

## A PHILOSOPHICAL APPRAISAL OF DENIS GOULET'S IDEA OF AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

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### **Abstract**

*In our global community, the place of development cannot be overemphasized. Despite various approaches to overcome underdevelopment in Africa by African theorists, issues such as poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, and political instability, to mention a few, persist, hence the exploration of Denis Goulet's position on the idea of African development, which encapsulates the enhancement of human well-being, dignity, and freedom in achieving true development in addition to economic indicators. In Goulet's view, ethical principles that prioritise cultural identity, local knowledge, and participatory decision-making must be adhered to actualize sustainable development. The external models imposed by the West that seldom jettison indigenous values and social realities were critiqued and instead made a case for a pluralistic and context-sensitive framework. In Goulet's approach, there was a push for African nations to prioritise the promotion of authentic self-reliance, empowerment of the marginalized, and eradication of structural injustices. Having taken cognizance of Goulet's position, this study makes a further push by highlighting that other factors outside these are even more colossal. To this end, employing the analytical methods, this study shows that development is essentially a continuum, and how development is gained is less important than what benefits are obtained at the end of the development journey. It is therefore recommended that for African nations to effectively pursue sustainable and equitable development aligned with their unique histories and aspirations, new solidarities extending to the entire world must be created. Also, cultural and ecological diversity must be nurtured.*

**Keywords:** Sustainable Development, Ecology, Participatory Governance, Dignity, Freedom

### **Introduction**

It is important to admit that the sole responsibility of achieving internal development rests with underdeveloped societies themselves, as the measures required for development include political will spread throughout a population, judicious goal-setting and resource allocation, vigorous implementation of policies, among others. It is doubtful if one can adequately pursue development except through the process of nationalism. Thus, Silvert posits that "nationalism is the acceptance of the state as the impersonal and

ultimate arbiter of human affairs.<sup>180</sup> Accordingly, the growing trend toward awareness of nationhood is a quality of political development. It is an obvious fact that countries with low income are now engaging in awareness of national building, and also to make national identity stronger. Some European nations are now considering a new way of what it means to be independent culturally, economically, and politically, while Africans are frankly looking for ways to fulfill their destinies since they are no longer under the control of European and American colonizers.

Parts of nationalism cases that needed to be resolved using certain moral rules are (a) for men to be human, they must have enough, and (b) people should be able to make decisions concerning matters affecting them. Through these moral rules, there is a need for an accurate plan to accomplish the goals of development, which could sustain people's life, boost their self-esteem, and also guarantee their freedom. Nonetheless, policy makers, as a matter of fact, must devise appropriate strategies that suit their own specific areas of decision, and also the underdeveloped countries need to improvise ways of dealing with other nations so as to enhance their development.

This study was informed by the recent COVID-19 pandemic that caught the perceived developed nations unaware, as they were thought to have reached the highest pinnacle of development; hence, the need to examine Denis Goulet's idea of African development and look at how to augment the flaws contained therein, and see how African leaders could explore the advantages of his ideas. This work observes that development is a continuum.

Denis Goulet's philosophy of development is deeply rooted in ethics. He rejected purely economic models that measured development solely in terms of GDP or industrial output. Instead, he suggested that development must involve the 'enhancement of human well-being', 'freedom', and 'self-determination'. His tripartite model of development consists of life-sustenance, that is, ensuring that people have access to the necessities of life such as food, shelter, health, and protection; self-esteem – fostering a sense of worth, dignity, and respect, especially among historically-marginalised peoples; and freedom – granting individuals and communities the ability to make autonomous choices and shape their own destinies. Goulet was of the opinion that African development should not be an imitation of Western modernisation but must instead grow organically from the continent's own cultural and social realities. Goulet elucidated three development foundations in which Africans can prosper, which include cultural authenticity, ethical development, and participatory empowerment. In sum, Goulet construes development "as a social concept standing for the process through which

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<sup>180</sup> K.H, Silvert, *Expectant Peoples: Nationalism and Development*, New York: Random House, 1963, 19.

human beings strive to improve the conditions of their lives.”<sup>181</sup> If we may amplify Goulet’s view, what should constitute the ultimate goals of development are those things which are to provide all men with the opportunity to live a full human life. Here, a few basic questions that attract our attention have to do with the kind of development that could be said to be human, how to acquire such developments, and also to know whether the gains of development could be achieved without tampering with the freedom of the people in the process.

