

Aesthetics and National Development

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Abstract

Aesthetics refers to the study or science of beauty whereas development has to do with all-round progress in all cultural, economic, political, social life, and so on whether at the human or societal level. National development, then, is the progress made by a nation in its strive for self sustainable growth; it is all-encompassing as it deals with the total man and total nation in all areas of life without exception. In fact, it is total development which, of course, is itself dependent on the level of development of individuals that make up the nation. In this paper we intend to show the relationship between aesthetics and national development, and maintain that development itself is a beautiful phenomenon to behold.

Keywords: Aesthetics; beauty; development; progress; self-sustaining

Introduction

The interest and concern with aesthetics and national development are not new or novel ideal in philosophy. If we agree that aesthetics deals with the beautiful, and that national development is something good and desirable, then we would definitely be in line with the Greek philosopher, Socrates, who believed that the beautiful is concurrent with the good; that the beautiful and goodness go together like two faces of a coin. Aesthetics deals with the beautiful especially in works of art, and Plato in his quest for an ideal State or Republic saw the censorship of poets, and artists in general as fundamental for the emergence of a good society. He saw arts in general and aesthetics which is the contemplation of the beautiful in arts, as an instrument of moral and political training that was capable of bringing about the much needed wholistic development in the ancient Athenian society.

It is in line with this that this paper seeks to show and subsequently appraise the relation existing between aesthetics and national development. This can only be done successfully, after we might have thoroughly examined the key concepts of "Aesthetics" and "National Development" respectfully. It is true that in recent times, whenever the term "National development" is employed in a discourse, we readily turn our attention to our decaying social infrastructure and wish that we were in possession of modern gadgets, state-of-the art roads and so on. It is true that these indices have been used in recent times to distinguish countries of the metropolis from countries at the periphery. It has also been used to distinguish countries that are "developed" from those that are "developing" or worse still "undeveloped"

In this paper, we shall endeavour to analyze the concept of "development" and subsequently show that the understanding which identifies development with the sum total of visible social amenities made available to a people is only a partial understanding of what national development stands for. It will be established that national development is, in fact, an umbrella name for an all-round welfare, and in this sense, development deals with the total man, and the total nation. We would like to maintain that it is this sense that national development makes sense and is a beautiful thing to behold.

What is Aesthetics?

As defined in *The New Encyclopedia Britanica* (vol. 13:9), aesthetics is "the philosophical study of beauty and taste". For Moore and Bruder (1999:10), it is "the philosophical study of art and of value judgment about and of beauty in general". This two-pronged definition by Moore and Bruder, it would seem, is suggestive. It may suggest that aesthetics though chiefly concerned about beauty in art is also engaged in any general appraisal of beauty or that which can be said to beautiful. This position justifies the general aim of this paper which is to use the parameter of beauty in the evaluation of national development. Titus and Smith (1974:537) define aesthetics as "that branch of philosophy concerned with art and the nature of the aesthetic object, experience and values". Ozumba (2007:5) defines aesthetics "as the science of sense perception and intellectual intuition about the beautiful and the ugly and the whole range of natural and human artistic objects". Etuk and Akpan (1990:3) see aesthetics as "the science of the study of beauty". The last two definitions see aesthetics, first and foremost, as a science. This is true because it constitutes an organized body of knowledge on a well-defined subject matter, namely: beauty.

Although the aesthetics motive to evaluate beauty is natural to man, it was only recently that aesthetics as a subject and area of study gained prominence in philosophy. This means that even in antiquity, when there were no aesthetic theories with which one can evaluate beauty, man has always appraised works of art, nature and even fellow men as "beautiful" and "ugly" even though this might have been done unconsciously or in a rudimentary manner. It was in 1735 that the German philosopher Alexander Gottfried Baumgarten (1714-1762),

first used the term, "aesthetics" in his *Reflections on Poetry*. Etymologically, aesthetics is coined from the Greek word "aesthesis" which means perception. It has been observed by Blocker and William (1974:290) that, aesthetics is derived from the Greek word for human sensibility and was introduced by the German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten in the eighteenth century to broadly cover the investigation of the sensual dimension of human experience.

