethical character of the synthesis should point to the moral significance of all postcolonial approaches to development since elementary questions of justice, human

dignity and sustainability are at stake. Despite all the tension between poverty alleviation and ecological needs, we assume that a synthesis between nature conservation and human protection is possible. It is normatively required and programmatically underlies the concept of sustainability. For the ecological and developmental crises are not separate phenomena, but the last two sides of the same coin. Taking cultural factors into account can help considerably in finding eco-social intersections of development policy goals. The guiding principle here is a context-sensitive understanding of ecological humanity that links ecological and social potentials of indigenous traditions.

The Development Aid Ideology was Not Completely Wrong, But Multidimensionally Inadequate

The institutionalisation of a donor-recipient relationship of concrete aid in the fight against poverty as a response to development gaps cannot be considered entirely irrational [23,9]. It was an initial reaction to the movements and revolutionary voices from the Global South in the 1980s and 1990s against colonial failures and increasing forms of imperialist machinations. Aid or project-based assistance thus moved to the centre of development strategy as a sign of compensation, amelioration, and reparation. In general, however, this approach remained limited to development factors that should be harnessed for workable and desirable outcomes. For decades, massive financial and ideological aid has flowed into most countries of the Global South in the form of assistance. However, concrete structural, institutional, and infrastructural development needs have remained insufficiently developed. In extreme cases, the “donor gods” have enthroned gangs of corrupt domestic appropriators who continue the exploitation with their transnational and international accomplices. Nigeria is a case in point.

In many countries of the Global South, particularly in Africa, donor projects at times degenerated into a policy of waiting for opportunities to intervene and deliver aid to conflict and war zones on the continent. This pseudo-approach led to a kind of aid propaganda that began to market the image of Africa as overwhelmingly terrible, devastating, and irredeemable in order to attract donor aid. Without denying the obvious fact that there are suffering situations in Africa itself, the donor-recipient ideology was once again hijacked and made lucrative in the hands of some modern imperialists. As a result, other dimensions of the development narrative, such as the exchange of knowledge and technology and respect for and integration of cultural worldviews, have been grossly neglected. Much earlier, even before the Millennium Development Goals, John Paul II pointed out that aid programs are not absurd in themselves but are manipulatively diverted: “[...] how can one justify the fact that sums of money that could and should be used for the development of peoples are instead used for the enrichment of individuals or groups, or are used to

increase the stockpiles of weapons, both in developed and developing countries, thus confusing real priorities? This is all the more serious in view of the difficulties that often impede the direct transfer of funds intended for the support of needy and impoverished countries [35].

A socio-ethical call, therefore, is to depoliticise development assistance ad extra, i.e., within international politics, to focus on direct assistance to those in need rather than any political ends, and to shift the narrative ad intra, i.e., within Africa and in our context Nigeria, to strengthen rather than weaken awareness of ownership and capacity. It is recommended to shift from project-based ideologies to the creation of structures that promote responsibility and initiative [36]. This should be based on an independent assessment of leadership and a determination to reflect development policies in national reforms and budgets in order to build "effective, legitimate, and resilient state institutions capable of engaging productively with their populations to promote sustainable development" [37].

'Developed' and 'Underdeveloped' as Geopolitical Terms were More Socio-Psychologically Pejorative than Socio-Politically Relevant

Despite all the technical and politico-linguistic arguments for the relevance and utility of the SDGs, the blanket categorisation of one part of the world as underdeveloped simply because it lacks certain socio-political and economic vectors peculiar to the other parts of the world leads to negative effects on the psychosocial behaviour of those affected. Even the ideologies associated with the SDGs reserve this categorisation and tend to base approaches on it. The main drawback of this invocation of the developed/underdeveloped dichotomy is that it further deepens the sense of inequality and creates superiority/inferiority complexes in development relations. It is well known that this creates "strategies of exclusion and hierarchical ordering" [21] that often lead to the perception of others as insurmountably "foreign" and "different", as we mentioned earlier. Such a geopolitical dichotomy lacks the equal reciprocity in respect for the uniqueness of others that is necessary for integral developmental relationships.