### **Understanding Development from Various Perspectives**

Around the twentieth century, many economists, particularly the orthodox economists, saw development in a conventional way as relating to challenges of economic growth that had to do with the increase of material goods, but never envisaged that technology could be expanded in the future. In a similar vein, Friday Iyoha construes development as “one in which the gross national product (GNP) or per capita income experiences sustainable growth.”<sup>182</sup> From this assertion, it is obvious that Iyoha’s notion of development is predicated on the economic situation of a particular society inasmuch as gross national product has yielded a considerable growth. What vitiates Iyoha’s position is the fact that he failed to take into consideration the political stability of that particular society. Enegho maintains that development implies equitable distribution of goods and services, but the researcher failed to explain what happens when these goods are concentrated in the hands of a selected few, especially in a capitalist economy. Karl Marx views development as man’s ability to appropriate his essence in a total manner, as a whole man. It is a holistic vision in which mankind assumes control of his destiny.<sup>183</sup> It is inferred from both Karl Marx and Enegho that development is achieved when people are able to live a modern or civilised life with unfettered access to basic facilities such as good roads, quality health care services and education, among others. Obviously, what we are experiencing in Africa is the opposite of these views, as Nigeria is believed to be running a capitalist economy.

Claude Ake sees development differently, but admits that, to some extent, economic growth determines its possibility. Ake, in *A Political Economy of Africa*, attributes forces of imperialism as the reason for the difference between Africa and the West in terms of development. Ake compared the characteristics of the colonial and post- colonial relation between Africa and its overlords and posits that the work is “a highly abbreviated account of the underdevelopment of Africa to understand the main features of the structure of

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<sup>181</sup> Denis Goulet, *The Cruel Choice: A New Concept in Theory of Development*, New York: Atheneum, 1971: vii.

<sup>182</sup> Felix Enegho, “Philosophy as a Tool for Sustainable Development in Nigeria”, *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 14(3), 2002:156.

<sup>183</sup> Karl Marx, *Economy and Philosophic Manuscript of 1844*, 1964. New York: New York International Publishing, 1964: 15.

the colonial economy is also to understand why Africa is so underdeveloped today.”<sup>184</sup>

Suffice it to say that Ake also clarifies how the imperialist forces with a biased mind purposely influenced various sectors of African economy – transport, trade (exports and imports monopolisation of commodities), manufacturing, and industries, among others., to their advantage. Ake then, on the development of a people, raises an issue about the consequences which monopolistic tendencies could generate thus:

One of these is that the monopoly under review contributed greatly to the rise and persistence of statism, that is, the large and all-important role of the state in society, particularly in economic life.... Second, is the fact that the monopolistic tendencies in question helped to create the contradictions between a very important contradiction between economic and political power, which became a very important contradiction in the post colonial era.<sup>185</sup>

For obvious reasons, it could be said that Ake’s submission was not different from the neo-Marxist thesis that blames African “under-development” on external factors, not forgetting that internal factors also account for the under-development of nations. It becomes necessary for any nation that wishes to grow to adopt internalist-externalist modes of development, that is, a development perspective that posits correct development perspective should combine generative roles of the mind and its interaction with the external stimuli to formulate development theories. He adds thus:

Development is also not a project but a process. Development is the process by which people create and recreate themselves and their circumstances to realize higher levels of civilization in accordance with their own choices and values. Development is something that people must do for themselves, although it can be facilitated by the help of others. If people are the end of development, as is the case, they are also necessarily its agent and means. Africa and the global environment are to be taken as they are and not as they ought to be.<sup>186</sup>

The assertion here can be said to be true since leaders of many nations especially those of the Global South make their people to believe that development is a project.