However as stated earlier, the concern with human delight and judgment of the value of the art and beauty dates back to the period of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and so on. This further strengthens our observation that even though there may not have been any explicit theories of aesthetic experience in classical antiquity, this does not in any sense presuppose that mankind has not been using the categories of beautiful and ugly in describing or even thinking about physical object and circumstances.

Aesthetics can be broadly divided into two namely: speculative and practical aesthetics. Ozumba (2007:11) explains that "speculative aesthetics is knowledge sought for its own sake rather than for the sake of its usefulness in action. Practical aesthetics on the other hand is knowledge that, by its very nature aids human action and is, therefore, sought not for its own sake but for the sake of action which it may direct".

What is Development?

The concept of development has been so over-used that one may be tempted to assume that there is universal understanding of the term. One may be surprised if he went about asking in a typical Socratic manner what development means, that many definitions that may be given would be either one-sided or may even lose the defining qualities of development. Walter Rodney (1972:10) has rightly observed that development is, in fact, a "many sided process". He also states that "at the level of the individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity self-discipline, responsibility and material well being. At the level of social groups, therefore development implies increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships".

It can be deduced from the above that development should be first and foremost, mental before it is translated to material terms and seen in our physical well being and improved living conditions. The tendency to see everything about development in term of provision of social infrastructures is very erroneous. This view of development is not well-founded and Igwe (1999:4) concurs with this when he states that:

genuine development is fundamentally of human beings in terms of ideals imbue in term the capacity to think qualitatively and tackle the problems that emerge out of their living conditions. It is important to note that the development of social infrastructure does not necessarily make a people developed if it is not matched with the equivalent mental development.

If we take Nigeria as an example, we will all agree that there is the presence of physical signs of development such as social infrastructure. But this does not reflect her level of mental development and this explains why most of her public utilities hardly function satisfactorily beyond few months of installation. A good example is the attempt by local and state governments to provide water for rural dwellers. In a matter of months, boreholes are drilled and water tanks are fixed. But with epileptic and inadequate power supply, water cannot be pumped for public use as planned. The overall aim is defeated and the site, overgrown with weeds. According to Igwe (1999:4), "the failure of a people's mental development to match their material development explains why many projects are started and abandoned half-way and why broken-down equipments litter the whole country. It also explains why her institutions are mere edifices bereft of form and content". Genuine development in any society, according to Rodney (1972:114), is its "capacity for self-sustaining growth."

Development is generally understood to mean an all-round progress. But the point we are emphasizing here is that it is first and foremost a mental and moral progress. Authentic development is measured as the sum total of "developed" individuals that reside in the society and how they contribute economically, politically, technologically, and so on. Development also has to do with accepting innovations in technology. This, as Anyim (1999:26) explains, "is why some developmental theorists make the assumption that development is synonymous with modernization". Others see development as synonymous with change and transformation. Offiong (1980:20) states that "modernization as defined by their arch priests like Wilbert Moore refers to the process whereby societies or social institutions change or move from traditional or less-developed ones to those that characterize the developed ones". Anyim (1999:27) writes that "there has been disillusionment with the modernization paradigm of development since the anticipated development has either not taken place in these developing countries or proceeded at the pace expected". It is in this sense that we can see that development also involves the aspect of making something become new or larger than it was. Genuine development emanates from a conscious application of well-formulated policies that are geared towards the goal of appreciating moral values and achieving the objectives of the people.

It is undisputable that development focuses on man and his overall well being. If this is true, then any purposeful development should be aimed at the development of the totality of man. While man strives in nature

to make himself comfortable in terms of material needs, it would be a great mistake if care is not taken to educate man about morality. One of the best ways to do this is through religion which should take care of man's spiritual development. This would ensure an all-round development since man is not just a material thing that exists in the physical, but he also has a spiritual dimension. Development to a large extent depends on the level of mental development of a people. This, in its turn, is dependent on how serious the people are with their education. Just as knowledge of nature and the ability to develop and handle scientific tools have aided scientific and technological development with its immediate benefits of improved economy and foreign earnings in the West, care should also be taken to ensure that there is moral development. This is needful because morality is necessary to guide us in the use of the knowledge and tool that scientific and technological development offers.