This article proposes that post-utopian development policy, especially in managing the SDGs, should use "partnership" as a development mantra to emphasise intersubjectivity as a central development norm. It should make this a norm to rid postcolonial development rhetoric of all exclusivist and neo-imperialist tendencies. It must be a developmental value based on the phenomenology of feelings, in other words, reflected upon recognising the singularity and dignity of others, who are also emotionally effective [38]. However, such a culture of recognition does not emerge in isolation. It must be structurally secured in the long term through a multidimensional, plural and integral concept of development.

In this sense, development policy should have a participatory character, which Habermas likes to call an inclusive “we-perspective” [39].

Endogenous Self-Awareness is an Integral Part of Development Policy

Both the 2030 Agenda and the environmental encyclical Laudato Si’, published in the same year (2015) by Pope Francis, recognise the urgency of a paradigm shift to better respond to the identified failures and mistakes in the management of our current development ideologies. However, while the 2030 Agenda focuses on partnership leadership in changing approaches, methods, and modes of application, the Laudato Si’ encyclical argues for a fundamental shift that must take place in the attitudes and behaviours of development actors themselves, the people. It argues for a profound cultural change. This is the basis for the third thesis of this article for a new social-ethical synthesis in the approach to development and, in particular, in relation to selected countries in Africa: genuine and holistic development does not happen solely because of exogenous financial aid—this can only serve as a catalyst. Development is predominantly centred and based on indigenous attitudes and the will of the people concerned. It is and should be culturally rooted. The encyclical states, “It is necessary to respect the rights of peoples and cultures and to recognise that the development of a social group presupposes a historical process that takes place in a cultural context and requires the constant and active participation of local people within their own culture. Nor can the concept of quality of life be imposed from the outside, for quality of life must be understood within the world of symbols and customs peculiar to each human group” [13].

As the North reshapes its approach to development and cleanses it of the extreme capitalist and geopolitical vestiges of inequality, the fragile states of the South, led by Nigeria, must awaken from their slumber and relentlessly resolve to reform their states, ask themselves new questions about the rule of law, explore and harness the continent’s capabilities to prove themselves reliable partners and participants in the global platform. Those responsible for implementing the SDGs must continue to work to strengthen their value system of harmonising environmental, social, and economic goals and respect for diversity [40]. Without such a fundamental purification of mentalities and attitudes in both hemispheres, overcoming the structures of inequality, marginalisation, oppression and dependency will not be possible.

Towards an Applied Afro-European Interculturality

Normative reflection on preconditions of development is necessary for a sustainable understanding and successful implementation of sustainability in the Global South. The introduction of the concept of “ecological humanism” is intended to argue that genuine, authentic and

sustainable development is not possible unless development vectors and approaches reflect a new level of quality in the integration of ecological and human values. For Nigeria, it is appropriate to draw on the Mmadụ concept of Igbo culture in this regard. According to this opinion, the human person and all realities existing outside of him form a community of existence [41]. It includes both the intra-dependent (autonomous) level, where the agent of development, the human person, governs the conscious self through personal values and abilities, and the inter-dependent (transcendent and communicative) level, where the same conscious self, communicates with the other in a form of partnership that is mutual and does not exploit the other. Both the relationship with the community and the relationship with nature and one's own habitat are part of this partnership. One can paraphrase the Mmadụ concept as culturally, socially and ecologically embedded African humanism. It is a concept that links responsibility and individual development. It is consistent with a person-centred understanding of development that focuses subsidiarily on empowerment and participation. It is based on intercultural dialogue. It is suitable as a critical correlation to the implementation of the SDGs in Nigeria, which is still strongly associated with dependency relationships, abuse of power, corruption and cultural disenfranchisement. To the general situation of the human person in the Nigerian context and within the critique of the current concept of globalisation, this leads to "an attack on the individual person's right to develop his or her capabilities [...], choosing the life and making decisions he or she has reasons thereof" [41]. Therefore, the concept aims at a new form of development humanism that enables equal participation while respecting the uniqueness, values, worldviews, capabilities, approaches and understanding of the individual person or groups.

