

Re-Imagining Africa

Presented by Narciso Matos, Executive Director of the Foundation for Community Development at the closing plenary of “Our World, Our Responsibility, Re-Energising Civil Society, a conference organized by Inyathelo, the South African Institute for Advancement, Cape Town, November 2009. Co-authored with Dr. Ragendra de Sousa, PhD in Economics and consultant.

Outline

1. The meaning of Development
 - 1.1 Historic evolution of the concept
 - 1.2 Human centered and comprehensive concept of Development
 - 1.3 African values which can imbed Human Centered Development

2. Conditions necessary to bring about Africa's Development
 - 2.1 Education, training and research
 - 2.2 Cultural identity and mental and economic emancipation

3. Africa's advantages to attain Development
 - 3.1 Rich and untapped biodiversity
 - 3.2 Natural, mineral and water resources
 - 3.3 Relatively young population

4. Requisites to get where we must be in the future
 - 4.1 Good national governance
 - Rule of law
 - Respect for human dignity
 - Peace and stability

 - 4.2 Regional integration

 - 4.3 Continental and international cooperation and solidarity

5. Conclusion

1. The meaning of Development. The future Africa we dare to dream

At outset the question to ask is the following: is Development equal to mimic and catch up with the successful nations of the world? What is indeed Development?

1.1 Historic evolution of the concept

First, Development meant the industrial revolution in the tradition of the United Kingdom and its followers. Post Second World War, especially in the socialist/communist world, Development meant first and foremost building “heavy industry”. By the fifties and seventies, at the advent of Africa’s liberation, Development became equal to agricultural revolution, to the “green revolution” after the examples of India and Latin America. More recently, in Africa, the concept of “green revolution” is being revisited, without necessarily spelling out its new or meaning to Africa.

All along, Development was generally seen as mostly an economic phenomenon. The discussion focused on growth of per capita GDP and relatively little attention was given to poverty alleviation, reduction of unemployment and income distribution.

1.2 Human centered and comprehensive concept of Development

The 1990s moved to a broader concept of Development: *“The challenge of development...is to improve the quality of life. Especially in the world’s poor countries, a better quality of life generally calls for higher incomes - but involves much more. It encompasses as ends in themselves better education, higher standards of health and nutrition, less poverty, a clean environment, more equality of opportunities, greater individual freedom and richer cultural life”*

This wider definition is clearly a great advance compared to the narrower previous discussion of economy-centered issues. However, it still fails to take adequate account of relational factors.

A new vision of Africa is exemplified by the ideal of “The African Renaissance Movement” which portrays development as a process of social transformation that implies not just quantitative but also qualitative change.

It defines “*Development as the process of a country moving towards greater inclusion, health, opportunity, justice, freedom, fairness, forgiveness, and cultural expression*”.

The eight factors within the definition can be expanded as follows:

”Inclusion” refers to political, economic, and social inclusion. The goal in society should be to ensure that every person in the population can participate fully in political, economic and social life.

“Health” means not just absence of disease, but should be understood as the positive sense of well-being in body, mind and spirit, and with sound nutritional status.

“Opportunity” includes access to education for everyone in society to achieve literacy, numeracy, and at least primary education, access to healthcare, the opportunity to work, the opportunity to participate in political

and economic decisions that affect daily life, the opportunity to develop musical and artistic talent.

“Justice” refers not only to the objectivity and freedom of operation of courts, but to whether the justice system succeeds in rebuilding relationships between offenders and victims, and between offenders and the wider society.

“Freedom” includes the freedom from fear, oppression, discrimination, hunger and mal nutrition; it also includes freedom for cultural expression, pursuit of personal and family goals, freedom to nurture children, to provide for one’s elders, and freedom to understand the wider trends affecting local, national and global society.

“Fairness” is not just about the differentials in wealth and income between individuals or sections of society, but is also the distribution of property, access to jobs in both the public and private sectors.

“Forgiveness” means the offended person stops repeating the story of the offence and hurt and releases the offender from the sense of guilt, and both and jointly the offended and offender focus on a new beginning and on rebuilding newer relationships.

Finally, “Cultural Expression” is the process of a society bringing to life its beliefs and values through literature, music, art and drama, which contributes to molding its unique identify.

|

1.3 African values that can imbed Human Centered Development

Inclusion, hospitality, and sharing are some of Africa's cultural traits that Africa should preserve and offer to other cultures and civilizations.

Africa's greatest strength lies in the way it handles many aspects of personal relationships.