Kinds of Development

Since development is a multi-dimensional and many-sided process, any attempt at an exhaustive treatment of all kinds of development would, in fact, go beyond the scope and focus of this paper. A look at some kinds of development would serve to show the many-sidedness or multi-dimensional nature of the concept "development". In view of this, we are going to examine economic, social, political, technological and human development. There are definitely other classifications, but these classifications, we believe, are enough to show the vastness of true development. Let us now consider each of them, piece-meal.

Economic Development

The economy of a state is said to be developed when a great majority of its citizens live above poverty level. This implies that there is a high standard of living, increased foreign earnings which are dependent on the people's productivity, adequate social security for the less-privileged, and so on. On this view, Walter Rodney (1972:114) observed that "the capacity for self sustaining growth is the matrix of real development in any society". When a society can sustain itself, feed its population and ensure their overall comfort with better prospects for the future, then it can be said that such a society has strong economy. Without pre-empting the discussion, it is necessary to state here that measured against the above standard, many economies are found wanting. With looting of public funds by those entrusted with the mantle of leadership, abuse of privilege and inappropriate fiscal policies, it is not a total surprise that many countries are not named among the developed economies of the world. Most financial institutions are not helping matters at all. Rather than give loans to small and medium scale entrepreneurs to aid them in their endeavors which would have the multiplier effect of economic empowerment, employment opportunities, self-employment and so on, they prefer to give large sums to individuals who may not really need it. The fact that this was done in the face of the global economic recession that shook even the strong economies of the world, makes it more worrisome.

Social Development

Social development has to do with improved living conditions of the society. It embraces such areas as health care delivery, good roads, electricity, and provision of portable water and social security for the needy. It is this aspect of development that the layman refers to whenever the word "development" is mentioned, that is, the provision of social amenities and infrastructure. There is the felt need for urgent action with regards to this aspect of development. This is due to the fact that it has been observed that improved social conditions in terms of transportation, health care delivery, power supply, and so on, attract foreign investors. And this comes with the benefits of an improved economy, industrialization and so on. However, the prevalence of crime and lack of security as evidenced in rampant cases of kidnapping and armed robbery have, in recent times, exposed the inadequacies of many societies in their strive for social development. People misuse and, sometimes, even vandalize public property; and this shows that without moral and educational development which true human development entails, people's strive for social development and provision of social infrastructure is an effort without an enabling environment. An enabling moral and mental environment is necessary for social development to thrive, and this is achievable through education.

Political Development

Many scholars agree that poor leadership is at the centre of all if not some of the societal problems today. The political development of a society is measured by its just, social and political institutions, transparency in leadership, and peaceful mode of change in leadership that reflect the will of the people, and so on. Political development is, at present, not a reality in most nations. It can be safely stated that periodic free and fair elections are the litmus test of a nation's political development. This is due to the fact the ballot box is supposed to be the deciding point where electorates exercise their rights of suffrage for a better leader. But this process is often marred by violence and political thuggery. This often triggers off post election violence when the election results do not reflect the wishes of the people. Zimbabwe, Kenya and Guinea are cases in point. However, some nations have, in recent times set the pace of political development but in some nations, incidences where courts

of law have had to intervene and ensure justice with its attendant, instability in governance and distraction have shown that such nations are still backward politically. Lack of political development in some nations is because those nations have been beset with leaders who lack proper ideas or vision of how to attain sustainable development.

Technological Development

It is true that in recent times technology has assumed the position of the measuring rod with which many developmental theorists appraise a society as developed or undeveloped. Looking at countries with highly developed technologies, one is likely to conclude that all of development hangs on technology. But this is not so, Technology as a skill is born in an effort of a people at solving their various problems. It is dependent on the extent to which they understand the workings of nature and the extent to which they can apply that understanding using appropriate tools. It cannot be denied that countries like China, Japan, Britain, Russia, United States of America, and so on that are considered as developed countries are technologically driven and this goes with industrialization and increased foreign exchange earnings with its impact on the economy and improved standard of living. It is very obvious that some nations are technologically undeveloped, and almost everything they need is imported from the developed nations. Any nation without indigenous technology seems to be completely at a loss.

Human Development

Human development, as the name implies, aims at developing the man. It does not only aim at making a man to be able to survive in his environment, but also embraces moral development and education. Frantz Fanon as quoted by Anyim (1999:25) writes as follows:

let us not try to imitate Europe (or US, USSR, Japan); let us combine our muscles
and our brains in a new direction; let us try to create the whole man, whom Europe
has been incapable of bringing to being.