Based on the above proposal, a critical view emerges of development concepts that are predominantly donor-recipient based, wedded to the utopia of linearly measurable notions of progress, and fixated one-sidedly on increasing GDP and consumption. This article argues for a dialogue between Afro-Nigerian traditions and international development concepts in order to liberate efforts to overcome poverty and ecological responsibility from hegemonic baggage. We expect such a dialogue to provide remedies to the existing ideological and ethnological conflicts associated with development policy efforts to date.

The ecological humanism we propose pleads for a transition to a changed development policy that focuses on people's abilities and wants to develop them as the central "human capital" of development and make them responsible for it [3]; for a more in-depth analysis of the human-nature relationship with regard to indigenous (especially African) alternatives to modern essential dualism [42]. In doing so, it recurs in equal measure to the individual and the cultural community. It is not only technological advances or the dominance of the market by the production

partner that define the core of what development should be. There are always multiple cultural and social preconditions for technological discovery, economic initiative, and political conflict management. These preconditions are, first, the freedom of a people's ideas, the freedom to interpret and live and represent who they are, regardless of socially and politically imposed nomenclatures, and the freedom to think from and live by their cultural, social, and environmental values. Freedom and responsibility are thought of as an integral unit. Thus, in socio-political terms, "development as freedom" [16] is conceptualised. An important aspect of this is the "ecology of relationships" in the sense of ontological connectedness through the eco-social balance of giving, taking and exchanging [42]. In times of the Anthropocene, which brings forth a new kind of nature ethics, religions can contribute some crucial aspects of ethical and cultural reorientation and have established themselves as a political factor in the understanding and implementation of sustainability [43,44]. For Catholic social teaching, this is associated with a profound paradigm shift in the understanding of development and in dialogue with other religions, including indigenous religions [13].

This proposal of culture-centred development promotes sociopolitical resilience by using the hand-me-down survival strategies of local people, which are often many decades or even centuries old, as a store of experience. The resilience factor serves a dual purpose, namely.

1) the repositioning of development thinking within the Global North and the associated forms of political, economic, environmental, and cultural exploitation that tend to increase inequalities and social exclusion rather than close them;
2) promoting a sense of identity in the South (Africa and Nigeria as our example) to enable integral, socially inclusive, and ecologically sustainable development. Strengthening the sense of home, local values, and socio-cultural skills is, at the same time, an essential element of quality of life, which, however, cannot be directly measured by the increase in GDP.

The concept is person-centred in that it is the human being who first determines, in his freedom, his values and capacities and engages meaningfully and participatively in the one global world of interaction, exchange of ideas, and complementarity of market and economy. It's a concept of eco-social "human correspondence" [45]. In this sense, tendencies of domination, imposition, and dictatorship in general development relations are a bane to sustainable development and society. A concrete illustration in the Nigerian context is a degenerated sense of ecological humanism, which struggles to manipulate its way in the effort to remain relevant. However, in a borrowed robe. That is why a pair of shoes made in Abia State, a Southeastern hob for textiles and footwear, must be labelled "Italian" before it can prove itself worthy of purchase. That is why Nigeria has harboured only the assembly plant of the French

automobile manufacturer Peugeot since 1975 in the name of a shared economic relationship, yet without any technological contribution to the modelling and configurations. The only effect allowed and permitted is the imprint of the derogatory expression “Built for Nigerian Roads” written on the rear windscreen of Peugeot vehicles assembled in Nigeria. In contrast, the same economic relationship exists between the German Volkswagen automobile manufacturer and the Czech automobile manufacturer, Škoda. Yet, their peculiarities, indigenous identities, and freedom of innovation are distinctive to their technologies. This is what partnership, intercultural and associative development relationship means. This form of development ethics proposed here is understood as responsorial, in other words, as a response strategy designed to respond to the experiences of the shortcomings and challenges of previous development governance [46]. One can also paraphrase the starting point in the case of experiences of injustice and unsustainability as pragmatic-problem-oriented.