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<sup>184</sup> J. C. Chukwuokolo, *Reason in Development: Towards a Rationalist Theory of Development*. Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2016: 16.

<sup>185</sup> Chukwuokolo, *Reason in Development*, 34

<sup>186</sup> Ade Claude, *Democracy and Development in Africa*, Washington, D. C: The Brookings Institution, 1996: 2.

However, Goulet's contribution to the study of development is not only normative but practical, as he offers a comprehensive analysis of development, from an ethical point of view, by formulating general principles in almost all relevant aspects of development, that is., technology and ethics, culture and tradition, the ethics of aids. Development theories and practices were also examined together with their relations to social justice, human rights and some basic amenities. He tries to analyse development using the development ethics paradigm, which consists of targeting the ethical goals and ways of achieving those objectives. Goulet's opinion is that development "is a social concept standing for the process through which human beings strive to improve the conditions of their lives."<sup>187</sup> What can be deduced from this assertion, if we may amplify Goulet's view, is that what gives men the freedom to live well should constitute the ultimate goals of development. To demystify his point, Goulet highlighted two aspects of development, which are the tangible or technical aspect and the intangible or moral aspect. The tangible aspect of development has to do with material progress, with concerns in the control and exploitation of the physical environment, and the application of the results of science and technology, whose main aim is human well-being, which M.S. Swaninathan calls "livelihood opportunities."<sup>188</sup> The intangible aspect of development involves the relationship among people, which will lead to the reduction of social inequality and the enhancement of positive social values like freedom, justice, tolerance, compassion and cooperation. Though the tangible is the most realistic if properly harnessed, the intangible is very important, but with the mindset of our leaders who are myopic as to what should constitute genuine development, or maybe the attitude of the winner takes all often employed by our politicians, and the realization of the intangible aspect of development seems unrealistic.

In spite of the shortcomings associated with both aspects of development, it is a truism to affirm that development is nothing but human development, for its main objective is the human's well-being in its material and moral dimensions. Evidence of this was seen in Amartya Sen's essay titled *Human Development*, where he argues about human development that, "it is thus about expanding the choices people have, to live lives that they value and improving the human condition so that people have the chance to live full lives."<sup>189</sup> So, it is much more than economic growth, which is only a means of enlarging people's choices. For Sen, fundamental to enlarging these choices is to build human capabilities, that is, the range of things that people can do or be in life, that is, the freedoms a person enjoys to live the kind of life he/she reasons to value. So, if the people at the helm of affairs of a nation can sincerely invest in

<sup>187</sup> Denis, *The Cruel Choice*, vii

<sup>188</sup> Oladipo Olusegun, "Issues in the Definition of African Philosophy", *Core Issues in African Philosophy*, Ibadan: Hope Publications Ltd., 2006: 95.

<sup>189</sup> Amartya Sen, "Human Development", 1988, retrieved from <http://www.developmenteducationview.com/issues-focus>, April, 2013, 15.

people, we believe this will enable growth and empower people to make different choices of careers, which will, in turn, develop human capabilities. It is crystal clear that the symptoms of authentic development, if we may say includes general development, technological advancement and industrialization, political stability, cultural development, and human security. From these indicators, it is an obvious fact that the enhancement of development does not rest solely on economic indices, it encompasses both financial and material part of human lives and as such development should therefore be seen in a multi-dimensional way involving the reorganization and changing the direction of the whole economic and social systems as well as to improve the income which typically involves radical changes in institutional, social and administrative structures as well as attitudes, beliefs and customs as enunciated by M.P Todaro where the researcher opines that, “a multi-dimensional process involving changes in structures, attitudes and institutions as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and the eradication of absolute poverty.”<sup>190</sup> In essence, development must represent the gamut of changes by which an entire system tuned to diverse basic needs and desires of individuals and social groups within that system, then moves away from a mode of life widely seen as unsatisfactory towards a mode of life regarded as materially and spiritually better. Succinctly put, the emphasis here is on the substantive issues of the quality of human life enjoyed by the people.