Our understanding of Fanon here is that he is advising Africans and other third-world countries to cultivate a kind of development that would be geared towards the whole of man; taking care of both his spiritual and material dimensions. Rather than see technical education as the ideal form of education due to its practical consequences, as Etuk (2007:14) notes, effort should be made to also give the kind of education “that would be equip men and women ... with the kind of education that would make them well-informed; well-rounded and cultured individuals and versatile and contributing members of the society”.

Human development is central to every other form or kind of development when one considers the fact that man is the fulcrum on which every developmental endeavour should revolve. This is why human culture should be safe-guarded and preserved in the face of all efforts at development since development was made for man, not man for development. This warning needs to be heeded to especially in the face of technological development. Etuk (2007:17) sums it up when he states that:

it would be a very poor and mindless trade-off if we should be prepared to be
produce generation of technically skilled persons but bereft of human values
and the great ideals of human life... such as, altruism, self-sacrifice, love of
the other persons, humility and honesty.

National Development

Having discussed development and some of its kinds, it is now time to look at our primary concern in this paper which is national development. We have seen that development is generally understood as a progress that leads to the emergence of qualitative and deniable phenomena. And anything that is “national” is seen as something attributable to a nation. In this sense, national development can be understood as the progress made by a nation in its strive for self sustainable growth. National development is all-encompassing. In fact, it is a total development. But the, a total development is itself dependent on the level of development of individuals that make up the nation. Igwe (1999:5) concurs with this when he writes that “national development is a function of mental development. A country is really as developed as the level and quality of ideas prevalent in her are”. Etuk (2009:14) in *Aesthetics, the New Media and National Development* writes that “development is a syndrome of a people’s all-round welfare, encompassing their economic, social, political, technological and human development. So development would have to do with the total man and the total nation”.

This serves to show that national development is a sum total of the various kinds of development. It is a total development that is geared towards self-sustenance. And it cannot come into being without concerted efforts in dealing with problems that may militate against it. National development, since it is dependent on how developed the individuals that make up the nation are, cannot take place, for instance, in a society where sizeable proportion if not the majority, is illiterate. It cannot take place in a society, for instance, where corruption and insincerity have eaten deep into its fabrics. This means that there is need to re-awaken the moral consciousness

of persons in the society if genuine national development is to be realized.

National development, as a wholistic development, embraces technology and its innovations. But it does not do this at the expense of morality. If we take the internet as an example, it is true that in a matter of seconds one can access archives for information from far-away places. It cannot be denied that this has aided researchers tremendously. But counting such gains, people should also count the losses they suffer from fraud to pornography and so on. This means that there is need for a wholistic development that would include a human development that upholds human values which should guide people on how to use the knowledge that technological development provides. As the development of the entire nation, National Development embraces all aspects of development; from the tangible to the intangible, the physical to the mental, the technological to the moral forms of development

Aesthetics and National Development: An Examination

Having viewed the concept of 'aesthetics' and 'development' respectively, we believe it not out of place to critically examine the aesthetic indignities that characterize national development landscape. This is based on the fact that aesthetics is one philosophical concept that permeates the entire field of human endeavour. It presupposes perception through which a person is able to appreciate and examine the beauty of his or her productive endeavours. Now, national development as we have seen, involves a carefully planned, holistic progress with the ultimate goal and aim of enhancing human life in the society. Thus, when national development is achieved, there is beauty, so we can safely state that man is inspired by his sense of aesthetics to add value to his life and the life of his fellow men. Hence, the relationship between aesthetics and national development can be clearly seen in the goals which they both seek to achieve. There is an aesthetic sense underneath every form or kind of development. A good road network in a city does not just fulfill its usefulness in easing transportation, but is also aesthetically satisfying. The modern well-built, air conditioned car with remote controlled ignition, doors, fuel tanks and boots is remarkably more beautiful and aesthetically satisfying than the early cars. All these are inspired by the aesthetic sense to bring about beauty in every facet of human life.