The anticipated strategy model for responsorial resilience must be reflected both in the attitude and in the systems. It is helpful to distinguish between specific and general resilience: specific resilience refers to individual parts of a system (e.g., a specific company), while general resilience refers to the interaction of the individual parts and, thus, to the system as a whole [46]. Following the opinion of this article, the concept of inclusive development aims to increase overall resilience. For this, broad participation is a key [8]. Therefore, as a development model, such resilience should focus on striving for robustness in change and reducing the vulnerability of people and social systems rather than expecting constant improvement. In this respect, it helps to create a less utopian, more problem-oriented and context-sensitive development ethic.

CONCLUSION: FROM DEPENDENCY TO EMPOWERMENT

If Nigeria, in particular, and some selected countries in Africa more broadly are to be capable of freedom, then the approach to development must change because freedom is essentially a state of mind. The decades-long perception that Africa has always been the victim of development policies has not helped Africa establish itself in the global economy and community. A new era must now dawn to mobilise the resources of the continent itself and make them subsidiary to change, liberation and holistic development. The temporal, geographic and civil development approach of the last decades has been extremely flawed and partly externally driven. Therefore, a necessary paradigm shift is to lead and direct development vectors from within. A revolutionary sense of autonomy must be rediscovered if the continent and its nations are to be “actors” of development and not perpetual “patients”. The establishment of “rights of nature” as protection against the exploitation of people and nature by international corporations [47], the associated understanding of the earth as home [14] and of frugality, mindfulness and beauty as

elements of quality of life [13,14] can be important points of reference here.

The allocation of status and performance characteristics in international geopolitical relations must be seen as a consequence of a truncated and hypocritical understanding of love and solidarity. In the name of love and aid, dependency relations have been created and the violation of principles of justice (e.g., in world trade) has been concealed. The African experience illustrates "how charity has been and continues to be misinterpreted and deprived of its meaning, with the consequent risk of being misinterpreted, disconnected from ethical life, and in any case (especially in neo-imperialist strategies) undervalued" [33]. There can be no real development if it is not the true freedom that comes from the independent attitude, culture and will of Africans themselves.

Africa needs to establish a functioning balance between governance and citizenship through a reformed, planned and disciplined fiscal system. This is not a miracle in the North. Rather, it is about common sense, discipline and responsibility. No development economy can survive with a culture of waste and corruption. Overdependence on the political and economic culture of consumption destroys the aptitude and ability to produce. Liberation from this tendency must be taught and internalised through education and awareness creation. The sum of the literacy rate in the case of Africa would be able to provide platforms for mutual reception and dialogue. However, the education that is provided must take up and integrate indigenous traditions much more than it has in the past. Only in this way will the promotion of self-confidence, values, and resilient identities succeed. One of the internal obstacles to development discourse remains the gap between development policy and grassroots ignorance. Education and development consciousness-raising, therefore, remain the basis for a free development culture based on the principle of subsidiarity for a sustainable Africa [12].

At the global level, the administration of the SDGs must open up new and reformed postcolonial approaches that examine the global failure to address the imperative of distributive justice. Poverty, suffering, and inequality remain systemic in international relations as long as production and consumption follow capitalist geo-economic monopolies of accumulation of power among corporations, financial institutions, and political representatives of the Global North. The structures of the world economy need a critical revision without falling into anti-capitalist patterns of thought. For Christian social ethics, freedom is a central value, with a close connection between political and economic-market freedom [48]. However, freedom is always a risk that requires a culture of initiative, responsibility and solidarity. Decades of dependency, heteronomy and corruption have destroyed a great deal of human capital, which can only be rebuilt slowly. Only if a revitalisation of value-based culture in Nigeria and other African countries is combined with fairness in global economic structures can the transformation to postcolonial development succeed.

DATA AVAILABILITY

All data generated from the study are available in the manuscript or supplementary files.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

MV initially addressed the broad concept of development and its significance in the postcolonial era within our current framework. CN applied the central ideas of MV's discourse, constructing a "Thesis-Antithesis" method to incorporate Afro-Nigerian experiences and, consequently, the Global South into the study.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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