Goulet believes that most African countries were rich in cultural values from which they got their identity and what life means; hence, respecting these values would free them from the manipulations of the elites, which implies that people are the object of change, which is an invitation to institutions yearning for development to reorient their plans by giving their citizens ample opportunities to make free choices as relating to their own lives and development path. Further, some argue that development ethics should criticize human deprivation whenever it exists, including in rich countries and regions, since they too have problems of poverty, powerlessness, and alienation. Some have argued that perhaps the socio-economic model that the North (developed nations) has been exporting to the South (developing nations) results in the underdevelopment of both. Also, just as the (affluent) North exists in the (geographic) South, the (poor) South exists in the (geographic) North.<sup>191</sup>

It is argued that development is interested not so much in the growth of an economy but rather in the conditions under which production occurs and the results that flow from it. In terms of conditions, development pays attention to

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<sup>190</sup> M. P. Todaro, *Economics for a Developing World*, London: Oxford University Press, 1982: 87-88.

<sup>191</sup> A. D. Crocker, “Toward Development Ethics”, *World Development*, 19(5), 1991: 9.

the environments affected by economic activity and the labour relations and conditions of the actual producers of wealth, that is, the peasants and workers who produce growth, hence the growth that wrecks the environment, and deadens working life is not development. Development also attends to the social consequences of production. The growth that merely concentrates wealth in the hands of a few cannot be said to be development as well. Most contentiously, development plays an important role in analyzing who controls production and consumption. If the growth process is controlled by a few powerful people rather than the many people who make it possible, it is not development. Development occurs when growth does not subject people to an incessant bombardment of consumption inducements that invade every corner of life. Development brings hope, and it is utopian.

Just as was explained by Marx, that development is quite different from growth, development springs from the most optimistic moment of the modern rational belief, whereas mere growth is practical, technological, but also class-prejudiced thought. The benefits of development would be felt on the nation's economy, enhanced by society's culture that determines how people live.

### **Goulet's Perspective on African Development**

Goulet is a pioneer figure in development ethics; his work centred on the critique of conventional models of economic growth by advocating for a human-centred approach to development. His development ethics provides a transformative lens through which African nations can pursue sustainable and equitable development aligned with their unique histories and aspirations.

Goulet was of the opinion that African development should not be an imitation of Western modernisation but must instead grow organically from the continent's own cultural and social realities. He strongly condemned what he terms 'developmentalism' in terms of modernisation which African leaders blindly pursue and argued that this often leads to alienation, dependency, and the erosion of indigenous identity as captured by M. Berman who writes thus "modernity promises us adventure, joy, growth, power, transformation of ourselves and the world – and at the same time threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are."<sup>192</sup>

Consequently, Goulet as cited by Astroulakis Nikos, identified three development foundations under which African nations can thrive, which include:

- (a) Cultural Authenticity: here, Goulet underscores the importance of creating development in African traditions, languages, and value systems. He believed that true development must be in tandem with a society's cultural norms and historical experiences. For any meaningful development to take place, especially in Africa, for instance, where traditional institutions have been disrupted by colonial heritage, restoring cultural

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<sup>192</sup> M. Berman, *All That Is Solids Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity*, London: Verso, 1983: 15.

authenticity was a moral imperative. (b) Ethical Development: Goulet's philosophy of development is deeply rooted in ethics. Goulet construed development as an ethical process that must prioritize justice, equity, and the common good. He therefore suggested that African leaders and policymakers must resist corruption and elitism, as these to him were not just a technical enterprise but a moral step that must involve ethical leadership and accountable governance. (c) Participatory Empowerment: Goulet argued for participatory development, where local communities play an active role in making decisions affecting their future. Goulet frowned at top-down approaches used by international donors and governments; instead, he suggested that African development must empower the poor and marginalized to be agents of change.<sup>193</sup>