For example, the Zulu concept of "UBUNTU", meaning "personhood" suggests that it is through relationships that people discover who they are, how they should live their lives, and what life is all about.

2. Conditions to bring about Africa's Development

2.1 Education and Training

The primary requisite for development is the existence of well-educated, trained and healthy citizens.

Education at all levels is a key condition for Development. We must overcome illiteracy, especially among women. We must achieve universal and equitable access to quality primary and secondary education that teaches values and imparts meaningful skills.

We need post-secondary, vocational and professional training that is responsive to society and community needs.

We need continuous and non-formal education (apprenticeship) that is recognized and certified and contributes to Development.

We need quality and diversified public and private higher education. We need university research output and extension related to country and community priorities:

- to relate training in contents, level and diversity to the requirements of the development process;
- to concentrate research on problems related to the reality of the country and the needs of the development process;
- to transform internationally available knowledge and make it available and applicable to local conditions;
- to contribute to the discussion of development goals, the selection of means, and the evaluation of achievements;
- to participate in a lively communication between university, the public, and politicians;
- to identify and contribute to the valorization of endogenous knowledge and values.

2.2 Cultural identity and mental and economic emancipation

Africa and Africans must believe in their own ability to build prosperous societies. We must overcome the syndrome of aid-and-dependence which creates a sense of powerlessness and vulnerability. We have to dare to imagine and help create a world beyond World Bank, IMF and Bretton Woods institutions and policies.

We must value our cultural heritage but also research and disseminate the positive side and effects for e.g. traditional remedies.

3. Africa's advantages to attain Development

Africa will not develop in isolation and closed to the rest of the world. But it must be able to identify and leverage its advantages.

3.1 Rich and untapped biodiversity and ecosystems

Africa is a continent with great potential in terms of genetic and ecological diversity. New species and unique ecological ecosystems are being discovered and can give Africa a unique comparative advantage. Bio genetic patenting is today a multimillion dollar business with a potential to benefit Africa.

We should focus our attention in studying, mapping out and patenting our biogenetic resources and develop industries based on African natural and indigenous resources such as in medicine, for which demand is increasing in the world.

3.2 Natural, mineral and water resources

Africa is endowed with vast natural, mineral and water resources. But, by themselves these resources mean little, unless they are combined with adequately trained human resources to add value and ultimately bring about Development.

3.3 Relatively young population

While the early developers face aging populations, increased costs of retired citizens, Africa's population is overwhelmingly young. Our challenges are on health (especially malaria, HIV-AIDS, water-borne and poverty-related diseases), education and training. We therefore have the ore, the raw-material, we need to work on it, to lapidate it, to uncover the hidden jewell.

4. How to get where we must be in the future

4.1 Good governance

More recently there have been advances in this front. An increasing number of African nations embrace universal concepts of democracy, rule of law and respect for human dignity.

There seems to be development also of a climate of Peace and Stability, notwithstanding hot and worrying spots where there is still much human suffering.

4.2 Regional integration

This is a necessity for Africa to overcome boundaries pose by one-nation, small-size and small-markets and become competitive.

SADC, ECOWAS, East Africa Community, etc. are making slow but steady progress, and there is no real substitute to their development.

4.3 Continental and international cooperation and solidarity

Africa Union and its institutions are struggling, but by and large they move in the right direction and point to what needs to happen. We are generations away from the “United States of Africa”, but there is no denying of AU’s progress compared to its predecessor institutions like the Organization of African Unity, which also served us well during the days of independence struggles.

CONCLUSION

I dream and have no nightmares about Africa in the coming 25 – 30 years. We will be better off ! We need to find who we are, our identity. We need to

educate ourselves for, there is no substitute for competence and efficiency. We need to respect the individual person and enforce the rule of law. We need to face the world in our terms, not as beggars, not as dependents, but as a dignified and self-confident people and continent.

Thank you.

References:

Collins, C. and Wright, M. *The Moral Measure of the Economy*, Orbis Books. New York, 2007.

Kuhnen, Frithjof. *The University as an Instrument in Social and Economic Development*, Journal of economic review, number 17. April 1998.

Merdith, Martin. *The State of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence*, Free Press, New York. 2005.

Okumu, A.J. W. *The African Renaissance: History, Significance and Strategy*, Trenton NJ and Asmara: Africa World Press, 2002.

Sen, Amartya. *The Idea of Justice*, the Belknap Press of Harvard University Press Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2009.

Wagner, Walter, C. *Moral Capitalism and the Essential Economy*, Wagner Book L.L.C Stockton, CA, 2006.