National development is one facet of human life that is not immune from man's natural craving for beauty. In fact, it encompasses all positive advancements. And any positive advancement whether in science or in arts is a progress from a previous status with the aim of bringing out more beauty and aesthetic worth in all we do. In our society today, there have not been faithful commitments to national development. This is why there is unequal treatment even in provision of social amenities. There are areas set aside to be inhabited by the rich. And in such areas, electricity, good roads and water supply are guaranteed. This smacks of all beauty because it appears that the leaders have distanced themselves from the plight of and circumstances of the led. This is the reason why Etuk (15) writes in *1st Professor Emmanuel Akpan Memorial Lecture* that "the creation and enjoyment of beauty is not consistent with a life lived in the midst of want and squalor; nor is it coherent with crime, violence fear, terrorism or insecurity". National development as we said earlier, is a many sided process; an all-round total development. And if we consider the different kinds of development that sum up to national development, we will find that there is no facet of development whether in technology, economic, political, social or human development that most societies have progressed reasonably along desired lines.

There are dwindling job opportunities for vast armies of employable individuals, no enabling environment for self-employment, poor health care delivery, poverty, hunger, insecurity of lives and property, infrastructural neglect, moral ineptitude, corruption, greed and prodigality on the part of the political leaders, violence, kidnapping crime, drug abuse, human trafficking, fraud and so on. This state of affairs unarguably portrays repulsive, unsatisfying, discomforting, unpleasant and irritating situation. These are the aesthetic indignities that have marred the quests for national development. The basis of the formulation of the society is undermined because the society which should be the platform for human self realization cannot live up to its expectation. Since individuals cannot be self-sufficient on their own, social philosophers saw the state as the platform which he can contribute his quota to an overall development while his own needs are in turn, taken care of. This is because the principal *raison d'etre* of the state, according to social philosophers, is the need for security, security of your limb, life and property.

It can be obviously seen that the quality of national development which gives worth and value is inspired by the sense of beauty in order and mutual cooperation and understanding that the human society evolved. But most nations have not been able to add value in a more significant dimension to the enhancement of the lives of its citizens. It is true that the application of aesthetic principles in man's daily activities can bring about changes, innovation and improvement. But failure to seek beauty, progress and perfection only leaves us with unpleasant circumstances as consequences. For instance, political development in most nations have been thwarted since it is characterized by political violence and thuggery, failure to conduct free and fair election, god-fatherism, politically motivated killings, imposition of the wishes of the rich and powerful against the will of the people, money politics, and so on. Technological development has been thwarted because of the unwillingness to fund technological research and these spills into the educational development, which has been

characterized by certificate racketeering, inappropriate funding which has led to brain drain, examination malpractice, impersonation, bribery, and so on. The aesthetic indignities like unavailability of drugs and modern medical equipments, have made it such that the rich and political elites often go abroad to seek medical attention but what option does this leave for the common man? How aesthetically satisfying is it that those in positions of authority send their children to schools in educationally advanced countries leaving the led with the option of no standard education owing to improper funding. Of what aesthetic appeal is it to observe that our long held and cherished values are fast eroded as in being replaced by inappropriate foreign models? There is need for a genuine development that would uphold cherished moral values while at the same time ensuring an all-round development in social, political, economic, technological, human and even spiritual dimensions. Such a development if it can be achieved in human society would no doubt be very aesthetically appealing.

Conclusion

National development is beautiful. It is a stage where all things work in a society. A stage where there is sustainable growth and progress in every facet of national life. It is an all-round, many-sided, multidimensional development. It should be guided by a sense of moral value and direction. The beauty of national development spreads into infrastructural development. Good and well-maintained roads are aesthetically appealing; bad roads are discomforting and annoying. Job creation and employment opportunities bring put the beauty and reward for education; unavailability of job opportunities after many years of education can be quite frustrating and distressing. Adequate power supply is a catalyst to economic development, a boost to small scale businesses and an advantage to self-employment inadequate power supply slows down economic development. Political thuggery, assassination, kidnapping, militancy, corruption, embezzlement of public funds are really ugly trends that need to be reversed if national development is to proceed along desirable lines. There is need to move beyond mere paying of lip service to national developing. We should implement policies and programmes that better the lot of the common man. It takes the political will of dedicated leaders and the faith and support of the led to reverse the why trend and thereby bring about the beauty in national development.

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