However, Goulet criticises neo-colonial influences in African development, which often come in the form of foreign aid, thereby enabling multinational corporations and international financial institutions dictate terms that put Africa under perpetual dependency rather than fostering self-reliance, which was buttressed by Toyin Falola, cited in Femi Omotoso, who argues that:

To concentrate on the economic history of the developed nations in the hope that by so doing, the developing countries could be transformed is false thinking. It cannot be reasonably argued that an understanding of the economic history of the U.S.A, for example, can lead to economic development of, say, Nigeria. There are differences in historical experience, physical environment, national resources, and other factors.<sup>194</sup>

Goulet, therefore, advocates for a rethinking of global economic relations that often placed African nations at a disadvantage through unfair trade terms, debt burdens, and exploitative investments. Furthermore, Goulet argued, Africans must be wary of being turned into imported models and instead opt for homegrown solutions and consequently warned against 'technocratic development', that is, approaches that prioritize economic growth and technological progress at the expense of human dignity and ecological sustainability.

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<sup>193</sup> Astroulakis Nikos, "Ethics and International Development: The Development Ethics Paradigm", *East-West Journal of Economics and Business*, xvi(i), 2013: 104.

<sup>194</sup> J. G. Onyekpe, "Issues in Development: Nigeria", *Readings in Political Behaviour*, Femi Omotoso, (ed). Ibadan: Johnmof Printers Ltd., 2007, 75.

## A Critique of Goulet's Idea of African Development

Goulet observes that an acceptable definition should accommodate (a) economic component related to wealth, social amenities and how to distribute them equally (b) sound health, affordable housing, education, employment and so on (c) political freedom and human rights protection (d) cultural elements, to protect people's identity and self-esteem; and (e) system of meaning which symbolizes values that people place on their lives.<sup>195</sup> Thus, the statements above are a reflection of what Goulet calls authentic development. One thing that stands out in Goulet's idea of African development was his allusion to cultural values. Goulet was of the opinion that Africa would experience tremendous development by respecting their cultural values. As plausible as this may sound, Goulet forgot to reflect on the ecological environmental status, which has been largely affected by technological advancement. Development is a crucial ecological problem in the sense of the term 'ecology', which means (a) biology, which studies the relationship between organisms and their environment, and (b) sociology, which deals with people and institutions. Goulet failed to consider this important factor, forgetting that a sound and healthy environment is the bedrock of authentic development. Bear in mind that through the concept of cultural diversity, African communities have differences in historical experience, physical environment, and national resources, among others. Then, do cultural values identified by Goulet mean the same thing in every community in Africa? What is the panacea for the degrading roles technology plays in our environment as it relates to ecological health? Just as K.C Lynton observes, "it becomes imperative to say that the cosmos has been altered by technology, which makes it impossible for natural balances to re-establish themselves independently of human intervention."<sup>196</sup>

Following from this, it is an indication that the development process comes with challenges of how man is to relate with other organisms and to his environment, considering the myriad problems confronting the African nations daily. Using the framework of Goulet's idea of African development, therefore, this paper proposes that contemporary Africa should not exist in isolation, but Africans should, nonetheless, be critical of any ideology that is alien. In the same effort, Africans should be genuinely committed to solving the African problems by applying the tools of criticality, creativity, innovativeness, and, in fact, originality.

Also, there are other inadequacies in his work. However, an important aspect that Goulet failed to analyse fully has to do with ethical value relativity and popular participation. In regard to ethical value relativity, societal value systems are threatened by changes, and social change is one of the main

<sup>195</sup> Gasper, "Denis Goulet and the Project of Development Ethics", 11.

<sup>196</sup> Gilbert Rist, *The History of Development: from Western Origin to Global Faith*, London: Zed Books, 1997, 212-3.

components of development. So, if we accept that development affects values of society and vice versa, then the concept of 'existence rationality' should be investigated, which he saw "as the process by which a society devises a conscious strategy for obtaining its goals, given its ability to process information and the constraints weighing upon it."<sup>197</sup> In other words, rational existence rationality is seen as what is obtainable in any society and also serves as a determining factor to fulfill societal objectives. Also, the core value of existence rationality is the provision of those ingredients that define a good life.

The assertion that participation is an essential component of development makes political elite, government officials, policy makers, specialists, etc view development as a matter of competence, which is the direct opposite of the conventional approach to issues of decision-making. Just as Ivan Illich underlines, "participation is deprofessionalization in all domains of life to make ordinary people responsible for their own well-being."<sup>198</sup> Ethicists see participation as a way in which people become agents and deciders of their destiny, thereby fashioning their own system of development. But the shortcoming that is noticed here is that Goulet failed to tell us to what extent the populace's participation should occur. Also, development was seen to have multiple interpretations in that it is either used descriptively or normatively. Thus, the descriptive usage was seen in various writings on development and academic literature of various disciplines. While in the normative usage, this was seen in the criticism of some authors who tried to project different visions that could be ethically better off.

Consequently, Goulet failed to address the undue influence of foreign bodies on Africa, which could also count as the bane of development in Africa. Apparently, the Nigerian political leaders believed that assistance from Western countries to the development of Third World countries cannot be wished away, whereas modernization theory was the paradigm floated by Western nations to enslave the third World countries. This implies that adopting the proper measure is the only way out of backwardness. Another shortcoming of Goulet's development ethics is that his definition of development was not centered on the African perspective because Africa and the West are different in geographical, climatic, environmental, and cultural situations; hence, Africans cannot build as in the West.

### Conclusion

It is imperative to note that development is not about the permanence of the condition of people. It deals with changes that promote the betterment of humanity and the progressiveness of human welfare. Thus, self-interest, self-gloryification, and self-promotion are anti-development, which the present

<sup>197</sup> Denis, "Ethics and International Development", 105.

<sup>198</sup> Denis Goulet, *Development Ethics: A Guide to Theory and Practice*, New York: The Apex Press, 1995, 91.

culture of Nigeria is. Also, when we talk about development, its processes are both cruel and necessary; necessary in the sense that all societies must realize that new things are evolving, and cruel because development gains are obtained only at a great price and also far from the truth that gains of development would make men happier, hence development remains a harsh process.

It is Eurocentric to make Western standard a paradigm that other countries of the world must meet. So, to concentrate on the economic history of the developed nations in the hope that by so doing, the developing countries could be transformed is false thinking. In fact, inasmuch as the gaps between the rich and the poor continue to widen and African countries are still not free from debt-servicing, then development choices would continue to be cruel. It cannot be reasonably argued that an understanding of the economic history of the U.S.A, for example, can lead to economic development of, say, Nigeria. There are differences in historical experience, physical environment, national resources, and other factors.

Also, it is not out of place to say that development is a continuum, as no nation can boast that it has reached the highest stage or level of development because new events and challenges are evolving on a daily basis. To this end, African leaders are encouraged to pursue development that is not only effective but also ethical, not only economic but also cultural, and not only institutional but also deeply human. African leaders, especially Nigerian leaders, must do away with the principle of self-promotion, but instead embrace cultural authenticity, human-centered policies, and ethical leadership both in principles and practices,<sup>199</sup> which will make African countries become the pride of nations.

Importantly, development is original (creative) from within, should not be a copy. The imported cars and machines should not be considered as development for a developing country. Articulation and unveiling of inner potentials of the resources of a given society should form the foundation for sustainable development. So, continued progression of this developmental program is integral. Thus, the ability of African leaders to ponder on these few analytical reflections would result in an auto-creation of a developmental consciousness of all people, one that can enhance African development.

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<sup>199</sup> Kwasi Wiredu, “*Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*”. Indiana University Press, 1998: 15.

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